

11 — The knowledge layer as an ally

Universities, planning bureaus, advisory councils and research institutes are a blind spot in the heatmap. Those who include them will see that the most formidable methodical counter-power against the Dutch compromise governance does not originate from politics, but from the institutes that have been measuring government productivity for fifteen years — and yet, no one listens.

In episode nine, the Dutch field of forces was mapped across twenty-six actors: fifteen Tweede Kamer factions, six unions, and five business associations. Those who read the heatmap accurately will notice one striking gap. The entire knowledge infrastructure — universities, planning bureaus, advisory councils and applied research institutes — is absent. This is not an oversight; it is a design flaw in the original selection. This episode fills that gap.

The knowledge layer in the Netherlands comprises nine relevant actors. Four representative institutions — UNL (Universiteiten van Nederland) for the fourteen universities, KNAW as the umbrella for the sciences, NWO as the distributor of nearly one billion euros per year in research funding, and the Vereniging Hogescholen for applied higher education. Three planning bureaus — CPB, PBL and SCP — each measuring the outcomes of government policy from their own domain. Two strategic advisory councils — WRR and Raad van State — which advise the government legally and strategically on the construction itself. And the applied-scientific institute TNO, which, as the largest of the five TO2-instituten, develops innovations and productivity for both the public and private sectors.

What they are already doing

A brief state of affairs per block, based on public behaviour in 2024-2025 — not what they claim, but what they actually publish.

In 2017, the Centraal Planbureau published a note at the request of the Ministry of the Interior regarding the productivity development of the Dutch government, estimating it between zero and seven-tenths of a per cent per year. In 2023, the CPB and IPSE jointly concluded that the productivity of public executive organisations had fallen by nine per cent between 2015 and 2021 — while the deployment of full-time jobs rose by twelve per cent. This is a factual foundation for Nova Democratia that is already in place; only the political will is lacking to translate it into policy. Consequently, the CPB scores minus twenty-five on phase two (Balkenende-norm and KPI-governance) — a strong ally.

The Planbureau voor de Leefomgeving and the Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau operate with comparable discipline. PBL measures spatial and environmental policy outcomes using a method that is non-negotiable. SCP measures social well-being in a way that no party can manipulate. Both provide methodologically exactly what Nova Democratia is building: measurement first, policy thereafter. Their average position on phase two is minus fifteen, and on phase one (dashboard) minus eight. Weaker than CPB because their domains are narrower, but moving in the same direction.

In July 2025, the WRR published the report *Sterke overheid investeert in eigen deskundigheid*. The recommendations read as if they were taken directly from the Transitiehandleiding:

strengthen strategic thinking capacity via internal strategists, break through persistent siloing with multidisciplinary units, and establish more powerful leadership via a permanent Commissaris voor de Rijksdienst. These are phase-one and phase-three measures in everything but name. WRR scores minus twenty on phase three and minus twelve on phase one — a natural methodical ally that already masters the vocabulary.

The Raad van State is a different case. As an institutionally independent advisory body on legislation and the constitution, it assesses every legislative proposal for legality, feasibility, effectiveness, proportionality and legislative quality. The lion's share — ninety-three per cent — receives a positive recommendation. For Nova Democratia, this is a double-edged sword. In phase zero (constitutional amendments), the Council will strictly test whether the text is constitutionally sustainable — that is a safeguard, not a blockade. In phase four (sunset laws), the Council is hesitant, as temporary legislation touches its core concern regarding legal certainty and feasibility. Net result: minus six on phase zero (technical ally), plus four on phase four (hesitant), net minus two. Not a strong ally, but not a link-with-inertia either.

TNO is the most explicit pro-Nova Democratia actor within the knowledge layer. The TNO Strategic Plan 2026-2029 places labour productivity at the centre as a national core theme, advocates for a substantial increase in productivity in healthcare through technological innovation, and builds programmes around KPI-governance, AI implementation and public sector reform. Companies that work financially with TNO are six to nine times more productive than the business average. TNO scores minus twenty-five in total — comparable to UEI, and without the need for a new foundation.

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Who is working against

The Universiteiten van Nederland (UNL) stand on the other side of the field of forces. The resistance against the cuts to higher education and science — a structural half a billion euros — was conducted in 2024-2025 as an existential struggle. No plea for methodical improvement, no proposal for independent performance measurement, no acceptance of the CPB figures on public-sector productivity. The UNL position is that universities themselves determine what constitutes good research and how much it may cost. In phase five (performance-based education), UNL scores plus nine — a strong resistance score, comparable to the education unions.

The KNAW occupies its own position. The report *Dutch scientists less and less free* from May 2025 demonstrates a principled defence of academic freedom against any form of external measurement. For Nova Democratia, this is a complicated position: academic freedom is in itself a second-order value that deserves respect, but it is sometimes used by KNAW as an argument against any form of public accountability, even where it would be appropriate. Net result: plus five on phase five, neutral elsewhere.

NWO is ambiguous. As a distributor of nearly one billion euros per year in research funding, NWO operates with two parallel tracks: the Open Competition for free research (where

researchers choose the subject themselves) and the National Research Agenda and the Knowledge and Innovation Covenant (where societal impact is the criterion). For Nova Democratia, that second track is a natural base of operations: measurement of impact, performance-oriented distribution. The first track is structurally resistant to any external steering. Net balance: minus two — a slight ally.

The Vereniging Hogescholen stands closer to UNL than to TNO. Resistance to performance-based funding, a principled adherence to a distribution model based on student numbers, and no plea for independent outcome measurement. Net result: plus seven.

What this means for Nova Democratia

Summing up the nine knowledge actors reveals a net balance of minus eighty-six points. This is stronger than VNO-NCW (minus twenty-four), MKB-Nederland (minus twenty-three) and UEI combined (minus twenty-five). There is a block of methodical counter-power ready that is less visible per actor than the unions, but collectively larger than them. The difference lies in the nature of their power. Unions have political and electoral levers via the voting behaviour of their members. The knowledge layer has methodical and publicist levers via measurement and publication. These work more slowly, but more deeply. A political party can be voted out; a CPB figure on productivity decline still appears in the Macro Economische Verkenning nine years later.

For Nova Democratia, an operational conclusion follows. The objection register from episode four can be built in cooperation with CPB, PBL, SCP and WRR — not as advisory bodies, but as publishing partners. Every month at least one analysed objection, with methodical testing by one of the four institutes, made public. This shifts the discussion away from the political domain and places it into the methodical one. For the objector, this is unfavourable — an argument that is methodically untenable will fail publicly. For Nova Democratia, that is precisely the design goal.

The universities sit on the other side of the table in this setup. This is not a problem to be solved through negotiation; it is a given that must remain in place with respect for academic freedom. Those who defend science as such should not be voted down. However, those who use academic freedom to reject public accountability in areas where it belongs — such as measuring the outcomes of publicly funded research — will gradually lose weight in the public debate due to the planning bureau counter-vote. This is the design: without conflict, through methodical evidence.

In this light, the TNO Strategic Plan 2026-2029 is the most interesting document from the knowledge layer. It contains exactly the vocabulary of Nova Democratia, from an institute that has no political ties and serves no sectoral interest. Engaging TNO as an operational partner for the objection register automatically includes an applied research programme regarding public sector productivity. This is no coincidence: TNO is already building what Nova Democratia requires.

The modified Pareto and heatmap

In the updated Pareto ranking for braking weight (episode two), two new groups appear: universities (UNL and VH together, total score 695) and planning bureaus and advisory

councils together (total score minus four hundred and ten — thus negative, as they support Nova Democratia). The top twelve formally becomes a top fourteen. The universities are in eleventh place — substantially lower than first-order actors such as education unions or EU-recht, but still relevant. The planning bureaus do not appear as a braking weight but as a conservative force; in a separate ranking, they would stand on the right in third place among the allies, behind UEI and VNO-NCW.

In the updated heatmap for episode nine, a new block appears at the bottom, between the companies and UEI: KNOWLEDGE LAYER. Nine actors, each scored on six phases plus a total balance. The colour of the block is predominantly green — stronger than the corporate block — with two outliers in red (UNL, VH) on phase five. That pattern tells the whole story at a glance: the Dutch knowledge layer is, on a net basis, a methodical ally of Nova Democratia, with a recognisable block of resistance surrounding academic freedom.

The three steps that can be taken

For those who wish to convert the operational consequences of this analysis into action, three steps are immediately feasible without any political movement.

First: request CPB for an update on the productivity measurement of the public sector over the period 2015-2025. The CPB works at the request of ministries, but also of Members of Parliament and public institutes. A single Member of Parliament from one of the six low-resistance factions identified in episode nine (NSC, BBB, PVV, D66, FVD, JA21) can submit that request. The method already exists from 2017; the update requires four to six months of research.

Second: request the WRR for a follow-up report on *Sterke overheid investeert in eigen deskundigheid*. Specifically: what does a phased implementation of a Commissaris voor de Rijksdienst look like in the Dutch constitutional context, and what legislative changes are minimally required for this. WRR works on its own agenda but responds to requests from Parliament and the Cabinet. Again, one Member of Parliament suffices.

Third: request TNO for an implementation plan for KPI-governance in two Dutch executive organisations, chosen from the dataset of the ESB-article from April 2023 that analysed productivity decline between organisations. One large and one small, one fast-growing and one shrinking. The plan can be ready within twelve months. Thereafter, a blueprint will exist that is scalable to all other executive organisations of the State.

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What this says about the original heatmap

The absence of the knowledge layer in episode nine was no coincidence; it was a mirror of a broader Dutch debate. In conventional political analysis, universities, planning bureaus and

advisory councils are not counted as independent actors — they are regarded as technical supporters of what politics decides. This is exactly the inversion that Nova Democratia attempts to correct. Those who measure do not belong beneath those who decide; those who measure belong alongside them, with their own voice that cannot be voted away.

A Pareto analysis that omitted the knowledge layer was itself a first-order error: the measuring tools were not included in the measurement of the counter-power. With this episode, that has been rectified. Not only for the sake of the heatmap's completeness, but because the methodical counter-power of CPB, WRR and TNO — operationally deployed — can dismantle the heaviest political blockades more quickly and sustainably than any campaign or party could.

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