

## **Transforming and translating anxiety, anger and distrust: an exploration of politicians' emotional governance of the gas-quakes controversy in the Netherlands**

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### **Abstract**

Recent research on policy controversies challenges us to rethink classical distinctions between anxious or angry citizens on the one hand and rational politicians on the other. Empirical studies – often in an interpretive tradition – ranging from health policies to contested processes of municipal amalgamation, and energy controversies point out that politicians also engage in the framing of emotions, and that citizens use rational arguments. Such insights encourage us to study how emotional governance takes place in policy controversies: in what ways networks of actors manage emotions culturally, institutionally and through communication. We will start this exploration by empirically zooming in on the way politicians frame emotions in an energy controversy. Based on a framing analysis of 1,852 newspaper articles in the case of the gas-quakes controversy in the Netherlands – where gas production induced earth quakes – we empirically show that politicians on each side of the controversy deal with emotions in different ways. First of all, national politicians attempt to transform emotions by (1) downplaying emotions and arguing for rational action, and by (2) showing empathy for negative emotions while trying to induce other emotions. Second, local and regional politicians translated the feelings and arguments of the Groningen population towards national politicians, thus putting pressure on contested decision-making and striving for policy change. As such, politicians ‘represent’ these emotions – and make them part of the decision making and policy making processes. We will end the paper with a reflection on what these insights contribute to theories on emotional governance.

## Introduction

On 17 January 2014, Minister of Economic Affairs Henk Kamp travelled to the village of Loppersum. He visited the region to explain to the residents that the National government of the Netherlands had decided to reduce gas extraction around the village, and to make available 1.2 billion euros for compensation for damage to houses and for investments in the region in the coming five years. The national newspaper De Volkskrant reported:

Kamp understands the residents, he says in the town hall. He sympathizes with them. "They are quiet and reasonable people who are concerned about their safety in the beautiful Groningen country." While he says that, outside protesters are breaking through the police fence. Dozens of them are banging on the windows of the room where the minister is speaking. The tinkling and shouting of the crowd is very close. For a moment Kamp is quiet, but then he continues to tell his story, to reassure the residents (Volkskrant, 18 January 2014).

Kamp's statement and these events as described in the newspaper illustrate a stereotypical image of politics and emotions: we see the rational cool politician versus the angry citizens. It is an image that politicians like to cherish, because it refers to a focus on rational politics that fits their office and thus provides legitimacy for their actions (Hoppe 2010, Verhoeven 2010).

This stereotypical image is problematic. It suggests that emotions do not, or may not play a role in politics. Nothing could be further from the truth. If we look at election campaigns and national crises, we know that emotions are very important, for example to win votes or to show sympathy and take action (cf. Westen 2007, Verhoeven 2006, 2010). Credibility and authenticity are important building blocks of politics in such situations. If politicians do not show their emotions, they lose their persuasiveness (Hajer 2009, Verhoeven 2006, 2010, Zuydam & Metze 2018). Another problematic aspect of the stereotype image is the suggestion that citizens purely respond emotionally to politicians. Political psychological research has shown that emotions in many situations induce a search for information. In particular with negative

emotions, people look for new and more information in order to remove the cause (Marcus, Neuman & Mackuen 2000, Neuman, Marcus, Crigler & Mackuen 2007).

Empirical studies – often in an interpretive tradition of policy analysis – ranging from health policies (Versteeg, te Molder & Snijder 2017, Durnova 2018), to contested processes of municipal amalgamation (Verhoeven & Duyvendak 2015), and energy controversies (Metze 2018) demonstrate that politicians, academics and administrators engage in the framing of emotions, and that citizens frame facts. The implication for policy controversies is that we are challenged to rethink classical distinctions between anxious or angry citizens acting as self-interested uninformed NIMBY's on the one hand and rational, impartial decision makers, politicians and administrators on the other. As scholars in the interpretive tradition pointed out, policy controversies are based on actors' disagreement on what facts are relevant, on different interpretations of the same information, on dismissing evidence put to the table, and on patching their arguments to assimilate those made by opponents (Schön & Rein 1994, Stone 2012, Wolf & van Dooren 2017). All these contentious activities are situated in framing processes in which problem perceptions are constructed by 'integrating facts, values, theories and interests' (Rein & Schön 1993: 145). As such, policy controversies '(...) are immune to resolution by appeal to the facts' because actors do not agree on what counts as facts or evidence (Schön & Rein 1994: 4).

Attention to the role of emotions has been rather scarce in the interpretive literature.<sup>i</sup> Informed by Habermasian ideas on rational argumentation and deliberative procedures, many interpretive scholars focused their studies of argumentation on *logos* while overlooking *pathos* and *ethos* (Gottweis 2007, Verhoeven & Duyvendak 2015). Sociological and social-psychological research indicates that cognition and emotions are intertwined in meaning-making processes and can only be separated for analytical purposes (Jasper 1998, Gross and D'Ambrosio 2004, Goodwin and Jasper 2004, Emirbayer and Goldberg 2005, Newman 2012). How the blending of cognition and emotions plays out in policy arguments may vary according to the policy issues, the setting, and how controversial a policy is (Gottweis 2007, Verhoeven & Duyvendak 2015). Hence we argue that in addition to facts, values, theories and interests (Rein & Schön 1993), emotions can be seen as part and parcel of framing processes through which problem

perceptions are constructed. Such framing processes may even be geared toward processes of what can be called 'emotional governance' – the management of emotions in networks of actors which may take place at three levels: in cultural processes of everyday life, in institutional structures, and in communications in the public sphere (Richards 2007).

Building on the interpretive tradition, we aim to further empirically understand what role politicians play in emotional governance processes during policy controversies. Our central question is: How do competing politicians frame emotions as part of their emotional governance during policy controversies? Our analysis focuses on the gas-quakes controversy in Groningen, which is situated in the North-East of the Netherlands. Earthquakes induced by natural gas production led to severe material damage and caused many people to experience serious psychological and health problems. The controversy, which is without doubt one of the largest in the Netherlands, involves the national government and the Nederlandse Aardolie Maatschappij (NAM), a joint venture of Shell and ExxonMobil on the one hand, and local and regional politicians and regional action groups on the other. The big issues in the controversy are the amount of gas produced and the treatment of the damages (see more explanation below in the overviews of the case).

We applied an interpretative approach to analyze the framing of emotions by national, regional and local politicians involved in this gas-quakes controversy. We studied their framing processes in a total of 1,852 articles from five national newspapers and the regional *Dagblad van het Noorden* in the period January 2013 up to and including March 2018. Our analysis shows that politicians engage in emotional governance in this energy controversy by *translating* and *transforming* emotions. Translation refers to representing emotions of the people by regional and local politicians, while transforming bears on national politicians downplaying emotions and arguing for rational action, or to them showing empathy for negative emotions while trying to induce other emotions. Before we present our empirical analysis and conclusions, we first present a theoretical section on the role of emotions in politics and on what we mean with framing of emotions, followed by a section on methods.

## Politicians' framing of emotions and emotional governance in policy controversies

The relationship between politics and emotions is ambivalent. Scholars in political science and political philosophy often see politics as a process in which decision-making is based on rational choices (Arrow 1951; Conn et al. 1973), or on an exchange of rational arguments (Habermas 1992). This emphasis seems to imply that politicians are most of all concerned with the substantive meanings of their policies. They formulate problems that governors should consider, try to oversee the consequences of those problems, come up with solutions and weigh these solutions against each other. Rational politics is often accompanied by a technocratic approach to policy, in which decisions are supported by knowledge provided by experts (Rittel & Webber 1973; cf. Hoppe 2010). Rational politics also translates into the tendency to manage bureaucracies as companies, where the government directs and pays, and implementing organizations are judged on quantifiable government-determined output criteria (Osborne 2006, Pollitt 2003). In such technocratic perspectives on politics and policy, emotions are in the best case irrelevant, but dangerous in the worst case. Emotions are believed to lead to demagoguery and totalitarian regimes (Edelman 1971), to short-sightedness of policies, and to a violation of principles of uniformity and equal treatment that apply within the bureaucracy (Blau & Meyer 1987).

Next to this technocratic and rational view on politics, there are authors who claim that politics is infused with emotions. Politicians need emotions to get citizens behind their plans, regardless of whether they are revolutionaries, nationalists, populists or moderates from the political middle (Hogget & Thompson 2002). In addition, authors argue that the exercise of political authority arouses all kinds of emotions that can lead to acceptance of or resistance to policies (Herbst 2003). In times of social media, there is an increasing influence of media logic on politics, as framing and personification increasingly weigh on legitimizing political choices (Van Praag & Brants 2014, Hajer 2009). Both are emotionally charged by the increasing interdependence between popular culture and politics (Richards 2004, Verhoeven 2006). In popular culture, emotions play an important role as control mechanisms of behavior in addition to knowledge, tastes, opinions and skills (Elchardus 2005). Emotions are therefore considered an important component of daily life, which contributes to the fact that people are also looking

for emotional experiences in politics (Richards 2004). In this line of reasoning, the implication for politicians is that their persuasiveness and credibility relies on knowledge and arguments and on the emotions they express (Van Zuydam & Hendriks 2015, Kouzes & Posner 2011, Axford et al. 1992, Scammell & Langer 2006). According to John Street (2004, p. 441), this requires political communication that creates symbolic realities based on templates about heroes and villains, values, aspirations, histories, myths and personalities.

Dramaturgical approaches to politics argue that *performativity* – the ways in which politics is enacted – becomes increasingly important. This means that the setting (the context), achieving dramatic effects based on language and action, and the management thereof, increase in importance for politicians to be convincing (Hajer and & Versteeg 2005, Hajer 2005, Alexander 2004, Alexander 2011). In other words, politicians who neglect the performance of politics (the ‘how’ element) by only focusing on the content of their plans (the ‘what’ element) run the risk of not being considered credible and authentic. Their proposals may encounter resistance because citizens are not convinced of their usefulness. However, politicians who only communicate through emotions and symbols run the risk of being thwarted, because in many cases emotions encourage a search for content and arguments (Marcus et al. 2000; Neuman et al. 2007). In order to be considered credible, the mixture of arguments, authenticity, and caring is important (Zuydam 2018).

We consider politics as a process in which emotionality and rationality are intertwined. From this point of view, it is obvious to analyze politics as a struggle for meaning (Hajer 2009), in which rational and emotional meanings are connected. In such struggles emotional governance becomes increasingly important. Emotional governance is ‘the informed management – so far as is possible – of the emotional dynamics of the political public’ (Richards 2007: 7). Richards sees emotional governance happening at three levels: 1) in the cultural processes of everyday life, meaning in the ordinary exchanges between people and the mundane practices of life which provide us with channels and structures for the raw materials of human sentiment; 2) in institutional structures, from the constitutions of states to management structures in organizations that provide ways to discipline and handle emotions that run out of control; 3) in communications in the public sphere, through the content and style of the messages (political,

commercial, corporate) which surround us (Richards, 2007). In a context in which public emotions have become more important, Richards (2007) argues, political leadership needs to be redefined by becoming more 'emotionally intelligent'. With a framing analysis of emotions by politicians in media sources, we attempt to study emotional governance in the communications in the public sphere. Hence we take media to be the conduit for politicians' messages to publics while they are also a 'major, autonomous producer of political communications (Richards 2007:4). By studying what politicians frame in the media, we focus on how they (re)produce emotional meanings.

Generally, framing is defined as specifying what is relevant or irrelevant, as articulating different elements of a scene in one set of meanings, and as transforming the meanings of objects of attention and how they relate to actors (Snow 2004). These characteristics also apply to the framing of emotions, where we can observe politicians as signifiers of emotions, pulling together, adding and transforming emotions they observe around them, or articulating emotions they deem relevant in the context in which they operate. To be more precise about what we mean with emotions being framed, we draw on Jasper's (2018: 4) distinction between five types of feelings. We leave aside 'urges', which are urgent bodily needs, and 'moods', which are energizing or de-energizing feelings that do not take direct objects. Instead we focus on the framing of 'reflex emotions', which are instant reactions to events and information such as anger, fear, disgust, surprise, shock, disappointment and joy (Jasper 2018: 4). We also analyze the framing of emotions as affective commitments: the long-term positive or negative feelings about others and objects, such as love and hate, trust or mistrust and respect or contempt (Jasper 2018: 4). Finally, we look into framing of moral emotions, being long-term feelings of approval or disapproval that stem from our moral intuitions or principles such as shame, guilt, pride, indignation, outrage or compassion (Jasper 2018: 4). Hence, the study of framing of emotions is of relevance in order to figure out how all sorts of actors handle emotions in highly controversial situations. Through the study of framing of emotions, we attempt to better understand what role politicians play in emotional governance on these controversial issues.

## Case study and methods

The Groningen gas-quakes are an interesting case of social and political controversy in which we can track the framing of emotions as a way to analyse how politicians conduct emotional governance over time. Natural gas production in the Netherlands started in the early 1960s and the complete country made a transition to gas within a few years. At the moment we see national politicians and industry struggle with a transition away from natural gas, while regional and local politicians have advocated a lowering in gas production and solutions for the damages in the region (see overview of the case below). The “Gas-quakes” policy controversy has some features that makes it suitable for our study: 1) it involves politicians on all relevant levels of government in the Dutch system; 2) the case is a long-term conflict that allows for a longitudinal comparative analysis of the framing of emotions between national politicians and their regional and local adversaries; and 3) it is a high-profile conflict with enormous economic, social and emotional stakes for all actors.

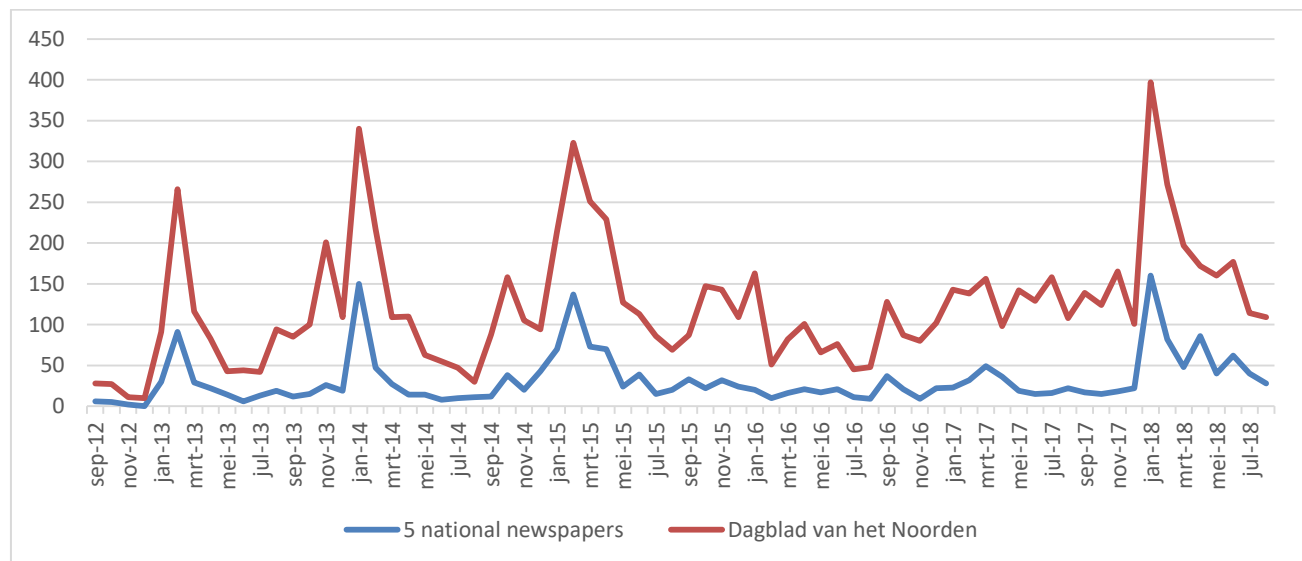
For our case study on the gas-quakes controversy we have used an extensive analysis of coverage in Dutch newspapers. From the total number of twelve daily national newspapers we have selected *De Telegraaf* and *Algemeen Dagblad* (AD) who both have a populist status, *Trouw* (Christian orientation), *Volkscrant* (VK, liberal leftwing) and *NRC Handelsblad* (NRC, no clear political stance). Together these five newspapers cover a broad range of political views and a range from tabloids to quality newspapers. In addition, we have analysed the coverage of *Dagblad van het Noorden* (DvhN) which provides more detailed local and regional news that usually does not make it into the national newspapers. All articles were retrieved from the LexisNexis academic NL database.

A logical starting point for the selection of articles from these newspapers was September 2012, when the debate following the mid-August 2012 Huizinge earthquake and the KNMI report started to heat up. The analysis was cut off at the end of August 2018, which gave sufficient time to see how long the media peak lasted after the Zeerijp earthquake of 8 January 2018. We captured all newspaper coverage with the keywords ‘Groningen’ [and] ‘gaswinning’ (gas extraction) [or] ‘aardbeving’ (earthquake) [or] ‘aardgas’ (natural gas) [or] ‘beving’ (tremor). In excel we created a dataset per year, per newspaper, and per amount of articles. This enabled



us to map media attention for the earthquakes in Groningen (see figure 1). Altogether our search resulted in 2,306 articles for the five national newspapers and 8,892 for DvhN. We see four peaks in the coverage both in the national newspapers and in DvhN. For a detailed analysis of the framing of emotions by Dutch politicians on different levels we analysed all articles in the peaks (Oliver & Myers, 1999). The first peak runs from January 2013 until April 2013, the second from November 2013 until February 2014, the third one from January 2015 until April 2015, and the fourth peak runs from January 2018 until March 2018. We cross checked whether these media peaks coincided with important events in the case during which we could expect emotions to run high.

**Figure 1: Total articles in five national newspapers & DvhN, September 2012-August 2018**



The next step in the selection process was to retrieve all articles per peak (see table 1), leading to a selection of 1,040 articles for the five national newspapers and 1,792 for the regional newspaper DvhN. We did not analyse all these selected articles due to bias in the selection procedure. For the national newspapers this bias was caused by the keywords being mentioned in articles on international energy debates related to Russia and the Middle East and in debates on sustainable energy. Sometimes the word ‘Groningen’ is mentioned in a different context than the gas-quakes. In the end 927 articles from national newspapers were analysed. For the regional newspaper DvhN there is more bias due to the fact that it has four editions, producing

substantial overlap in articles particularly for peak 4. After correcting for this bias, we analysed a total number of 925 regional newspaper articles. The total number of analysed articles for all newspapers is 1,852.

**Table 1: Selection of newspaper articles per peak**

	<b>Total per peak</b>	<b>Number analyzed</b>	<b>Percentage analyzed</b>
<b>National newspapers</b>			
Peak 1	170	150	88%
Peak 2	242	225	93%
Peak 3	338	302	89%
Peak 4	290	250	86%
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,040</i>	<i>927</i>	<i>89%</i>
<b>Regional DvhN</b>			
Peak 1	214	171	80%
Peak 2	332	232	70%
Peak 3	380	277	73%
Peak 4	866	245	28%
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,792</i>	<i>925</i>	<i>52%</i>

The analysis of framing of emotions by politicians was inductively conducted with Atlas.ti. We employed administrative codes for types of articles and for politicians on the national, regional and local level. Content codes were used for the framing of emotions based on politicians using ‘emotion words’ which directly mention emotions such as: ‘people are very angry about...’ or ‘minister x cannot be trusted on keeping his word’ (Verhoeven & Duyvendak 2015). We also coded for metaphors as indirect references to emotions, for instance by coding heat metaphors which express anger: ‘people are hot under the collar’, ‘currently we are in a heated argument with...’, or ‘they will be in for a hot summer’ (Edwards 1999, Verhoeven & Duyvendak 2015). Emotions attributed to politicians by journalists, activists or others were not included. By coding for the framing of emotions in this way, we are able to demonstrate (combinations of) emotions per actor and shifts in those over time, as well as differences between politicians operating at different levels of the Dutch state.

## Results: emotional governance by politicians in the gas-quakes controversy

### *Overview of the case*

Before we present our empirical analysis of the emotional governance by national politicians and their regional and local adversaries, we will first introduce the case by discussing what happened during the four media peaks that we analysed.

The Ministry of Economic Affairs together with the Nederlandse Aardolie Maatschappij (NAM), a joint venture of Shell and ExxonMobil, in 1963 commenced with the exploitation of the largest natural gas field in Europe which is situated in the North-Eastern region of Groningen in the Netherlands. Until 2018 this gas production provided the Dutch state with a revenue of 288 billion Euros and the NAM with 29 billion Euros (Scholtens 2018). The gas is used for heating and cooking in most Dutch households and the surplus is exported to Germany, France and Belgium (Mulder & Perey 2018). Gas production in the Groningen region was fairly uncontested until August 16, 2012, when the little village of Huizinge became the epicentre of an earthquake measuring 3.6 on the Richter scale. Since 1991 about 300 earthquakes occurred in the region (Mulder & Perey 2018), but never with such a high magnitude.

For decades experts knew about the relationship between gas extraction and seismic activity in the region and predicted only minor damages (Mulder & Perey 2018). The Huizinge earthquake and subsequent smaller ones proved these experts wrong. At the beginning of 2013 a report from the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute (KNMI 2013) indicated that gas production had increased from 20 to 50 billion cubic metres per year and that the number of earthquakes had increased, leading them to conclude that future earthquakes between 3.9 and 5 on the Richter scale were conceivable. The consequences of higher magnitudes were revealed by the Huizinge earthquake that caused damage to the houses of 170.000 people, of which 85,000 have multiple damages that occurred after consecutive earthquakes (Postmes, et al. 2018). People in the area worry about their housing situation, physical injuries, and a reduced quality of living for all. The constant threat of earthquakes led to an increased risk perception over time (Perlaviciute 2018).

After the report by the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute early 2013 the policy controversy took off. Local and regional politicians and citizen action groups demanded a

lowering of gas production, in the hope that the gas-quakes would recede, and a swift settling of damages. In that period the state supervision of the mines (SodM) recommended the Minister of Economic Affairs to lower gas production in the area, to which he responded by commissioning more investigations into risks and safety issues (Metze 2014). The NAM became responsible for settling the damages, leading to complicated assessment procedures and people with damages having to struggle with a private firm to get compensated for their damages. This start of the gas-quakes controversy dominated the first media peak that we analyse in this article.

During the second media peak in November 2013 a report was issued on the future of North-East Groningen, written by a commission of experts and politicians. The report caught quite some media attention. Early 2014, the Minister of Economic Affairs decided to reduce gas production in the town of Loppersum, which is at the centre of many small earthquakes, to invest 1.2 billion euros in the region for repair and reconstruction of buildings, and to involve citizens in further decision-making through a 'dialogue table' (De Volkskrant 18-01-2014; De Telegraaf 17-01-2014). Local and regional politicians perceived these measures as insufficient for the needs of the region.

Early 2015, the third media peak was induced by a highly critical report from the Dutch Safety Board on the historical context of decision-making by the government and the NAM. The Board concluded that economic interests had always prevailed in decisions on gas production and that the safety of the people living in the area did not get enough attention because the parties involved were suffering from 'tunnel vision'. Criticisms from the province, municipalities and citizens had been ignored by the government. The board advised to fundamentally change the decision-making processes on the production and the sales of natural gas (De Volkskrant February 19, 2015). This report contributed to further escalation of the controversy, deepening resistance by the local and regional politicians and citizen action groups.

On 15 March 2017 national elections led to a change of government. After a record-breaking formation process of 225 days, a new cabinet took office at the end of October 2017. Minister of Economic affairs Henk Kamp was succeeded by minister Erik Wiebes, both from the liberal party. During his first ten weeks in office the new minister visited the region three times.

People were desperate for solutions to their problems since nothing had been decided from the March elections onwards and only slow progress had been made since the beginning of 2015. In a parliamentary debate the new minister qualified this lack of solutions as ‘a government failure of non-Dutch proportions’ (NRC, 10-1-2018). On top of this, the region was hit by another heavy earthquake on Monday 8 January 2018. The earthquake had a magnitude of 3,4 on the Richter scale with the epicentre at the village of Zeerijp, which is about 7,3 kilometres from the town of Huizinge that was hit by the previous heavy earthquake in August 2012. Both villages lie in the area where gas production was lowered since 2014. The earthquake at Zeerijp falsified theories that the lowering of gas production in that specific area would prevent heavy earthquakes. The media attention increased tremendously, sparking a fourth peak that we included in our analysis.

Given the numbers of people involved, the damages reported, the impact on daily life, and the economic and political considerations, the Groningen ‘gas quakes’ case is currently one of the largest societal and political problems in the Netherlands, particularly if we also see it in the context of the transition to renewable energy.

*Media peak 1: the rational minister faces the framing of anxiety and a breach of trust*

During media peak 1 (January-April 2013), after the report suggesting that heavier earthquakes might occur and the advice to lower the gas production, minister Kamp of Economic Affairs did not act immediately but commissioned more investigations, thus postponing the debate on reduction of gas production (Metze under review). The minister decided to visit the region to explain his ideas. Before his visit a journalist asked him what he wanted to say to the citizens:

That I understand very well that they are uncertain and worried and that it is my responsibility to do something about it. It is important that we gather all information as soon as possible and that we announce it. Sunday I will go to the area and will stay for a couple of days to deliberate with the politicians and the people and to hear their story. I find good communication very important. The people should exactly know what is going on (DvhN, 26 January 2013).

By stating that people are uncertain and worried, the minister acknowledges their feelings of anxiety. At the same time, he immediately connects these feelings to a rational political process focused on information gathering, deliberation and good communication. Contrary to the minister, local and regional politicians mainly articulated and emphasized (and as such framed) people's concerns about safety, risks of more earthquakes and the feelings of anxiety that accompanied those. The deputy of the Provincial Authority working on this case said:

I am scared by the risks for North-Groningen. Earthquakes of 5 on Richter's scale. That is quite something. (...) The minister should come to explain why North-Groningen is exposed to these risks. He should take away the anxiety among people that things get out of control (*DvhN*, 26 January 2013).

In the beginning of February, a series of small earthquakes led local politicians to intensify their references to anxieties of the people living in the area. The mayor of the town of Loppersum:

There are concerns here about heavier earthquakes caused by gas production in Groningen. People are getting scared, asking: how does this end? It's all about their safety, that is what comes first (*NRC*, 7-02-2013).

Following on the earthquakes, local and regional politicians sent a letter to Parliament in which they insisted on a quicker decision-making process to reduce gas production than the process suggested by the minister. In this attempt at agenda setting, they also framed the prevailing anxieties of the people and indirectly through media sources communicated those to the national political level:

With eight earthquakes in five days, turmoil amongst our inhabitants increases. The feelings of unsafety are substantial and growing (*DvhN*, 13 February 2013).

All these quotes relate to the anticipation of risks caused by the threat and manifestation of earthquakes, which allow the local and regional politicians to claim that feelings of unsafety abound. In the sociology of emotions anxiety is related to the expectation of evil, thus linking fear as an instant reaction to an imminent threat with the anticipation of risks that the future might hold for people (Ten Houten 2007; Svendsen 2008, Jasper 2018). This articulation of anxiety actually represents the feelings of the people living in the area, which was confirmed by a large qualitative research indicating that the threat of new earthquakes led to feelings of insecurity, uncertainty and anxiety (CMO Stamm/SPG 2016: 42-45).

In the same period regional politicians started to add a lack of trust to their framing of emotions. Max van den Berg, the leader of the regional authority, framed a breach of trust that can only be mended by adequate measures:

If the reasoning of the Cabinet is that The Netherlands may not be left out in the cold by strictly following the advice of SodM [to lower gas production], then my reasoning is that The Netherlands may not leave North-East Groningen out in the cold concerning the damages and drawbacks for citizens and businesses in the area. (...) It cannot be the case that citizens and businesses suffer indirect damages or are affected by drawbacks as such. A trustworthy and proactive approach of this issue is required (DvhN, 9 February 2016).

'Leaving Groningen out in the cold' is a metaphor signaling a lack of financial compensation. The government needs to act 'trustworthy' by providing compensation. The link between demands for compensation and trust became a regular aspect of the framing by regional politicians. Trust is an important political emotion that is linked to specific objects (in this case the government and agreements made) that can exist for a longer period of time (Goodwin et al. 2001, p. 11). If trust between politicians decreases, this is a clear signal that relations are disturbed and action is needed quickly to restore them. This recovery is often urgent, because many agreements between leaders and between leaders and the public are based on trust.

*Media peak2: deepened rationality versus framing of anger and distrust*

The second media peak, November 2013-February 2014, blossomed was triggered early 2014 by the 'gas decision' of the minister of Economic Affairs. The minister came to the village of Loppersum to explain his decision. After the announcement of his plan, the minister claimed to understand the people of Groningen:

These are quiet and reasonable people that are concerned about their safety in the beautiful Groningen country side (*Volkskrant*, 18-01-2014).

Here the minister tried to frame the matters at hand in such a way that emotions are tempered and rationality is called for. He supposed that the people are concerned but also quiet and reasonable. The contradistinction between his words and the actual situation was striking. While the minister spoke, protestors were banging on the windows of the Loppersum town hall, shouting and singing to get his attention. He fell silent for a moment and then continued his speech (*Volkskrant*, 18 January 2014). Afterwards the minister was criticised for not taking emotions seriously. In an interview a week later, he reflected on this critique:

I have been at least five or six times in the area during the past year and have talked with people in their farm, shop, on the street. I understand their feelings very well. But that does not release me from the duty to take rational decisions. (...) The decisions that I take are based on a combination of rational arguments and understanding (*AD*, 25-01-2014).

In the same interview the reporter asked him how he had experienced all emotions. His answer was:

I had to have more information, I had no second the impression that I could take a decision. I knew that emotions would run high. But I think that is was a good decision. We are going to decrease gas production in the core of the area. That is something



different than we would have decided a year ago. It is good that we have taken our time (AD, 25-01-2014).

Both quotes illustrate the rational approach of the minister based on information and taking your time. There is hardly any room for people's feelings, except that the minister claims to rationally understand them.

Two months before the minister took his decision, a report on a sustainable future of the region came out. The committee that wrote the report talked to many inhabitants of the region and concluded that feeling of 'not being heard' and 'not being taken seriously' form together with 'feelings of distrust toward the NAM and the national government a potentially explosive mixture' (Commissie duurzame toekomst Noord-Oost Groningen 2013). At the presentation of the report, Ed Nijpels, a nationally well-known politician involved in the drafting of the report, framed the anger among the people due to lack of action on the national level:

Before the North becomes angry, a lot has to happen. The North has also benefited from gas production, but that does not mean that you have to accept everything. Now it is time for the residents to speak out and stop hiding (DvhN, 2 November 2013).

Once again, politicians are expressing the feelings of the people here. Research by CMO Stamm/SPG (2016: 46) indicates that people were very angry about ignoring their security situation, postponing behaviour and continuation of gas production for national profit. In the sociology of emotions anger is seen as a way of dealing with problematic situations resulting from hierarchy such as exercises of power that impede one's sense of autonomy (Ten Houten 2007:40). Anger is always oriented toward other actors who block goals or commit unjustifiable acts for which they are to be blamed and which require a reparation of the moral order (Turner & Stets 2006: 553-554). The lack of action on the national level is the unjustifiable act for which the minister and members of parliament are blamed.

Meanwhile regional politicians continued their framing of distrust. They no longer framed a beginning breach of trust, as they did in the previous period, but instead framed a

growing feeling of distrust in national politics and in the NAM. In the run-up to the ministers' gas-decision Max van den Berg appealed to distrust in combination with critical arguments about the political performance by the national government:

The breach of trust only grows the longer the answer by the government to uncertainties concerning the safety of gas production and proposals to maintain liveability fail to appear. It feeds the thought that nothing will come from safety and compensation. The Hague [seat of the Dutch national government] now still has the chance to come to new relationships with the region. Time is running out. If no swift action is undertaken, the circumstances will become increasingly difficult (*DvhN*, 21 December 2013).

Here we see that the leader of the regional authority tries to increase pressure on the national political level by claiming a growing breach of trust. Distrust needs to be fixed by establishing new relationships and taking swift action to prevent more difficult circumstances. The claim of growing distrust taps into the feelings among the population in the region. Research by CMO Stamm/SPG (2016: 35-36) indicates that the idea of not being taken seriously by the NAM and the national government was strongly embedded in the region, leading to feelings of distrust. This also confirms the impression of distrust that the committee studying the sustainable future of the region had put forward.

### *Media peak 3: Opponents' distrust on an all-time low and an explosion of anger*

The third media peak, January 2015-April 2015, was sparked by a parliamentary debate about another ministerial gas-decision. Before this debate, local and regional politicians made themselves heard via the media. The municipal council of Loppersum stated that trust in the minister and the NAM had reached an all-time low. Lies Oldenhof from the social democrats (PvdA) compared the minister and the NAM with a dragon:

We talk about a dragon. You chop off one head and another grows back on. The problem has become an uncontrollable issue (*DvhN*, 20 January 2015).

The dragon metaphor refers to the Hydra of Lerna in Greek mythology that was ultimately defeated by Heracles. In this struggle the dragon represents the NAM and the minister who proved to be unreliable partners. The framing of distrust was followed by action. The regional authority decided to file a lawsuit against the minister to lower the gas production to acceptable levels. Max van den Berg, the leader of the regional authority said: 'we have to cut him [the minister] off' (*DvhN*, 10 February 2015). After the parliamentary debate regional and also local politicians further intensified their framing of distrust. Deputy William Moorlag of the regional authority: 'pumping back value and trust into the gas production area is a long way to go' (*DvhN*, 16 February 2015). Mayor Eduard van Zuijlen of the town of Menterwolde put it as follows:

He [the minister] makes it difficult for us as mayors by his technocratic attitude. That leads to more distrust under the population (*DvhN*, 14 February 2015).

A few days after the parliamentary debate the report by the Dutch Safety Board criticising the decision-making processes on gas production in the past came out. Local and regional politicians exploded with anger in their reactions. Peter den Oudsten, mayor of the city of Groningen, claimed that the people of Groningen were 'mislead shamefully' and called for a Parliamentary investigation (*Volkscrant*, 19 February 2015). Regional deputy William Moorlag was very annoyed calling for an apology to the people to soften the pain of the wrongdoing:

'Their remarks were put aside as nonsense. They should be rehabilitated in retrospect' (*DvhN*, 19 February 2015).

He also called for drastic measures against the prevailing forms of decision-making to restore the moral order:

'Safety was subordinate to financial interests. The gas bastion needs to be forced open' (*DvhN*, 19 February 2015).

The publication of the report gave local and regional politicians the opportunity to frame anger as an expression of the need for change. A few weeks later the minister indeed apologized, although these apologies were not taken seriously by local and regional politicians. Regional deputy Mark Boumans of the liberal party summarized this critique:

These are well thought-out apologies. Kamp was asked after the presentation of the OVV report to make apologies. But ‘sorry’ has no meaning if it is not really lived through (*DvhN*, 3 March 2015).

The local and regional politicians covered the anger of the people of Groningen which developed during the second media peak and now came to an explosion since the report confirmed their suspicion of a national decision-making process that did not take their interests seriously.

#### *Media peak 4: the new emphatic minister changes the emotional dynamic*

The fourth media peak, January-March 2018, was characterised by the people waiting a long time for solutions to their problems and by the next heavy earthquake at the town of Zeerijp.

Two days after this earthquake the minister visited the region. He typified the earthquake as ‘horrendous’ for the people in the area (*DvhN*, 9-1-2018) and said ‘if I would live here, I would also be angry’ (*AD*, 11-01-2018), referring to slow compensations for damages to people’s houses and a lack of progress regarding reinforcements of buildings. The minister promised to hurry up with the development of a ‘damage protocol’ for which the region had been waiting since the March 2017 elections (*De Telegraaf*, 11-01-2018), and he argued about a further reduction of gas production:

Gas production in Groningen must be reduced as much as possible during this government's term of office. Whatever we can think of. We need to reduce gas production (*NRC*, 9-01-2018).

These are all indications that the new minister has a different political style, compared to his predecessor Henk Kamp. Instead of hammering on rational decision-making and the need for more research and information, Wiebes shows serious empathy for the people in the region by recognizing anger as a legitimate emotion and by promising to act soon.

On 31 January Wiebes kept his word with the announcement of a new damage protocol in which the state takes responsibility for all damages. This is a very significant shift since people with damage do not have to go through endless struggles with the privately-owned NAM that was focused on cost-efficiency. The minister recognized the problem that gas production for too long had been a private affair of oil companies that could affect the people in Groningen:

I wondered, do I still believe in that? No. It doesn't look like it anymore. The whole province is going up and down, so it's a matter for the government (*DvhN*, 1-2-2018).

A second and totally unexpected action was the minister's announcement on 29 March 2018 that the Dutch state will stop all gas production in Groningen before 2030. He also announced that he wants to substantially lower gas production to 12 billion cubic metres per year before October 2022, which is a very sharp decline from the 20,1 billion cubic metres the NAM produced in 2018.<sup>ii</sup> These decisions are historical, setting in motion a transition toward renewable energy which is as significant as the introduction of gas was in the 1960s, when the Netherlands made the transition from coal to gas within a few years (Gasterra 2009). About these measures Wiebes remarked:

A real turning point in the gas file. (...) Until now we fought the symptoms, now we are taking away the cause (of the earthquakes). (...) This is a day for safety, not a day for finance (*NRC*, 30-3-2018; *DvhN*, 30-3-2018).

and:

If I would live there, I would be happy. (...) I have fought for them. (...) Groningen can remain Groningen (*AD*, 30-03-2018).

All these changes made by the minister sparked a different emotional dynamic than before. Shortly after the earthquake at Zeerijp, the regional and local politicians at first continued the framing of anger and distrust that we found in the previous three media-peaks. Rene Paas, the leader of the regional authority framed the situation as follows:

But I know what the damage looks like, everyone knows what it looks like, we've been through it so many times. (...) The frustration is enormous. The people have not asked for anything to be done in their ground, they don't get anything in return. Except for this kind of fall out. (...) You only have one chance to do it right. If you mess it up, frustration and insecurity will increase even further (*Trouw*, 9-1-2018).

By directly addressing people's frustration Paas frames anger based on what the NAM does in the ground and how much they see of this from the government. In addition he alludes to trust by arguing that there is only one chance which should not be messed up. This implicitly refers to the well know proverb trust arrives on foot but leaves on horseback. People anxieties were also framed, for instance by mayor Albert Roodenboog of Loppersum:

It has been pretty quiet lately in terms of quakes. Many people hoped that the worst was over. Now we are back to square one. There's a lot of uncertainty about the future again (*DvhN*, 10-1-2018).

This framing of anger, distrust and anxiety by local and regional politicians continued until the minister announced the new damage protocol. The regional politicians were the first to frame enthusiasm, joy and hope:

I am so glad that this has now been achieved on paper (...). This protocol is a piece of text, which must become reality through actual behaviour. But we are very enthusiastic about the turn the process has taken under the new minister. That makes us hopeful (Rene Paas in *AD*, 1-2-2018).

These positive emotions became even stronger after the minister announced his plan to stop gas production before 2030 and to significantly lower production before 2022. Regional deputy Eelco Eikenaar is very enthusiastic:

The gas tap is closing and that's great news. The problem is being tackled at the source, and I read in the Minister's letter that this will be done as soon as possible. Faster than fast (*Trouw*, 30-3-2018).

Enthusiasm and joy are positive reflex emotions triggered by a sudden release of tension caused by negative emotions or by a solution to a risk. Such positive emotions pop up to fill the void created by previous negative emotions, after expectations of unpleasant experiences are taken away (Jasper 2018). The ministers decisions on the damage protocol and stopping gas production in the future at least for a while took local and regional politicians' mind of the anxiety, anger and distrust leading them to frame enthusiasm and joy in their immediate reactions to the plans. In addition, hope is a positive orientation on the future in which 'people's sense of the possible expands, the costs of action seem to decrease, and the possible benefits soar' (Jasper 2018: 93). Hope is less volatile since it roots in positive expectations. As such the framing by the regional politicians acknowledges the opening of a window on a new future.

However, the new plan also leads to ambiguity and framing of mixed emotions. Albert Roodenboog the mayor of Loppersum in the middle of the damaged area provides an example of this:

Of course, I am happy with this phasing-out schedule. But there is one great danger. An intention does not take away the current danger. (...) All this time, the risk of tremors

remains, and who says that this will decrease if the gas tap closes further? I am not out of trouble (*Trouw*, 30-3-2018).

The quote also illustrates that the negative emotions are not easily overcome since all plans need to be implemented to create a difference. The minister gets the benefit of the doubt in the region, which he realizes all too well himself:

Of course, it is: first see, then believe. (...) Confidence is not yet back. That is a fact (*NRC*, 29-3-2018).

The minister's change of the emotion dynamic was very much enabled by the better economic circumstances in which he could take far reaching action, compared to his predecessor Henk Kamp. But his emphatic style of emotional governance which stands in stark contrast to the rationality of Henk Kamp, should not be underestimated. It is through his form of emotional governance combined with appropriate actions that one of the most complicated policy controversies in recent Dutch history is now moving from stalemate to settlement.

### Conclusion and discussion

Our empirical analysis of the framing of emotions by national, regional and local politicians in the gas-quakes controversy reveals two patterns in emotional governance, which we call 'translation' and 'transformation'.

We see translation of emotions as a pattern of emotional governance by which politicians frame the emotions felt by others in a policy controversy to get a problem on the agenda, to redress plans, or to demand concrete measures. During such processes they need to be adequate in their representation of these emotions to remain credible as speakers in name of the people that experience them. In the gas-quakes case, the local and regional politicians translated the anxiety, anger and distrust of the people in the 'North' to national politicians and to the public at large. The framing of anxiety and anger were particularly used to make national politicians understand what the earthquakes and the handling of their consequences did to the



people in Groningen. It translated the risks that people experienced and the frustration caused by the lack of solutions. In terms of framing theory, we can say that the translation of the people's anxiety and anger was used to diagnose the problem (Rein & Schön 1993, Benford & Snow 2000). In a different vein, the translation of distrust was used to emphasize the urgency for the national government to meet the demands put forward by the local and regional politicians. This happened right from the beginning with the leader of the regional authority calling for a trustworthy and proactive approach, and continued when solutions failed to appear. The translation of distrust became quite personal in the perception of minister Kamp as technocratic instead of trustworthy. In terms of framing theory we can say that the translation of distrust was embedded in a prognosis of and a call for solutions to the problem (Rein & Schön 1993, Benford & Snow 2000), but also in attributing blame (Entman 1993) to the minister for not acting vigorous enough.

We see transformation of emotions as a pattern of emotional governance by which politicians 1) can downplay, temper or take away negative emotions they find themselves confronted with, by arguing for rational action and giving explanations based on information; and 2) relate to and acknowledge negative emotions they are facing while trying to get to an emotional dynamic characterized by positive emotions. The first transformation pattern appeared very clearly in the way minister Kamp dealt with the issue. He said that he understood people's emotions, without taking the time to specifically address them, while quickly developing arguments about the rational decisions that had to be made and the knowledge and information that had to be acquired to underpin these decisions. The second transformation pattern developed under the regime of minister Wiebes. He claimed to understand people's emotions by addressing them heads on, for instance by acknowledging that he would also be angry if he lived in the region and by recognizing that trust is not restored easily. At the same time he argues that he would be happy if he would live there, after the announcement of his plans to take away the cause by stopping gas production at the latest in 2030. This form of transformation seemed to pay off as a form of emotional governance when regional and local politicians started to frame enthusiasm, joy and hope. The sustainability of this framing depends on the minister also executing his plans accordingly.

The emotional governance patterns of translation and transformation that we found in the gas-quakes case need to be further analysed in other policy controversies to be able to tell how general they are. Our study is limited due to its explorative and qualitative nature that does not allow to generalize beyond the case. Both patterns of emotional governance were quite dependent on what happened in the case. For instance, the type of emotional governance performed by minister Wiebes was influenced by the change of political regime after the elections and by the new government having much more financial leverage to take drastic measures, compared to their predecessors who had to deal with the economic crisis.

We do think that these patterns of translation and transformation deserve further exploration by analysing other policy controversies that involve different layers of government, to see if translation is mainly enacted on the local and regional level and transformation can mostly be found on the national level. Our expectation would be that these patterns of emotional governance may appear at any level of government, depending on the type of issue at stake. We expect both patterns also to be found in policy controversies where one governmental actor and their business partners face resistance by citizen action groups or NGOs. Politicians may for instance try to transform citizens' anxiety or anger about windfarms into rational reasoning, or try to translate their grief about a proposed site to the project developer of the windfarm. One other possible avenue for further research on these patterns is to explore if not only politicians but also citizen action groups, NGOs and social movement organizations involved in policy controversies engage in them. Given the importance of emotions in their mobilization processes (Goodwin et al. 2001, Jasper 2018), we would expect these types of actors to perform emotional governance and perhaps also the patterns we found. In all these types of cases a next methodological step could be to combine interpretive framing analysis with a big data analysis of all media material and all policy documents, to analyse the discourses in which the framing of emotions is embedded and also to quantify these discourses and framing processes. This would also allow for cross-case comparisons that can confirm similar translation and transformation patterns of emotional governance or reveal entirely new ones. As such we can further unpack how emotional governance works during policy controversies, thus opening up a new field of exploration in the policy sciences.

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## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Of course, there are some exceptions such as Forester's (1999) work on emotional sensitivity in planning practices, Durnová's (2018) work on intimacy in care policies and Stone's (2012) acknowledgement of avoiding emotional harms through policy making.

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.nam.nl/nieuws/2018/nam-produceert-minder-gas-in-groningen-in-gasjaar-2017-2018.html>