



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Burgers tegen beleid : een analyse van dynamiek in politieke betrokkenheid

Verhoeven, I.

Publication date

2009

Document Version

Final published version

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Verhoeven, I. (2009). *Burgers tegen beleid : een analyse van dynamiek in politieke betrokkenheid*. Aksant.

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.



SUMMARY

CITIZENS AGAINST POLICY

An analysis of dynamics in political involvement

Once in a while it happens. Dutch citizens become politically active against policy interventions by the government. They protest against proposals for highway construction, for flood control measures, plans for sludge dumps, the construction of new railroads, nature development projects, and many processes of municipal amalgamation. These are examples of national or regional interventions; many more examples of local practices could be given. The political involvement of Dutch citizens against government policies therefore seems to be a widespread social and political phenomenon. For politicians and public administrators concrete manifestations of this phenomenon form an unwelcome interference with their work. According to them these citizens suffer from a Not-In-My-Backyard (NIMBY) syndrome, motivated by egoism and calculative behaviour. They are also seen as angry citizens, blinded by emotions and irrationality. Of course these conflicts provide unpleasant circumstances for political decision-making. In most cases citizens indeed seem to be angry or afraid. But where does their anxiety of anger come from? Can we see their protest as self-made? Or do government and political processes contribute to them? In this dissertation I argue that the phenomenon of citizens against policy is embedded within an ambiguous political culture that is produced over time through citizens' changing political repertoire as well as changes in the political landscape in which they can become politically involved. I also argue that within this broader picture, concrete manifestations of citizens against policy occur because of the meanings that politics, government, the media and actors in the civil society produce in discourses and framing processes, and because of their attempts at political mobilization. Before I explain and empirically substantiate this argumentation, I will sketch the broader picture of citizens against policy as a social and political phenomenon.

1. The broader picture

The broader picture of the phenomenon is influenced by developments in citizens' political involvement over the last decades but also by changes in the political landscape in which citizens are provided with more chances to become involved. In the first two chapters of this dissertation I analyse these two lines of development.

Chapter 1 focuses on developments in citizens' political involvement since the 1970s. What is going on with citizens' involvement in politics? What direction are developments heading for and what social changes are they connected to? Citizens' involvement in politics is indeed changing. I conclude in chapter 1 that since the 1970s an ambiguous political culture has developed, in which support for as well as criticism on the political regime go hand in hand. The foundation for this ambiguous political culture can be found in high support for democratic values and for democracy as the most acceptable form of political decision-making. On this basis a broad political repertoire has developed from the 1960s and 1970s onward. This repertoire includes electoral political involvement as well as direct forms of political influence and protest behaviour. Of course electoral behaviour has been at the centre of this repertoire. Over the last decades we have seen a decline of electoral forms, such as party membership and voter turnout. Although the turnout numbers for the Dutch national elections are still very high, around 80 percent. Alongside electoral behaviour direct forms of influence through contact with ministers, members of parliament or politicians on a local level have been part of the Dutch political repertoire at least since the 1970s. The biggest change in the repertoire has been the support for and participation in a broad range of protest activities, that grew quite popular in the 1960s and 1970s in Holland as well as in other western democracies. These elements of the broad political repertoire nowadays stand at the disposal of citizens who have less trust in political institutions, who are quite interested in politics, and who feel more self-confident that their involvement can contribute to political decision-making.

The big question is how we can interpret the directions these changes are heading for and to what social changes they are connected. A first interpretation comes from social capital theorists such as Robert Putnam. He claims that declining electoral behaviour and developments in direct influence and protest behaviour indicate that citizens' political involvement is in crisis. For him political involvement is only meaningful when it contributes to representative forms of democracy. Direct influence and protest behaviour do not fit into this perspective, because they refer to personal interests and not to the public interest. Putnam locates the cause of this crisis in social developments such as declining participation in civil society, lower social and political trust and the bad influence of the media and popular culture on civic involvement. Conversely, modernisation theorists such as Ronald Inglehart agree that electoral behaviour is declining and that support for direct influence and protest behaviour is growing. They claim that this development is connected to citizens' changing value patterns through

generational changes. Values from the older generations are seen as materialistic and the baby boom generation has developed a post-materialistic value pattern which is more oriented on sustainability and so on. Within the modernisation perspective these changes are positively appreciated. The popularity of protest behaviour indicates that we are heading toward turbulent forms of democracy which is seen as a good development.

Both explanations suffer from a lack of solid empirical substantiation, at least for the Dutch situation. The civil society is not in decline and the media do not seem to have a detrimental effect on civic involvement. Also the changing values toward post-materialism are hard to find. Most citizens seem to have mixed values at best. Another problem that both explanations suffer from is that they assume a linear development from A to B. They do not take into account that electoral as well as other forms of political involvement can very well be complementary within democratic states. Therefore a third interpretation from what may be called an individualisation perspective seems to be more promising. It assumes that political involvement is not developing in one clear direction, but that it is broadening through time. Individual citizens have access to an ever broadening political repertoire, and they draw on it according to the political circumstances they are confronted with. From this perspective political behaviour is a matter of successive individual choices: Register to vote or not? Contact the alderman or not? Join a demonstration or not? Furthermore it assumes that these individual choices, although they seem subjective, in fact are very much influenced by collective actors and institutions. Individualisation is sometimes seen as a social process in which people become more independent from collectives and make up their own mind. Sociologists such as Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens have convincingly argued though that this is not the case. What happens is that individual reflexivity has become more of a centre stage activity for many people, and collectives exert their influence in more subtle ways by referring to feelings of subjectivity and choice. It is exactly through these almost unconscious influences of collectives that ambiguous forms of political involvement drawing on a broad political repertoire can be accounted for.

The individualisation perspective points us not only in the direction of individual citizens if we want to understand the social and political phenomenon of citizens against policy. It also points to the influences of collectives and therefore to changes in the political landscape in which the ambiguous political choices of citizens are being influenced. What are the most important changes in the Dutch political landscape? What are the consequences of these changes for political involvement? In chapter 2 I focus on three developments that seem to be very important causes for the ambiguous political culture.

First I describe the higher and contradictory expectations that Dutch government has developed toward citizens. Since the 1980s government has withdrawn from many tasks it had given itself within the context of the welfare state. This retreat has come together with higher expectations of citizens' 'personal responsibility' and citizenship.

But it has also come with a redefinition of relations in service provision. Under the influence of new public management philosophies government has become a provider and citizens have become clients with demands on quality and efficiency. Alongside these redefinitions government has worked on the democratic empowerment of citizens by enlarging their room for tolerated claims making. Citizens have a say in all kinds of boards, they have more opportunities to complain on service delivery, and they can appeal to administrative law if they do not agree with government decisions. Altogether these higher and contradictory expectations contribute to the ambiguity of Dutch political culture. Citizens can be loyal and responsible at one moment, behave as clients the next, and finally have been given the tools to be very critical on decision-making at another moment.

Secondly, the political landscape itself has changed dramatically. Political decision-making has become a joint process in which the European Union, agencies within the regulatory state, NGO's, experts, the media and sometimes even the judiciary exert their influence. For citizens this means that political decision-making has become a process of messy, non-generalizable, and contingent practices, institutions and discourses that manifests itself in many places. The sheer number of political subject matters, interests and claims has become enormous and more oriented on specific issues and problems. Issue politics is not new, but it has become harder for political elites to control. Political conflicts on specific issues come more out into the open and can provide citizens with objects for their political involvement. Objects that require different forms of political action and ambiguous choices.

A third important change in the political landscape is the representation of politics in the media. Media coverage of politics nowadays is more often focussed on spectacle and incidents, the failure of politicians, picking winners and losers, and blaming and shaming. Technocratic and content focussed coverage has become entwined with sensation and emotion as can be found in entertainment programs, advertising and popular culture. Many commentators deplore these changes. They claim that citizens have become ill informed about politics and will withdraw from political action. For the time being there is no empirical evidence that supports such a pessimistic perspective. It seems to be more realistic to assume that the entwinement of politics and popular culture provides citizens with a broader picture of politics. It becomes clear for them that politics is not only a process of trust, consensus, giving and taking, but also of distrust, difference of opinion, conflict, controversy and criticism. This means for citizens that politics manifests itself as a sequence of particularities, issues and specific problems that can trigger their attention, and that require different and ambiguous political choices.

These three developments of the political landscape each add to the ambiguous political culture. The higher and contradictory expectations amplify differences of interest between government and citizens. They provide with more conflict potential and a loss of political authority. Citizens nowadays have to be convinced that service provision

is effective, efficient and just, and that democratic decision-making is legitimate. Loyalty and trust are not self-evident but require permanent effort. It has to be proven that government and politics deserve citizens' trust and loyalty. This has to be provided for against the background of a dramatically changed political landscape in which many actors are influencing political decision-making, and in which many specific issues can become an object of citizens' political engagement. The identification with such objects and sources has become much easier because of the changed representation of politics in the media, in which specific issues are communicated in ways that are more recognizable for citizens.

Altogether the changing political landscape contributes to a scattered pattern of political engagement, which is characterized by shifting involvements. Besides elections citizens most often do not follow politics at all (they are 'offline'), or they follow specific issues that come to their attention (they are on 'stand-by') and take political action whenever they consider it necessary (they become 'online'). Stand-by and online behaviour depend very much on the policymaking and policy implementation of government and politics. Because of an awareness of loss of authority, many Dutch municipalities and departments have experimented with different forms of deliberative decision-making, such as interactive planning, citizens' councils and so on. Through these experiments they try to avoid conflicts with citizens over difficult decisions. But not all conflicts on decision-making can be avoided. This is when the phenomenon of citizens against policy occurs. Citizens become 'agonistic'. They are not enemies of government, as in the 'antagonistic' relation between terrorists and the state in which one party does not respect democracy and the rule of law. They temporarily become an adversary of government on a specific policy issue. What develops is an agonistic relation in which citizens do respect democratic standards and the rule of law as the context within which to protest against policy interventions.

2. The formation and activation of agonistic publics

Now that the broader picture of the phenomenon citizens against policy has been sketched, it still remains unclear *how* and *why* citizens become politically involved in such agonistic practices. I give theoretical answers on these questions in chapter 3. My main assumption is that the phenomenon occurs in practice through the interactions between collective political actors and citizens. Whenever citizens become active against policy, they are reacting on policy interventions by politicians, public administrators, or civil servants. Except for very well informed citizens, most will not know that there is an upcoming problematic policy intervention. Media attention or NGO's can make them aware of an issue. So mostly citizens are depending on collective political actors to trigger their attention, to take them from offline to stand-by. By doing so those actors in fact form a public for a problem, a public whose members can become actively politically involved.

The notion of the public has recently gained a lot of interest through the renewed appreciation for the work of the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey. For Dewey “the public consists of all of those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for.” Important in his formulation is that those who suffer from indirect consequences have no direct influence on them. Therefore they have to organize themselves as a public that collectively tries to soften or take away the indirect consequences. So a public occurs for a specific reason that is connected to a problematic issue. In the current political landscape with its ambiguous political culture we can think of many sorts of publics that can occur in reaction to different problematic issues. Some publics focus on the indirect consequences of human action, as Dewey assumed. This happens, for example, when social movements mobilize citizens on environmental or other social issues. These sorts of publics have to be distinguished from agonistic ones. Whenever an agonistic public is formed, the problem originates from the consequences of political decision-making. The cause of the problem lies not in the indirect consequences of transactions by third parties, but in the direct consequences of policy interventions by government that have to be softened or taken away.

Agonistic publics do not come into being by themselves. They originate in a public discourse in which one or more collective political actors start to problematise policy interventions. They articulate the direct consequences of a policy intervention and argue who might suffer from those consequences. If the persons addressed start to focus on the arguments against, an agonistic public has come into existence. The shared attention for the discourse connects the public. Through this connection an agonistic public can be seen as a reservoir of potentially active citizens, whose members now and then become active because of changes in the public discourse and processes of political mobilization. Ever-changing groups of collective political actors can be involved in these processes. On the moment that some collective political actors come together on a policy intervention, a problem specific context is being formed in which an agonistic public can flourish. We can describe such contexts as ‘public energy fields’. Such fields are organizational networks of collective actors who come together across existing institutional boundaries, because of their problem focus. Simultaneously such fields are discursive spaces in which collective proponents and opponents give their projections of goals and motivations pro or contra the policy intervention. By doing so they create public energy, in the sense that they draw the attention of citizens to the policy intervention, and also in the sense that they can provide the members of the public with motivations to become politically active.

The influence that collective political actors exert on the formation and activation of agonistic publics, can best be understood by the application of the political process theory. This theory has been developed in research on social movements, but its application has broadened to situations of so-called ‘contentious politics’ in which various actors have contested claims. Political process theory assumes that political involvement occurs

through framing processes, mobilization structures and political opportunities. For our purpose political opportunities are not relevant to take into account, because they focus attention on the macro conditions in which public energy fields might occur. This is not the object of analysis in this dissertation though, considering the interest in the occurrence of agonistic publics within the context of a public energy field. This leaves us with mobilization structures and framing processes to account for the occurrence and activation of agonistic publics. Mobilization structures consist of resources such as time, money and people, but also of networks. That resources are important seems to be uncontested. Networks seem to be somewhat underestimated. They can provide a strong basis for the exercise of political power, because collective political actors with big networks usually have more definitional power within a discourse through their higher control of communication processes. Networks can also be very important in the mobilization of agonistic publics. Whenever action groups or NGO's are part of a public energy field, they can draw on social and informal networks to mobilize members of an agonistic public to become politically active.

Framing processes are very relevant for the creation of public energy, because frames have three important functions. They focus attention on an object by specifying which information is relevant or irrelevant, they are articulation mechanisms for the conveyance of meaning to a public, and they can perform a transformative function by changing the meaning of an object and its relation to an actor. These functions can be found in the literature on policy framing, the framing of collective action as well as media framing. In all their functions framing processes provide a combination of emotional as well as cognitive aspects of meaning production. The transfer of both aspects of meaning can be found in the use of rhetorical techniques and metaphors. Well-known rhetorical techniques are problem definitions, identifications of causes, diagnoses of consequences, causal attribution of problems to actors, moral judgements on actors or suggestions of solutions to a problem. Metaphors are a vehicle for symbolic forms of communication. The essence of a metaphor is to understand something in terms of something else. Within political discourses metaphors are being used to translate complicated matters into easily recognizable images of a problem or of involved political actors. Because of the mixture of emotional and cognitive aspects of meaning production, the analysis of framing processes is very relevant to understand what power is being exercised between collective political actors within a public energy field and how this influences the occurrence and activation of agonistic publics therein. Understanding of framing processes provides access to the creation of public energy by collective political actors within a public energy field.

Whenever collective political actors come together as a public energy field their framing processes can draw citizens' attention to a policy intervention, and thus create an agonistic public. Furthermore some collective actors can politically activate members of this public through mobilization processes. The dynamics of these processes can only be understood and shown through empirical research.

3. The process of municipal amalgamation: main findings

I have conducted empirical research on a specific policy intervention: a process of municipal amalgamation of the city of The Hague and its vicinity in the period 1997-2001. For this research primary and secondary data on the planning and decision-making process have been analysed, qualitative interviews have been conducted with 73 citizens who were engaged in local action groups, an analysis has been made of a corpus of 389 articles from a total of 3200 that were published in the regional newspaper *de Haagsche Courant* and, finally, a survey has been held under 350 individual citizens of whom 315 have been politically active against various plans for municipal amalgamation. The results of these various forms of research are extensively presented respectively in chapters 4 to 7. For now I will summarize the main findings, by putting the pieces of the analysis together, as I have done in chapter 8.

The city of The Hague, which lies in the South-West of the Netherlands, has had its share of big city problems such as a decrease of the middleclass, economic and ethnic segregation, increasing criminality, growth of unemployment and an increase in ethnic groups with low incomes. This has resulted in a sharp decline of municipal tax revenues. A solution for these problems would be to build new houses in order to attract middleclass people, to develop industrial sites, and office locations. The problem was finding the space to build all this, because within the city limits there was no space. Since the end of the 1980s The Hague tried to appropriate territory from adjacent municipalities by a method that is known as border realignment. In brief, after a lot of trouble, several government bodies that were involved in this process did not succeed in finding a satisfactory solution. The issue became so highly politicized that the national government and also the Dutch parliament interfered. In the end it was decided in May 1997 that a process of municipal amalgamation would be the best solution. Municipal amalgamation is a process, usually enforced by law, in which municipalities are merged partially or entirely. This process has been used on a large scale in the Netherlands since the 1980s. In the case of The Hague the process was officially completed by law on the first of January 2002.

The planning process for municipal amalgamation concerned the municipalities of Rijswijk, Leidschendam, Voorburg, Pijnacker and Nootdorp. Some of these municipalities were developing new housing estates, industrial sites and office locations. These were the main target for municipal amalgamation with The Hague. To connect The Hague with the targeted sites a corridor was planned through some very old neighbourhoods in Rijswijk, Voorburg and Leidschendam. A first plan was brought out into the open in the Spring of 1998. From this moment on a public energy field was under construction. An alliance of collective political advocates from several layers of government was formed. They saw themselves confronted with an unusual alliance of opponents consisting of the five municipalities, which later on was broadened with local citizen action groups

and which got a lot of support by a regional newspaper *de Haagsche Courant*. From 2000 onwards the alliance of the advocates changed because the province of Zuid-Holland stepped out of the process and the Minister of the Interior stepped in. Later on even parliament got involved. This public energy field did not only function as a network context in which the problem of various municipal amalgamation plans was embedded. It also functioned as a discursive space. The two alliances each had their own political slogans to mark their position. The advocates used the slogan: "Give The Hague space". The opponents' slogan was: "Cooperation yes, annexation no". Both slogans were backed up by several normative storylines in which the various plans were legitimated or problematised. Within this discursive space the opponents sought for opportunities to address their citizens as an anti-annexation public and later on to mobilize their agonistic political involvement.

Events during the planning and decision-making process offered ample opportunities to convince the public that annexation was wrong; provide them with political motivations and mobilize them in large numbers. One of the advocates was the province of Zuid-Holland. They had to make a plan which would be presented in May 1998. In the period before the presentation of the plan the opponents started to frame municipal amalgamation as a process of annexation. The five municipalities made diagnoses of possible consequences of annexation for the public. They used metaphors in which the consequences were framed as threats. Those threats were loss of neighbourhoods, growing distance between citizens and local government, and extra financial burdens due to rising taxes. Several injustices were framed in language that referred to feelings of fear or anxiety that living conditions or the neighbourhood would be harmed. This fear was perceived as real, because citizens in letters to the editor of *de Haagsche Courant* expressed these fears and even added another dimension, the fear for loss of local identity.

After the province had presented its plan the opponents had opportunities to alter their framing of annexation in such a way that they became much more critical about the advocates and their handling of the decision-making process. The five municipalities extended their framing of annexation by adding storylines on the poor financial foundations and the lack of clarity in the purpose of the plan. Citizens in letters to the newspaper as well as the editor of *de Haagsche Courant* were also highly critical. But more important than the content of the plan was the severe criticism on the political performance of the province of Zuid-Holland and the municipality of The Hague. This criticism came up during open information evenings held by the advocates and in a very intense public debate in the media. Both advocates were being accused of Machiavellian power politics, undemocratic behaviour, misuse of authority, and improper conduct that went over the heads of the five municipalities and their citizens. This criticism was shared by a broad coalition of opponents, being the five municipalities, the citizens' action groups, the regional newspaper as well as citizens being interviewed in this newspaper.

The criticism on the plan and the political performance of the advocates triggered a frame transformation process. The diagnosis of injustice shifted from the threat to the living conditions to moral indignation about the violation of democratic principles. The analysis of news coverage (see chapter 6) shows that in the language the use of metaphors changed from threats to war. Annexation became a battle with the advocates. In the use of rhetorical techniques diagnoses on possible consequences declined in favour of causal attribution of problems to and especially moral judgements on the advocates. In this transformation the focus of attention shifted from the content of the plan to the symbolical and procedural aspects of the political process. Finally, and perhaps most crucial, the frame transformation also meant that the emotional aspects of meaning shifted from fear and anxiety caused by injustice for one's living conditions, to anger caused by moral indignation.

After 1998 the plan got into a deadlock for a while, the province of Zuid-Holland stepped out of the planning process and in 2000 the Minister of the Interior took charge of the process. What is striking about this period is the much lower intensity in the framing of annexation. The five municipalities were less protest oriented; they started to focus more on lobbying. They repeated the storylines from the Spring of 1998 in which they framed annexation as a threat to the living conditions of the public. The regional newspaper was also less visible as an opponent of annexation; and the action groups of citizens remained calm until action was necessary. So there was no evident coalition of opponents with a clear message to reject the planning process. At the end of April 2000 the Minister presented his plan. This led to more upheaval, but still most reactions were down-to-earth. The Minister meant business and he did not make any severe procedural mistakes that could be used to voice criticism. The citizen action groups were the only ones that tried to arouse and revive feelings of anger and moral indignation.

Did the framing of annexation particularly in 1998 and 2000 affect the agonistic public? Yes it did. Many citizens in the five municipalities were against the various plans (see chapter 7) and they massively participated in political actions to express their protest (see chapters 4 to 7). Again events in the planning process offered ample opportunity for these actions. The advocates were bound by procedures in which each plan had to be available for inspection, information had to be provided, and possibilities for objection had to be given. But the five municipalities as well as the citizen action groups also invented political actions. It all started with open information evenings that turned into demonstrations on April 29th 1998. About 2,000 citizens in three of the five municipalities went to their own town halls in order to protest against the annexation process. On June 12th 100,000 window posters against annexation were distributed door to door by hundreds of volunteers. Some can still be found hanging. At the end of June and the beginning of July, about 6,000 people attended two open information evenings by the province of Zuid-Holland on their plan. These meetings were also used for demonstrations. In the same period about 23,500 people – that is approximately 1/6 of the total population of the five municipalities at that time – filed a notice of

objection against the plan. In October 1998 the municipalities organized a non-binding referendum on the issue. The citizen action groups helped to mobilize the population. About 90,000 people participated, a turnout rate of 74%. As much as 88,500 people voted against the plan and 1,500 were in favour. The turnout rates for the referendum were much higher than those for the last municipal election. Between municipalities it varied from +17 to +36 percent. Many more political actions were undertaken, such as voting in regular elections, signing petitions and so on. In the Summer of 2000 again 28,000 citizens were mobilized to file a notice of objection against the plan from the Minister of the Interior. This means that about 1/5 of the total population in all the municipalities participated. Altogether I have found 24 different forms of action. These actions reflect the broad political repertoire that has developed since the 1970s (see par. 1) and which was put into practice in this case.

How do I know that the framing was so important? In the survey described in chapter 7 I found that 315 active citizens undertook a broad variety of political actions. Many of them combined various actions through time. Within this variety their choices were very much influenced by two factors. First by the framing of annexation, especially the moral indignation that was produced after the frame transformation was a strong political motivator. Secondly, their choices were influenced by the mobilization efforts (asking them to take part in actions) that the five municipalities and the citizen action groups undertook. These findings are pretty solid, since I have controlled for many social-economic factors and alternative explanations from theories on political participation. The active citizens furthermore are pretty much representative for the population, which leads to the conclusion that the framing processes as well as mobilization must have been very important for the agonistic activities of the anti-annexation public as a whole, meaning all citizens who were not only interested in the various plans but were also against them (which was the case for about 93 percent of the population).

The transformations in the framing of annexation were the key to successful mobilization of members of the anti-annexation public in 1998. By the changes in emotional and cognitive aspects of meaning that were produced by several collective opponents in reaction to the changing situation, a strong public energy against the provincial plan was built up. Usually when the stage of mobilization for actions is being reached, some form of emotional message is needed in order to provide citizens with a motivation. In this case hardly any extra emotional message was necessary because the build-up of public energy had been emotional from the moment that the opponents started to frame annexation as problematic. The situation in 2000 was different. One could say that the public energy had imploded, because of lack of attention for the problem of annexation. The opponents did not form a strong discursive coalition any longer, so that there was no natural build-up of public energy going on. The citizen action groups had to be much more dramatic in their mobilization efforts, by appealing to feelings of fear and anger. This consequently led to a much lower number of activities against the plan from the minister and to much lower numbers of agonistic citizens who participated.

4. Conclusions and discussion

Concrete manifestations of citizens against policy are very much connected to the influences that interacting collective political actors exert on the minds and hearts of citizens. How this phenomenon occurs is connected to the deployment of resources, the existing networks that come together in a public energy field, and the creation of political opportunities that result from a flow of events. Why this phenomenon occurs can be explained from the construction of public energy through a changing framing of emotional and cognitive aspects of meaning, which is driven as well by a flow of events.

In the case of municipal amalgamation the formation of the public energy field can be seen as a factor that structured the rise of the anti-annexation public and facilitated the political mobilization of its members. What happened can be compared to a stage that comes into being because some actors start to act together. Where the stage can be found only becomes clear after the actors start their dialogue. All the time some new actors can enter and appropriate a role for themselves, and other actors can leave. During the acting process the actors offer each other opportunities and they also impose restrictions on what can be claimed and said. So the public energy field is formed as a network through the interactions between actors that come together on an issue. But in itself the field can also be seen as a temporary hub of existing networks and resources that the actors bring with them. These networks and resources helped the collective political actors to fulfil their roles of advocate or opponent towards each other as well as towards the anti-annexation public. It especially helped the opponents to mobilize the members of the public for a great variety of agonistic political actions. The importance of resources and networks confirms that mobilization structures as can be found in the political process theory are also important in situations of citizens against policy. Another important piece of the puzzle is located in political opportunities. But in this case it did not concern the macro-opportunities as we know them from political process theory. The political opportunities that occurred can best be termed as micro. Why? Because the flow of events provided for very concrete, short-term and therefore very dynamical political opportunities that were within reach for members of the anti-annexation public. These micro-opportunities also provided a structure, in this case for the agonistic political actions of the anti-annexation public.

A final piece of the puzzle can be found in the framing transformations, that led to the build-up and transformations of public energy. Again the flow of events during the political decision-making process was the driving force behind these transformations. The build-up of public energy was connected to the changing emotional aspects of meaning production on the problem of annexation, from fear and anxiety to anger and moral indignation. These changes were very significant because diffuse emotions, that are not so acute and cannot be easily assigned to actors, were exchanged for reactive emotions that are very acute and connected to actors. The anger intensified the public's

need for action and it provided them with a target for their actions, in this case the advocates of municipal amalgamation. That there was a huge build-up of public energy during the Spring and Summer of 1998 becomes even more evident if we look at the situation in 2000. The battery was nearly empty and it took the citizen action groups a lot of effort as well as explicit emotional action mobilization to activate the members of the anti-annexation public one more time. The dynamics in the emotional changes show that during a flow of events huge peaks but also time-offs of public energy can be reached and that it depends very much on the coalition of collective political actors and the intensity and the direction of their meaning production whether peaks can be reached or time-offs will occur.

It seems to me that my findings can be applied beyond the case of the municipal amalgamation of The Hague. This case provides an extreme enlargement of the processes involved in the how and why of citizens' agonistic political behaviour against policy. But these types of policy interventions are not unique, at least not in the Netherlands. Many more processes of municipal amalgamation have stirred up protests by citizens. Also many other types of cases can be pointed out in which a context for an agonistic public was provided for. In all these cases there seems to be a ground pattern that can account for citizens' political behaviour against policy. There always occurs a public energy field of collective political actors that can vary in its composition during a flow of events. Within this field advocates and opponents come together to legitimate or problematise a policy intervention. Some events will take place that offer ample opportunities for the opponents to develop their framing of the problem with which they can address a public. The degree of support that the opponents will get from other collective political actors, especially from the media, is decisive for the scope as well as the intensity with which an agonistic public can be addressed. If the policy intervention goes on for a while, framing processes can stir up public energy which provides a foundation for political mobilization. The resources and networks of the opponents and the micro political opportunities that can be created determine the extent in which individual members of the agonistic public can be mobilized for political actions against the policy intervention.

I also think that my findings can contribute to the further application of the political process theory to situations of contentious politics and more specific to manifestations of the phenomenon of citizens against policy. By following the flow of events we can see the true impact of political processes on citizens' political involvement. Especially the formation of public energy fields and publics therein, the micro political opportunities and transformations in public energy that all occur through the flow of events, form a contribution to the theory's sensitivity for political dynamics. Contrary to its name the application of political *process* theory unfortunately has been not so much focussed on these dynamics. By taking dynamics seriously it is easier to account for the role that collective political actors play in citizens' political behaviour against policy.

Considering the role that collective actors seem to play in concrete manifestations of citizens against policy, one could ask whether it is appropriate to discard this phenomenon as NIMBY-ism or as irrational behaviour, as politicians and public administrators do. Whether NIMBY-motives occur seems to depend on the framing of a problem by collective political actors. Therefore a more investigative reaction to this phenomenon makes more sense, in order to find out how and why citizens become politically active against policy. One furthermore could ask whether politicians can afford to discard citizens against policy, because they might learn something from these cases. This could lead in itself to more legitimate policy interventions. Finally, on purely normative grounds the opposition that these citizens provide can also be seen as a contribution to democratic citizenship. Unless inquiry shows that there is NIMBY-behaviour involved, the practices of citizens against policy can be seen as a democratic virtue that adds to a better quality of political decision-making. A quality that is very easily neglected in times when government is more focussed on the responsabilisation of citizens for their own lives.