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Communication, contextualization & cognition: Patterns & processes of frames' influence on people's interpretations of the EU constitution

Baden, C.

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Prologue

Among all the varieties of academic publications, the dissertation is a curious one: Standing at the beginning of an academic career, it might appear a minor contribution to scientific knowledge – certainly in view of what is promised to follow. Yet, all too often it also is the one precious occasion when a scientist enjoys the liberty of pursuing one question, and nothing but this question, over many years. Dissertations are criticized for being relatively inaccessible, both physically and intellectually, and in consequence their impact factors and citation frequencies are low. Yet, unlike the many papers and chapters which are ripped out of them (to improve impact), dissertations are privileged venues where one can explore things beyond their immediate isolated context, and bridge the gaping abyss between itemized, specialized scientific knowledge and the real, messy, contextualized world of societal relevance. Also, unlike other academic monographies, dissertations underlie a scrutinous process of repeated review and incremental refinement. Dissertations, in short, are a curious chimera somewhere between a new author's debut and an unusually resource-rich and well-scrutinized contribution to academic theorizing.

The most curious property of a dissertation, however, lies in its function to demonstrate the academic maturation of an individual scientist. Dissertations represent the culmination point of a years' long process of learning and specialization, of theory building and empirical research. They are treated as the outcome of an individual's ripening process, and their quality and ingenuity are taken as a measure of a candidate's readiness to be admitted to the world of trusted academics. Yet, research is never, can never be, an individual process: Standing on the shoulders of not giants, but a whole population of women and men whose ideas inspire, enhance and advance the scientific work, crediting a dissertation to the abilities of an individual researcher does gross injustice to a great many people. I have had, throughout my dissertation, the privilege to enjoy the support of many inspired and inspiring people – a privilege that, I am painfully aware, many of my colleagues and friends do not share. If I present to you this dissertation as the result of many years of my studies, beginning long before I formally entered my PhD candidacy, I am proud and honored to present to you also the collaborative work of many people without whom this book could never exist:

Many of the ideas I am about to present to you have derived from the spirited discussions I've enjoyed with my colleagues, many of whom I have the pleasure of calling my friends. Among the most important discussions which have advanced my work, I need to name the Political Communication PhD Club at Amsterdam, chaired for most of the time I attended by Jochen Peter. His sense of precision and rigor has greatly influenced my view on my own research. Among the participants, probably the most important exchange I have had with Sophie Lecheler, whose research on framing has challenged my ideas and inspired many improvements over the course of the years. A particularly fruitful moment was the convention of the Framing Reading Club at the initiative of my supervisor Claes de Vreese, who brought together some of the most inspiring people I know in the field of framing research – notably, himself, Rune Slothuus, Hajo Boomgaarden, Andreas Schuck, Sophie Lecheler, as well as James Druckman as a special guest. I am indebted to the participants of the panels I organized at various ICA conferences: The work of Swantje Lingenberg on audience perspectives in

COMMUNICATION, CONTEXTUALIZATION, & COGNITION

European communication has been integral to defining the societal relevance of my work and focusing my thinking about European communication spheres. Paul D'Angelo, Jörg Matthes, Paul Brewer and Kim Gross have challenged and stimulated my thinking about the cognitive processes behind framing, and Baldwin van Gorp's work on the cultural dependency of framing processes has much improved my conceptualization of the knowledge required to comprehend a frame. Leo Kim's ideas regarding the dynamics of semantic associations and Jana Diesner's, Janet Takens' and Wouter van Atteveldt's work on the generation of semantic networks from content analytic data have been instrumental to designing much of the empirical part of this study. In particular, I need to thank Janet for letting me use her codebook and other technical documents for devising my own autocoding procedure. Without Wouter's miraculous 'Amsterdam Content Analysis Toolkit (AmCAT)' platform and the patient and meticulous work of Jouke Jacobi on the implementation of the algorithms used in this study into the platform, this thesis would have been plainly impossible. I have greatly benefitted from the openness and welcoming reception by Jan Kleinnijenhuis and the Communication Science department at the Free University of Amsterdam. Similar thanks are in order to Bart Monné and Alexander Schouten, whose great work at the ASCoR ComLab enabled my online experiment, and to Jeltje Wynia, without whose advice and great preparation my focus group study could hardly have succeeded despite the short preparation time available. Anoeska Schipper deserves thanks for her useful ideas and great support during the focus group analysis and the preparation of the experiment. Throughout my dissertation, I have been able to count on excellent, ample and forthcoming advice by many colleagues, amongst whom I need to mention Floris Müller and Linda Duits for all issues concerning qualitative data analysis, Diana Lucio Arias, Wouter de Nooy, and Loet Leydesdorff whenever I had a question regarding network analysis, Jochen Peter, Rens Vliegthart, Andreas Schuck (also for granting me access to his data on television coverage of the EU), Hajo Boomgaarden, as well as many more colleagues whose doors I have been knocking on frequently. I am particularly indebted to Klaus Schönbach, not only for his excellent and readily given advice, but also for his idea to get me into contact with Romy Fröhlich when I moved to Munich. There, Romy Fröhlich not merely provided me with a job that – and this is a rare commodity in Germany – included respectful collaboration and fair working hours, but she also offered me all the support and freedom I needed to conclude this dissertation. In Munich, Helmut Küchenhoff and Georg Pfundstein at the Statistical Counseling Office (StaBLab) have provided me with their statistical expertise. Certainly not least of the thanks apply to my former supervisors in Leipzig and London, Christian Fenner and Stefan Collignon, for encouraging me to undertake this project at all. However, among all people whose ideas and comments have benefitted my work, the most important input has come from my supervisor Claes de Vreese, whose talent at cutting through the fog and confronting the core problems has formed the direction of my work in many places. His trust in me, his sense for striking the right balance between freedom and control, his generosity in supporting my (unfunded) project and the constant challenge to reconcile my enthusiasm and many diversions with his pragmatic focus on feasibility, output and schedule has enabled me to bring this project to a successful close. The wide range of inspiring scholars he has helped gathering in Amsterdam combined with the constructive academic culture that I have had the pleasure of experiencing there has made my research not only much richer than

COMMUNICATION, CONTEXTUALIZATION, & COGNITION

anything I could have achieved on my own; it has also made this time a pleasure, and I wish to thank each and everyone who has played a part in making my time in Amsterdam most enjoyable: Tonny Krijnen, Yiu Fai Chow, Mario Keer and most of all Diana Lucio Arias have been the greatest office mates one could hope for. Moniza Waheed single-handedly restored my sanity and ability to smile at many occasions throughout the tedious writing process. I also wish to thank the many and changing members of the PhD Club, with whom I not only had many intellectually challenging exchanges, but also a serious number of drinks, during and after working hours. At my new home in Munich, Thomas Koch, Sonja Lorenz, Sabine Pflieger, and Barbara Rampf have given me a warm reception at the Institute for Communication Science and Media Research (IfKW). I am deeply obliged to my parents, Gabriele and Eberhard Baden, for believing in me and supporting me through all this time. Last, but anything but least, I wish to express my love to my son Adrian, who has created a stir in my life like nothing before, and who continues to be the sunshine and pride of my day. It is to him that I wish to dedicate this book.