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# Theorizing government communication with regard to the Dutch nature policy

## ABSTRACT

*The implementation of a National Ecological Network poses a significant challenge to the Dutch government. The establishment of this ecological network has led to conflicts among various interest groups in the public sphere, each of which defends its own interests. In this struggle for recognition communication fulfils an important role. This article contends that the discourse about nature is driven by deep frames, is comprised of values and is rooted in world-views. The insight that world-views play a role elucidates the various positions in the debate and shows normative dimensions in communication. This article argues that the network society, more than ever, requires the government to be explicit about its normative choices.*

## KEYWORDS

nature policy  
government  
communication  
contextual turn  
interaction  
frames  
world-views

## INTRODUCTION

Today we find ourselves living in a network society. Castells (2009) writes that in a network society each participant is a sender who can determine who receives his or her messages. At the same time each participant is a receiver who can determine from which sender he or she would like to receive messages. As compared to the industrial society that preceded it, this means a shift from allocution – where the sender determines what, when, and via

1. In the industrial society the logic of modern thinking, namely rationality and bureaucratization of society, prevailed (cf. Fischer 2007). As to communication, it was built on the principals of mass media and strongly sender-oriented.
2. In this article we adopt Hajer's description of discourse. He defines discourse as an ensemble of ideas and concepts that are 'produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices' (1995: 44).

which medium messages are communicated – to consultation – in which the sender makes information available and the receiver determines what, when, and by which medium that information should be accessed.<sup>1</sup> This development has consequences for the relationship between government and interest groups or non-government organizations (NGOs). Since the 1990s a new perception of the relationship between government and society has emerged in the Netherlands: from 'command and control' to more 'contract and negotiation' (Keulartz et al. 2004). The government thus increasingly becomes a participant and actual policy becomes a product of consultation and bartering. In this article we want to gain an insight the extent to which this new perception of the relationship between government and other parties influences the discourse about nature policy in the Netherlands.<sup>2</sup>

The implementation a National Ecological Network (NEN) has for many years been the most prominent ideal for nature policy in the Netherlands. A network of nature conservation areas is being created throughout the Netherlands to help preserve the country's flora and fauna. The typical Dutch landscape is disappearing and, in order to preserve Dutch nature 'in which many varieties of flora and fauna can live' (Ministerie van LNV 2005: 3), the government needs to supervise the restoration of nature in certain areas. Hence, Dutch nature policy can be considered to have a pro-active strategy for conservation; its primary goal is not to protect, but rather to extend nature areas (Swart et al. 2001). However, achievement of the NEN in practice is difficult: it is not citizens and politicians who determine the direction of nature policy, but rather scientific experts, Keulartz (2009) suggests. In a sense there is a discrepancy between the science-based (ecological) knowledge upon which nature policy has heavily relied and local, experience-based knowledge, i.e. local perceptions and views (Swart et al. 2001; Keulartz 2005). In this respect that which Hajer argues is intriguing: political conflicts are related not merely to the intended change of policy 'but at least as much to the institutional way of conducting politics' (2003: 89). In his view nature development in the Netherlands illustrates 'the limited effectiveness of classical-modernist political practices in dealing with these kinds of complexities and with the fragmented and unanticipated political dynamics these generate' (Hajer 2003: 89).

As mentioned above in this article, we examine to what extent new perceptions of the relationship between the government and other parties influence the discourse about nature policy in the Netherlands. In the first part of this article we argue that the character of government communication has changed. We have called this the contextual turn. In the second part of this article we explore the issue of normative dimensions in communication, in relation to frames that exist in language. Therefore a closer review of communication is necessary. Central to this article is the thought that without both an awareness of the contextual turn and insight into the normative dimensions in communication the discourse about the Dutch nature police cannot be properly understood. Drawing on our theoretical research we argue that the network context, more than ever, requires the government to be explicit about its normative choices. This leads us to briefly deal with the concept of argumentative turn.

## 1. CONTEXTUAL TURN

As already mentioned, a different relationship between the government and other social actors has developed in the Netherlands. According to authors such as Keulartz (2005), this perception concerns a shift that took

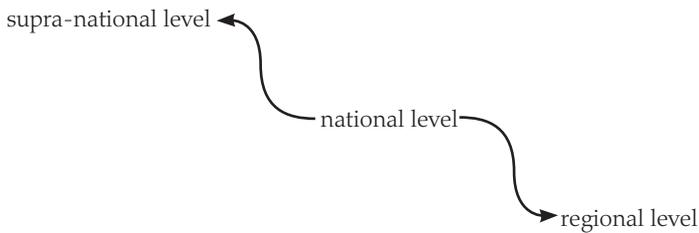


Figure 1: Vertical shift or multi-level governance.

place towards socialization and commercialization within the public sphere. Keulartz (2005) claims that this move towards socialization and commercialization entails a double shift. There is, first, a perceived upward and vertical shift of public accountability from the national to the supra-national level. To a large extent the issues of the nature policy transcend the regional scale and scope and therefore require action at a higher level. Second, there is a perceivably clear downward and vertical shift from the national level to more regional levels (Keulartz et al. 2004). Here we see the paradox of globalization: globalization is accompanied by increasing regionalization, which causes the national level to recede from view.<sup>3</sup>

This double shift demands not only multi-level governance (see Figure 1) but also multi-actor governance (Keulartz 2005). Ruling authorities increasingly give societal interest groups and commercial parties responsibility and shared accountability in the implementation of policy. There is, therefore, a horizontal shift from public and semi-public organizations towards more private arrangements and establishments (see Figure 2, bold line). This horizontal shift from the public to the private yields a relationship between government and citizens that is no longer characterized by ‘command and control’, but more so by ‘contract and negotiation’ (see Figure 2, striped line). The developments described in this paragraph could be seen in our view as a contextual turn that affects government communication.

There are a number of perspectives on government communication, each relating to certain social developments, since government communication first arose in the Netherlands shortly after World War I. Below we describe three main phases of government communication that can be distinguished in our view, namely the phase of public information (1.1), the phase of dialogue (1.2), and the phase of the market or negotiation (1.3). These show that the character of government communication has changed: the contextual turn has resulted in emphasis on information being shifted to social interaction.

### 1.1. Public information: Communication after the fact

In the phase of public information, policy was first developed and then communicated to the public. In fact, up until the 1970s people did not talk of communication but rather of information services that explained and clarified policies already adopted (Eberg 2006). This kind of communication focused



Figure 2: Horizontal shift or multi-actor governance.

3. Bardeol talks of the paradox of modernity and claims that modernization is straightforward but ‘a paradoxal process that generates opposing trends’ (2000: 32). He writes in this respect:

We [perceive] the rise of a global culture, which commenced with internationalization [...] some thirty years ago. [...] A segment of this process of globalization is the postulated erosion of the nation-state, which after all, is ‘too small for large problems and too large for small problems’. As a result, our continent knows two parallel processes. On the one hand, there is the process of European unification and indeed of advancing globalization, while, on the other, we see, as the counterpoint, a renewed interest in regionalization and localization.

(Barodel 2000: 7–8)

4. Fischer talks of about a rational model of decision making. In this model,

rational decision makers are seen to follow steps that closely parallel the requirements of scientific research. Decision makers first empirically identify a problem, and then formulate the objectives and goals that would lead to an optimal solution. [...] Combining the information and evidence about probabilities, consequences, and costs and benefits, they select the most efficient, effective alternative.

(2007: 223–24)

5. Rationality serves as a core concept for Habermas (1981). By definition, this cannot be held as equivalent to scientifically determined factuality, although de-mythologizing is, for Habermas, a necessary condition for rationality. Rationality points towards having and providing good reasons for actions or statements. The justification for these reasons may, in turn, be based on criticizable knowledge. In other words, rationality for Habermas calls for answerability to be demonstrated based on convincing arguments or claims. Furthermore, according to Habermas it means that, with the exception of argumentation, all types of coercion are prohibited. Themes may not be excluded from potential rejection from a free dialogue or discussion and this dialogue is, in principle, accessible to everyone. It is important to note that power-free is not the

on the dissemination of ‘neutral’ and objective information and amounted to communication ‘about’ policy.<sup>4</sup> Policy was often experienced as elusive and a gap was experienced between the government and citizens. However, discussions on political democratization arose in the 1970s and answers were sought to the questions: ‘To what extent and how can, or rather how should, information held by the government be made available to citizens?’ (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken 1970: 4–5). The government subsequently felt it to be its duty to inform citizens about government policy, thus resulting in quicker and more extensive dissemination of information concerning developments and themes that occupied government attention. Information was disseminated particularly through the news. Press conferences became fashionable and the government began cooperating more actively with various media. This ushered in the era of communication ‘as’ policy: in addition to publication and explanation communication also became an instrument of behavioural change (Jumelet and Wassenaar 2003).

### **1.2. Dialogue as an expression of socialization**

Alongside the discussions on political democratization that took place in the 1970s there was an increasing recognition and realization that each city, each village and each neighbourhood had its own interest groups, atmosphere, political climate and sensitivities. The Dutch government sought to take advantage of this by drawing interest groups into processes aimed at finding solutions for policy issues relevant to their interests as early as possible in the process of policy-making. Communication thus became something that was instituted prior to a policy. Jumelet and Wassenaar (2003) refer to this as communication ‘preceding’ policy. Citizens were given opportunities to voice their points of view prior to the government taking a decision. Or as Jumelet and Wassenaar put it: ‘the citizenry is allowed to have its say in town halls, after which authorities take a decision’ (2003: 25). In the late 1980s and early 1990s this expression of public involvement in policy development, i.e. socialization (cf. Keulartz et al. 2004), was characteristic of government communication. The term dialogue is strongly associated with this period.

Dialogue requires a symmetric relationship between two parties. Both parties need each other in order to effectively analyse the situation and reach a consensus or draw a conclusion. Dialogue is therefore important to all the parties involved and the basic idea underlying dialogue is that of exchanging arguments in such a way that intersubjectivity and consensus are achieved (Burkart 2009). Or, in terms of Ricoeur: ‘dialogue is an exchange of questions and answers [...] which directly connects the voice of one to the hearing of the other’ (1991: 107). Language is a key factor because only by engaging in analysis and argumentation, and subsequently inferring conclusions, can one attain a cognitive understanding of an issue and subsequently develop the beliefs that allow for consensus (Habermas 1989; Burkart 2009). In language we can find a communal, rationally based definition of objective reality (truth: are the facts correct, is what I say true), the normativity of social reality (rightness: what is right in relation to other things), and the expressive components of the innerness of the actors involved (sincerity: am I honest), (Habermas 1989; Roothaan 2005; Burkart 2009). Truth, rightness, and sincerity are, for Habermas (1981), the rational assessment measures for weighing the validity of arguments.<sup>5</sup> He argues that truth, rightness, and sincerity are norms that are fundamental to all forms of conversation that aim to understand

### *Text box 1. Participatory processes*

In response to the protests and critique of interest groups most governments have switched their approach from one that is centralist and top-down to one that is participatory. Fischer (2007) talks of participatory democracy. Participatory processes do have the potential to improve governance but they are not without problems. 'As soon as it became clear that the interests of many local interest groups would be substantially affected, the implementation process almost came to a standstill', Engelen et al. (2008: 274) argues. Keulartz (2009) demonstrated a large gap between the rhetoric on participation and the real-life implementation of participatory processes. He also claims that, insofar as participatory processes are put into practice, the results are ambiguous at best. More specifically, Keulartz (2009) outlines five problems with participatory processes. First, the inclusion of a wide range of interest groups in the policy-making process is usually costly and time-consuming, as it could in turn delay the urgently needed adoption of policy measures. Second, the democratic quality of the consultation process involving local interest groups is questionable. The consultation process has more to do with bargaining than with arguing. Third, as it pertains to nature policy, participation falls severely short of the criterion of inclusiveness, because the fate of nature is actually placed in the hands of a minority who happen to live in the countryside. Fourth, too much emphasis on interactive policy will cause a situation in which politicians and policy-makers are held hostage by local interests at the expense of broader interests. Lastly, the increasing use of participatory processes can lead to serious output deficiencies. From both a quantitative and a qualitative perspective the shift from a top-down to a more bottom-up approach goes, according to Keulartz (2009), hand in hand with the debilitation of the original nature objectives. In a sense, participatory processes could take place at the expense of good nature conservation.

same as influence-free. A dialogue is focused on change and in a sense influence is inherent to a dialogue.

and agree; in this respect we also refer to validity claims. The provision is that this assessment takes place under symmetric communicative conditions that provide participants with equal opportunities to advance their opinions and deliver criticism. Habermas's (1981) aim was to arrive at a power-free dialogue for gaining consensus.

### **1.3. Negotiation as a leading principle**

In this third phase there is a stronger call for negotiation than before (Keulartz et al. 2004). Arguments certainly remain important, but rationality as demonstrated by Habermas has now achieved a different connotation. Authors such as Latour (1993) believe that we construct reality in interaction with others. He talks of hybrid networks, a collective of networks that link people and caring for the meaning of matters. However, in a network context people do not always have clear-cut identities or preferences (Hajer 2003). They are present and act in several and separate networks at the same time. People live within networks that 'stretch across territorially defined boundaries, and often without explicitly seeking representation in the sphere of formal politics in the location where they happen to live' (Hajer 2003: 88). Therefore Hajer

6. Hajer (2003) notes that in a network context communities are based 'on the fact that their "members" feel affected by the intended public policy programme rather than "on shared normative beliefs"' (2003: 89). In this context he talks of a 'community of fate', which triggers shared preferences.

argues that 'citizens could also be seen as political activists on "stand by" who often need to be ignited in order to become politically involved' (2003: 88). It is mostly a 'public initiative that triggers people to reflect on what they really value, and that motivates them to voice their concerns or wishes and become politically active themselves' (Hajer 2003: 88). So Hajer (2003) comes to the conclusion that public policy creates a public domain, 'a space in which people of various origins deliberate on their future as well as on their mutual interrelationships and their relationship to the government' (Hajer 2003: 88). According to Hajer (2003) an intended policy intervention, for instance the implementation of the NEN, makes people aware of what they feel attached to, 'the awareness of what unites them and what separates them from others' (Hajer 2003: 89). Policy-making, he concludes, provides the practices in which people start to deliberate, 'policymaking [...] creates a sense of community and triggers meaningful political participation' (Hajer 2003: 89).<sup>6</sup> 'The established thinking focuses on the issue of how to represent a (given) community and how to come to a fixed system of legitimate decision-making on policies' (Hajer 2003: 96), but in a network context 'policymaking lead to the creation of communities that for themselves have to determine what constitutes a legitimate decision in a particular instance' (Hajer 2003: 97). Hence he concludes that 'politics first of all [is] a matter of finding and defining the appropriate setting in which to stage the discursive exchange' (Hajer 2003: 96).

*Text box 2. Implementation NEN*

Top-down implementation of the NEN faltered on local protests and according to Hajer, 'the protests were not anticipated in the predominant neo-corporatist practices of consultation at the national level' (2003: 92). Consultation practices include a broad range of organizations, but according to Hajer the protests show that in a network context organizations are not reliable representations of feelings at the local level. In other words, landscape is part of the identity of people. Or, as Hajer put it, landscapes are 'loaded with meaning and signifiers, stories and achievements' (2003: 93). So 'environmental policy should not be regarded as a fixed programme for ecological improvement that "only" needs to be implemented, that politics was not merely a matter of doing "more" or "less" for the environment' (Hajer 2003: 92). Besides, for farmers in particular the plan for nature development 'indicated a lack of appreciation for the labour of previous generations' (2003: 93). In a sense, as Hajer rightly notes, the implementation of the NEN, i.e. the concept of nature development, ignores the farmers' way of life and also neglects Dutch history, that of an agrarian society that reclaimed land from water.

The situation described above differs from 'traditional' participatory processes in terms of focus and engagement (see text box 1). Interactive policy-making practices are typically employed before a formal political decision has been made, Hajer (2003) argues. But for a long time this was sectorally organized and content-oriented. Policy-making is increasingly moving away from 'sectoral orientation towards an integrated or area-oriented approach' (Hajer 2003: 94). In the network context interactive policy-making is not only a matter of content

but also a matter of policy-making practices. 'It is the confrontation with a particular policy programme that first provides the shared basis for discussion, that first brings together the range of individuals in a particular region' (Hajer 2003: 95). So Hajer (2003) comes to the conclusion that policy discourse is constitutive for a region or what he calls a 'political community' (Hajer 2003: 96). In other words, in a network context 'policy discourse can be constitutive of political identities' (Hajer 2003: 89) while in the industrial or classical-modernist view 'policymaking is conceived of as the result of politics' (Hajer 2003: 88).

As a result of the trends mentioned above, today interest groups and NGOs are autonomous and negotiation is the leading principle. The government has become a participant and fellow player or one of the negotiators in the marketplace. However, if the government is increasingly becoming a player in a process of negotiation and bartering, the question arises as to how we can obtain the best view of the government's own role and relationships with other players, such as interest groups or NGOs. In the Dutch nature policy this question is urgent because the government is currently inclined to hold social interest groups and other parties such as NGOs in the marketplace accountable for the implementation of nature policy. Furthermore a lot of conflicts have been noted during the implementation of the Dutch nature policy (see introduction and text box 2). To answer the question just asked a closer inspection of communication is necessary.

## **2. CLOSER EXAMINATION OF COMMUNICATION**

In the first part of this article we outlined a contextual turn. Distinct borders in terms of time are difficult to draw here. However, since the new millennium communication has been regarded as being central to the policy-making process in the Netherlands (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken 2001). The fundamental perception is that we no longer need to attempt to translate policy into language that can be understood by citizens, but rather that policy as such must be comprehensible. Policy should itself be communicative (Jumelet and Wassenaar 2003; Eberg 2006). As such, policy and communication are seen to more or less merge into each other. Eberg (2006) regards government communication as the communal work field of both. Nowadays, we are increasingly seeing more attention being paid to communication as the modelling principle of an organization and its relationship with society. This illustrates the shift from the instrumental role of communication in the sense of production and distribution of information to that of communication as a means to build and maintain relationships, in essence a shift from message to meaning.

The different forms and contexts in which communication plays a role make it a complex, as well as an interesting, phenomenon. Based on different assumptions about the character of communication, various theories have attempted to grasp this. 'Communication theory is enormously rich in the range of ideas that fall within its nominal scope', Craig (1999: 119) says. However, roughly speaking, there are two different main approaches when it comes to communication: the first approach emphasizes the effect – an instrumental approach or functional vision; the second approach emphasizes the meaning that originates between actors – a social approach or constructivist vision (cf. Van Ruler and Verçic 2012). The instrumental approach of communication is rooted in the idea of the transfer of a message, i.e. the transmission model supposes an exchange of information (Carey 1992). What is pivotal in this process is the information, understood as a kind of package, or its effect.

7. With regard to government communication it is intriguing that Fischer notes that persuasion and justification play an important role in each stage of the policy process.

Emphasizing the context-specific rhetorical character of analytic practices – the ways the symbolism of language matters, the ways audiences needs to be taken into account, how solutions depend on problem construction, and so forth – the argumentative approach recognizes that policy arguments are intimately involved with the exercise of power.

(Fischer 2007: 226)

Craig (1999) notes that the transmission model should at least be ‘supplemented, if not entirely supplanted’ (1999: 125) by a model that conceptualizes communication as a constitutive process that ‘produces and reproduces shared meaning’ (1999: 125). He talks of the ritual approach to communication. This is not so much about conveying information as it is about shared beliefs. For authors such as Carey (1992) communication is dedicated to building and preserving communities and maintaining shared beliefs.

In this second part of this article we theorize our view on communication. The starting point is the question mentioned at the end of the previous part of this article. We briefly deal with the concept of argumentative turn to clarify the relationship between government and other parties (2.1). In argumentation ‘language constructs’ such as frames play an important role (2.2) and show depth layers that relate to normative concepts, leading to the conclusion that normative dimensions exist in communication (2.3). We argue that communication presupposes recognition of other people and their normative convictions (2.4). However, by communication the focus is on conveying meaning. For that reason we argue that communication is based on ‘linguistic’ interaction (2.5).

### **2.1. Argumentative turn**

According to Fischer, the ‘postpositivist argumentative turn brings in the local knowledge of citizens, both empirical and normative, ‘relevant to the social context to which policy is applied’ (2007: 225). And although Fischer primarily focused on policy analysis, in his article he notes some aspects that could be interesting for the topic of our article. He asserts that the argumentative turn starts from ‘a recognition that multiple perspectives are involved in the interpretation and understanding of social and political reality and the competing definitions of policy problems to which they give rise’ (Fischer 2007: 224). The argumentative turn focuses on ‘the crucial role of language, rhetorical argument and stories in framing debate, as well as on structuring the deliberative context in which policy is made’ (Fischer 2007: 225).<sup>7</sup>

Fischer recognized the normative dimensions in the policy discourse. He argues that at the intersection where politics and science confront practice and ethics ‘both policy analysts and decision makers would explore and compare the underlying assumptions being employed’ (Fischer 2007: 228). Therefore he advocates what he called a post-positivist approach. In his perspective this involves a different approach to empirical and normative enquiry. As he puts it:

Where conventional social science attempts to build in qualitative data about norms and values to an empirical model through quantification, the communications model reverses the task by fitting the quantitative data into the normative world view.

(Fischer 2007: 227)

In his view normative dimensions of policy questions cannot be dealt with through empirical analysis, ‘that is, by converting them into variables to be operationalised’ (Fischer 2007: 227). Therefore he argues there is a need to seek ‘a viable alternative by reorienting the task to begin from the normative perspective and fit the empirical in’ (Fischer 2007: 227). In his view normative analysis can be facilitated by an organized dialogue among competing normative positions.

In such a policy debate, each party would confront the others with counterproposals based on varying perceptions on the facts. The participants would organize the established data and fit them into the world view that underlines their own arguments.

(Fischer 2007: 227)

Fischer rightly notes that by doing so the locus of the interpretive process shifts from the scientific community to the practical world of the public realm. He notes that the criteria for accepting or rejecting a proposal would be the same as those for accepting or rejecting a counterproposal and must be based on precisely the same data. As in interpretive explanation in general, he argues that the valid interpretation is the one that survives the widest range of criticisms. He talks of practical reason:

Practical reason holds that a decision depends on the person making it, and that formal rules of decision-making cannot be abstracted for persons and their actions into formal systems of demonstration modeled on deductive logic, as attempted by the methodologist of positivist social science. Reasoning refers here to a method for convincing or dissuading adversaries, and for coming to an agreement with others about the legitimacy of a decision.

(Fischer 2007: 229–30)

Fischer argues that motives that have successfully undergone the test of argumentation can be seen as 'good reasons'. But it is interesting that he notes that, when seeking a decision on which action should be taken, 'a practical argument begins with the norms to which the participants in the controversy are committed and then seeks, by means of argument, to ground the decision on them' (Fischer 2007: 230). This means, as he rightly notes, that practical reasoning supposes normative commitments.

Such norms are never universal or ever-lasting; all that is necessary in practical reasoning is that they be recognized by the audience [...] to whom the discourse is addressed at the specific time of the argument. Practical reasoning, as such, takes place among individuals or groups in a social context and in historical time. In contrast to the timelessness that is fundamental to deductive reasoning, the notion of temporality is essential to practical reasoning.

(Fischer 2007: 230)

In his view there is no unique way to construct a practical argument. According to Fischer data as well as evidence can be chosen 'in a wide variety of ways from the available information, and there are various methods of analysis and ways of ordering values' (Fischer 2007: 230). To summarize, Fischer argues that the logic of practical reasoning is based on three principles: (1) it begins from opinions, values, or contestable viewpoints rather than axioms, (2) it aims to elicit the adherence of the members of a particular audience to the claims presented for their consent and (3) it does not strive to achieve purely intellectual agreement but rather to offer acceptable reasons for choices relevant to action.<sup>8</sup>

In argumentation as referred to above 'language constructs' such as frames play an important role. In the next section we elaborate on the concept of frames in greater detail and argue that thinking in terms of frames is helpful to gain insight into the depth layers in communication (see Figure 3).

8. Fischer talks in his article of an intersection or complex blend between empirical data, normative assumptions, interpretative judgements inherent in the data-collection process, particular circumstances of a situational context and specific conclusions.

9. The words selective and navigate are important in this respect. According to Entman framing is about 'selection and salience' (1993: 52) 'what to omit as well as include' (Entman 1993: 54) and 'attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements' (Entman 1993: 55).
10. Although a frame gives direction and guidance to our thoughts, according to Balaban a frame exists by the grace of other frames: 'for each frame structure we have a complementary structure, i.e. the opposite' (2008: 12). Frames should therefore not be interpreted as being static; they change over time (Hallahan 1999). Van Gorp notes that

because a frame is characterized by some level of abstraction, so that it should be applicable to (entirely) different issues, it can be argued that an issue-specific frame, that is, a frame that is applicable only to one particular issue, in fact is preferably linked to another, more abstract 'master' frame.

(2007: 67)

## 2.2. Frames

Frames are selective views on certain issues or events that navigate our own beliefs (Entman 1993; Balaban 2008).<sup>9</sup> 'We perceive them in daily life, or discourse, and we use them to structure our process of perceiving' (Darnton and Kirk 2011: 69). A frame shows what is at stake, i.e. what is considered as fact, and which arguments, events and experiences are important for understanding a certain issue (Buijs 2009). By presenting something in a certain way, frames navigate our thoughts and the discourse by influencing the interpretation. This assigns a specific meaning to something, which implies that other aspects disappear into the background. Frames select and connect information, they close and disclose at the same time. In this sense frames assist us by shaping our perception on reality: they help us form perspectives of the world around us and so frames provide us with a workable interpretation of reality (Hallahan 1999).<sup>10</sup> Or in other words, to interpret something as meaningful, we need to connect it to a frame that relates observations and experiences with values, as a result of which things begin to make sense.

### *Text box 3. Premises of Frames*

Van Gorp suggests six premises with regard to frames: (i) there are more frames in a culture than we normally use, which ensures that there are different definitions that can be used and 'that the same events make different kinds of sense depending upon the frame applied' (Van Gorp 2007: 63); (ii) because frames are part of a culture, 'the actual frames [are] not encompassed in media content. The text and the frame must be seen as independent of one another. Both the attribution of meaning to media content and the connection with certain frames are part of the reading process' (Van Gorp 2007: 63); (iii) because frames are related to cultural phenomena, frames are often invisible. 'Because these frames are often unnoticed and implicit, their impact is by stealth. [...] However, whether or not frames actually bring about individual effects depends on several factors, such as the receivers' degree of attention, interests, beliefs, experiences, desires and attitudes' (Van Gorp 2007: 63); (iv) because frames are part of a culture, they are not the same as personal mental structures 'and probably not strictly individual frames' (Van Gorp 2007: 63). He argues therefore that mental structures should be understood as schemata. 'The main difference between a schema and a frame is that schemata, defined as collections of organized knowledge, develop gradually, become more complex and are related to personal experiences and associated feelings' (Van Gorp 2007: 63); (v) frames are more stable than schemata and change only a little or gradually over time. This does not mean that frames are static, but rather dynamic in the sense that they depend on 'negotiation'. 'The application of frames is subject to negotiation: frames are contextualized by the journalist and the audience, new ones are selected and others may disappear without the frames themselves undergoing any change' (Van Gorp 2007: 64); (vi) frames are part of what he calls social interaction. 'Media makers interact with their sources and other actors in the public arena, and the receivers interact with media content and with each other' (Van Gorp 2007: 64).

Although it is possible to define what a frame is in conceptual terms, it is much more difficult to make it specific. Van Gorp proposes that 'frames seem to be everywhere, but no one knows where exactly they begin and where they end' (2007: 62). He rightly stresses that frames more or less exist independently of the individual and are part of a culture.<sup>11</sup> Frames are 'in stock' in a culture and we use them consciously or unconsciously as we communicate, as well when we interpret the communication.<sup>12</sup>

Lakoff's (2006) distinction between surface frames and deep frames is helpful in understanding how frames are related to normative dimensions in communication.<sup>13</sup> Surface frames function at the level of our daily language and clarify what it is about and provide us with a point of view. In the case of surface frames it is their semantic meaning that is key; for example the words 'dark wood' in the first place have a descriptive meaning relating to a certain type of wood and 'wilderness' refers to a rough place. Through their immediate meaning surface frames identify the context of the discourse. They are a sort of snapshot, Darnton and Kirk (2011) argue; they name the subject matter and at the same time provide an angle for viewing it. Surface frames could be seen as 'techniques' that structure communication. However, the frame 'dark wood' is easily associated with feelings of fascination, fear, initiation into a numinous reality, etc. The frame 'wilderness' usually has the connotation of a pristine and real nature, nature as it originally was before it was affected by humans. This illustrates that surface frames appeal to underlying values and convictions that can be communicated in deep frames and that ground our daily language in our (normative) convictions regarding the world and our lives. Deep frames 'are the evaluative context for the discourse' (Darnton and Kirk 2011: 75) that we need in order to interpret something as meaningful. Or, as Lakoff (2006) puts it:

Without deep frames there is nothing for surface frames to hang onto, slogans do not make sense without the appropriate deep frames in place.  
(Lakoff 2006: 29)

To summarize, deep frames show our convictions and value patterns and could be seen as an articulation of world-views. Naugle (2002) concludes that any explanation of the social and natural world is conditioned by world-views, including our interpretation of and our relationship with nature. World-views shape our interactions with the environment, Peterson and Liu (2008) argue. This is reflected in our communication about nature, especially at the level of deep frames, see Figure 3.

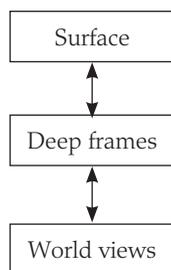


Figure 3: Depth layers in communication.

11. He summarizes culture as 'an organized set of beliefs, codes, myths, stereotypes, values, norms, frames, and so forth that are shared in the collective memory of a group or society' (Van Gorp 2007: 62).

12. Entman (1993) mentions four functions of a frame: (1) defines a problem, (2) diagnoses causes of a problem, (3) provides a moral judgement and (4) offers a possible solution. In his opinion, during the communication process we once again see frames at four levels: (1) that of the sender, (2) that of the text itself, (3) that of the receiver and (4) within a culture.

13. Van Gorp talks of frame packages, 'a cluster of logical organized devices that function as an identity kit for a frame' (2007: 64). Such a frame package is composed of three parts:

the manifest framing devices, the manifest or latent reasoning devices and an implicit cultural phenomenon that displays the package as a whole. [...] My focus is on frame packages in which a cultural phenomenon functions as a central theme, such as an archetype, a mythical figure, a value, or a narrative. (Van Gorp 2007: 64)

What he interprets as 'framing devices' is similar to what we call 'surface frames' and what he calls 'reasoning devices' has to do with what we consider as 'deep frames'.

14. Taylor argues with regards to mutual recognition:

To come together on a mutual recognition of difference – that is, of the equal value of different identities – requires that we share more than a belief in this principle; we have to share also some standards of value on which the identities concerned check out as equal. There must be some substantive agreement on value, or else the formal principle of equality will be empty and a sham. We can pay lip-service to equal recognition, but we won't really share an understanding of equality unless we share something more. Recognizing difference [...] requires a horizon of significance, in this case a shared one.

(1991: 52)

### 2.3. World-views

The relationship between deep frames and world-view becomes clearer when we look at what Naugle (2002) writes about world-views. He considers world-views as contextual phenomena that allow people to see things in a certain way and enable people to make connections between things. World-views emerge from a 'cultural milieu including religion, politics, science, place-based values, education and ethnicity' (Peterson and Liu 2008: 707). All these things reshape world-views constantly in an uncontrollable manner (Note et al. 2009). This makes world-views a complex and comprehensive framework of one's basic beliefs about things. They define the person and provide people with 'fundamental assumptions upon which a life is based' (Naugle 2002: 291).

*A Weltanschauung* – as the primary system of narrative signs that articulate a vision of reality and lie at the base of individual and collective life – is the most significant set of presuppositions on the basis of which interpretations operates. One set of privileged signs – the worldview – provides the foundation and framework by which another set of signs – speech acts, texts, or artifacts – is understood.

(Naugle 2002: 313)

World-views function at the level of what Taylor (1989) refers to as 'frameworks of understanding'. 'Frameworks provide the background, explicit or implicit, for our moral judgements, intuitions, or reactions [...]' (Taylor 1989: 26). As humans, we need these 'frameworks' to distinguish between good and evil, to know if something is important or not, if things are interesting or just trivial (Taylor 1989). According to Taylor (1989) we can say that 'frameworks' ensure that our moral reaction has the content we intend it to have and that they provide the context necessary to determine the value, i.e. meaning, things have to us. In other words, to articulate these 'frameworks' is to explicate what makes sense, what is meaningful for us. In our view communication should be aimed at doing justice to all participants in the communication and therefore also to their world-views as they become manifest in the frames they use in the communication. In others words, communication requires the recognition of each other's normative convictions on which our choices are based.

Interestingly, Taylor (1991) argues that things acquire their importance against the background of a pre-existing and inescapable horizon, as he calls it, with some things being worth it and others not so much or not at all, entirely prior to each choice. According to Taylor these horizons are given socially and historically. Choosing a certain normative position – he talks about an ideal – presumes that there are other important positions in addition to one's own normative convictions. According to Taylor our own normative convictions cannot stand alone. It presumes a horizon that helps to define the issues that really matter. Only if I exist in a world in which 'significant others' matter can I define and place a value on my own normative convictions. With this reasoning in mind we need to consider what the consequences would be of recognizing that there are different normative convictions. In other words, what it would mean to recognize the equivalence of different viewpoints.<sup>14</sup>

### 2.4. Mutual recognition

Taylor (1991) shows us that humans are dialogic beings. We are always interwoven with and connected to each other. It is precisely these connections

that characterize our humanity. In fact, we could claim that human beings exist in relationships. Human beings cannot flourish without acknowledgment and appreciation by others; as humans we wish to be recognized by others (Komter 2003; Blokhuis 2005). In this section we want to explore what (mutual) recognition entails. Or, as Berlin puts it:

I'm nothing if I do not find recognition [...] because also for me, I am how others see me. I identify myself with the views of my environment: I feel myself somebody or nobody, depending on the position and function that I have in the social whole.

(Berlin [1958] 2010: 61)<sup>15</sup>

Mutual recognition makes it possible to maintain relationships with others, and so in a certain way mutuality serves as a social structure. It not only establishes relationships, but also stabilizes them, according to Komter (2003). According to Van der Stoep (2006), people flourish when they function in a variety of different social relationships and structures. In a sense we as humans are network-oriented by nature.

It is an important insight in critical social theory that the interaction between people only flourishes when people function in a variety of different social relationships, so that they are not locked up in one of the different social spheres and society is not ruled only by the law of the market, the law of the state, or the law of the family or church.

(Van der Stoep 2006: 143)

Each relationship presumes a unique form of reciprocity. It involves a transition: the human being (or organization) that I am has undergone a change in the encounter with the other, the other has left their mark. In the interaction one's own uniqueness is retained, but at the same time both parties are changed and shaped.

#### *Text box 4. Discourse about Recognition*

The concept of recognition quickly establishes a link with the discourse about identity and multiculturalism. This is to do with the fact that (non-)recognition is linked by Taylor (1994) with 'causing harm to the other party'. In short, what it comes down to is that he believes that we need to 'recognise' each other; otherwise we will cause harm to the other party. This harm, according to him, is a form of 'oppression' and 'imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being', see quote below:

The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by the recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.

(Taylor 1994: 25)

15. Taylor (1991) argues that our identity is dependent on our relationship with so-called significant others. We know ourselves, but not in an immediate way. In answering the question of who we are, we depend on 'the detour of a story'. That story is formed in conversation with other (life) stories (Ricoeur 1991).

16. By mutuality we mean interaction between parties. By asymmetry we mean that in communication equality (symmetry) is impossible, because each party 'talks' from his or her own situated place and context. This applies in particular to the relationship between the government and interest groups. The government has a particular view on, for instance, land use and rural planning and sets the agenda with respect to the development of nature. The government is bound by its own laws and regulations and has to deal with interests that transcend topics and situations. It is important to note that equality is not the same as equivalence. Equality levels everyone's uniqueness and situatedness; by contrast equivalence emphasizes that, despite differences, each contribution has the same expressive power. However, each contribution must be assessed on its merits and related to the overarching importance. In other words, the game of asymmetry is played on the basis of fundamental equivalence. Our calling this a game has to do with dependency: sometimes I need the other party and sometimes the other party needs me.

17. Language is not just a tool we use to express ourselves. We use language to achieve communication and concomitant content of meaning. Language has a structured nature of its own and at the same time it structures communication. Additionally, language has a creative and disclosing character.

It is important not to confuse equality and equivalence. Recognition is not the same thing as 'everybody is equal in everything'. Recognition is navigating between acceptance of equivalence and being loyal to one's own individuality. It expresses a willingness to think about the importance of equal treatment in relation to one's own interest and the general interest. Recognition is in essence about taking other people seriously and regarding these people as worthy 'interaction partner(s)'. Recognition implies an authentic encounter between parties, i.e. with the aim of understanding the other party better (cf. Gadamer ([1975] 2004).

As mentioned in text box 4 we must not regard mutuality as a sort of reciprocity between equals. In our view it is a predominant misconception in communication that mutuality implies the equality of both parties. Mutuality does not imply equality. Quite a few communication philosophies approach communication as a symmetrical process. However, in our view, symmetry neglects social structures and the (civil) context too much. It is precisely the 'not being equal' that is the point of departure for recognition and that therefore forms the basis of mutuality (cf. Blokhuis 2005). If recognition is a reaction to being 'other', it positions us in a sense asymmetrically to one another.<sup>16</sup> This inequality characterizes our relationship to one another. To conclude, relationships, and in turn the communication processes at their core, are mutual as well as asymmetric. These mutual and sometimes asymmetric relationships pertain to interactions between communicating partners. This means that communication is based on social interaction.

### 2.5. Interaction

In general we can define (social) interaction as a process in which people (as individuals or as representatives of institutions or organizations) act and react to others. It has to do with our response to the appeal of others. Or in terms of Goffman:

Interaction [...] may be roughly defined as the reciprocal influence of individual upon one another's action when in one another's immediate physical presence. An interaction may be defined as all the interaction which occurs throughout any one occasion when a given set of individuals are in one another's continuous presence; the term 'an encounter' would do as well.

(Goffman 1959: 8)

According to Castells (2009), meaning can only be understood within the context of social relations in which meaning and information are processed. In a sense, communication is sharing and disclosing, i.e. conveying meaning through interaction. Communication could therefore be seen as interaction, in which language play an important role (see Section 2.2). Or, more philosophically: communication is disclosing meaning through language in interaction between human beings.<sup>17</sup> Our approach to communication integrates the two main approaches that we mentioned earlier in this part of this article. Both approaches have their own point of truth. The functional approach justifiably draws attention to the aspect of language just as the constructivist approach rightly does to the aspect of context. However, both of them are to a certain

extent restricted. We prefer a view of communication in which both aspects are interwoven. For that reason we approach communication as a primarily linguistic activity with meaning purposes.

## DISCUSSION

In this article we theorize government communication with regard to the Dutch nature policy. Or, in other words, we examine in a conceptual manner to what extent new perceptions of relationships between government and other parties influence the discourse about nature policy in the Netherlands. In the first part of this article we have shown that a changing society affects government communication. In the Netherlands we have moved increasingly from information transmission or one-way communication on policy to a situation of negotiation. We have conceptualized this as a move from allocution to consultation, and we call this a contextual turn. This contextual turn makes the question of how to interpret the relationship between the government and, for example, NGOs an urgent one. We argue that to answer this question we need to be aware of the normative dimensions in communication. In the second part of this article we assert that it would be helpful to distinguish two levels or frames in communication in order to acquire a better understanding of these normative dimensions in communication. Surface frames function at the level of our daily language and identify the context of the discourse. However, surface frames appeal to underlying values and convictions that can be communicated in deep frames. Deep frames shows that our communication is grounded in normative convictions regarding the world and our lives, so called world-views. This makes clear that any discourse is conditioned by world-views, including the discourse about nature policy. So we claim that, without insight into the normative dimensions in communication, the discourse about the Dutch nature policy cannot be properly understood.

So what are the implications of this for the discourse about Dutch nature policy? As mentioned in the introduction as well as in Section 1.3, the implementation of the NEN faltered for several reasons. At its core there is a gap between the rhetoric about participation and real-life practice; it is still an institutional way of conducting nature policy. Despite the fact that a broad range of stakeholders in a network context are consulted, organizations are not reliable representations of people's feelings at local level (Hajer 2003). In a network context the practices of policy-making become more important as well as more difficult. Hajer (2003) notes that nowadays policy-making is moving towards an integrated, area-oriented approach. Because the NEN is implemented at a local level, this development opens up new perspectives for nature policy. In a network context it is increasingly a specific policy programme in a particular region that brings together the range of individuals and provides the shared basis for discussion. In this context Hajer (2003) talks of a 'community of fate' (see note 6 and text book 5 below). Communication by the government is about more than providing and obtaining information; it is the government's task to provide each interested party with the opportunity to present its point of view too.

Nature policy is to do less with carrying out national policy, i.e. the greatest common divisor, than it is to do with recognizing the individual positions of the various participants in the discourse. Each of the participants has his/her own substantive role and normative position. In other words, awareness of the multiple perspectives in the discourse and of the underlying assumptions, i.e. the normative choices of the various actors, is crucial. Swart et al. (2001) argued that it is

*Text box 5. Responsive Democracy*

In this context we sometimes talk of responsive democracy. This means openness by the government to civil initiatives and it means transparent, accessible decision-making processes (Bekkers 2001). The opposite of responsive democracy is representative democracy, which entails the delegation of power by society to elected officials. An example of responsive democracy is boundary organizations. Boundary organizations are essentially interest group platforms and user associations that operate in the interface between groups and communities with different interests and ideas (Keulartz 2009). Boundary organizations can help policy-makers create and maintain good working relationships about practical matters. Obviously, they only have an impact if they show real interest in the problems and perspectives of all the interest groups, Keulartz (2009) argued.

important to know the competing perceptions and views, otherwise the processes of (nature) restoration may easily stagnate. The concept of argumentative turn shows us that decision-making begins with making explicit the norms to which the participants in the controversy are committed (Fischer 2007). The decision-making then seeks, by means of argument, to base the decision on these norms.

To conclude, problems with the implementations of the NEN are related not so much to the intended change in nature policy – a move towards a proactive strategy, i.e. nature development – but rather, and at least as much, to an institutional way of conducting nature policy and a lack of openness about normative choices in the discourse. In order to gain (public) trust and facilitate the implementation of a controversial policy such as the NEN in a network context the government needs to be open about its normative convictions. At the same time the government needs to be sensitive to the normative choices of other parties and citizens. The concept of the argumentative turn provides tools to put this into practice. More than ever before the network context calls for an awareness that not every communication process is the same: multi-level and multi-actor governance require an awareness that each process has its own dynamics and orbital period. The role of communication professionals is no longer primarily to produce communication materials or to transmit content; their role is to make explicit the norms to which the participants in the discourse are committed. Communication professionals are first and foremost a ‘spider in the web’, and they need to focus on ‘bonding and bridging’ by conveying meaning of the actions of the government. However, this article opens up other possibilities for future studies. This article presents an analytical structure, but more research is needed to explore which normative convictions are present in the discourse about nature policy in the Netherlands.

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