

# Media Logic Versus the Logic of Network Governance

## The Impact of Mediatisation on Decision-Making Processes



Iris Korthagen



**MEDIA LOGIC VERSUS THE LOGIC  
OF NETWORK GOVERNANCE**

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decision-making processes**

**IRIS KORTHAGEN**

This work is part of the research programme 'Complex decision-making in the drama democracy', which is financed by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO, 400-09-245).



Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research

Photo frontpage: Ferry Schinkel (<http://www.ruimtevoorderivierijsseldelta.nl/>)

ISBN 978-94-6169-637-3

# Media Logic versus the Logic of Governance Networks

*The impact of mediatisation on decision-making processes*

# Medialogica versus de logica van governance netwerken

*De impact van mediatisering op besluitvormingsprocessen*

Thesis

to obtain the degree of Doctor from the  
Erasmus University Rotterdam  
by command of the  
rector magnificus

prof.dr. H.A.P. Pols

and in accordance with the decision of the Doctorate Board.  
The public defense shall be held on

Thursday, the 23th of April 2015 at 15.30 hours

by

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born at Gouda



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## VOORWOORD (PREFACE IN DUTCH)

Naar deze momenten heb ik uitgekeken. Het moment waarop ik mijn voorwoord kon gaan schrijven bij mijn proefschrift. De momenten dat lezers mijn proefschrift openslaan of door scrollen. Het moment dat ik mijn proefschrift mag verdedigen. Iets meer dan vier jaar hard werken hebben deze momenten mogelijk gemaakt.

Het is een promotietraject geweest dat ik voor een belangrijk deel naar eigen smaak heb kunnen inrichten. Zo heb ik ervaring kunnen opdoen met kwantitatieve en kwalitatieve methoden, zodat ik me tot een allround onderzoeker heb kunnen ontwikkelen. Daarbij heb ik met veel plezier het Netherlands Institute of Government-PhD programma gevolgd, met als hoogtepunt de goede en complete cursus *Network Governance* gegeven door de Nederlandse guru's op het gebied, Erik-Hans Klijn en Joop Koppenjan, en de Deense meta-governors Jacob Torfing en Eva Sørensen. Daarnaast heb ik de kans gekregen mijn werk te presenteren op conferenties in binnen- en buitenland (zoals in Londen, Bournemouth, Rome, Dublin en Praag). Bovendien heb ik de laatste anderhalf jaar van mijn traject in een detacheringsconstructie gewerkt bij de Raad voor de Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling. Stuk voor stuk heel goede ervaringen die mij enorm hebben verrijkt. Ik heb echt het gevoel dat ik de kansen heb gegrepen die zich voordeden en dat is een goed gevoel.

In mijn promotietraject heb ik er zeker niet alleen voor gestaan, dit voorwoord wil ik daarom gebruiken om hen te bedanken die er voor me zijn geweest. Te beginnen bij mijn promotoren, Erik Hans en Steven. Erik Hans kan gekenmerkt worden als een zeer betrokken promotor. Soms iets té betrokken misschien, maar ik kan niets anders zeggen dan dat hij wel altijd het beste met me voor had. Ook al waren we het niet altijd eens en kijken we toch wat anders aan tegen de wetenschap die we willen bedrijven, we konden het daar wel goed met elkaar over hebben. Dank Erik-Hans, voor het feit dat je me zo zelfstandig hebt laten werken, je hebt me daarmee veel zelfvertrouwen gegeven. En erg fijn dat je mijn eigenwijsheid wel kon waarderen. Steven was een tweede promotor op de achtergrond, bij wie ik altijd terecht kon als ik dat wilde. Ik heb daar niet al te vaak gebruik van gemaakt, maar wanneer ik dat wel deed had hij goede tips. Op mijn werk gaf hij bovendien altijd duidelijke, constructieve kritiek, veel dank daarvoor, Steven!

Verder was er in Rotterdam een flinke groep van promovendi die belangrijk voor me was omdat ik bij hen terecht kon voor gezelligheid, leuke discussies, lieve peptalk en goede tips. Ik heb aan alle aio's wel wat te danken (al was het maar geld voor een cadeautje voor een van de collega's als ik weer eens om donaties vroeg), maar ik wil een paar lieverds uitlichten. Allereerst Ingmar, met

wie ik al snel een hele leuke klik had. We hadden altijd lol om van alles en nog wat, het meeste toch eigenlijk wel werk gerelateerd. Heerlijk om achteraf even te kunnen lachen om moeizame gesprekken, (reorganisatie)stress op de afdeling of onze ietwat optimistische plannings (-). Het leukste was dat we ook samen onderzoek hebben gedaan. We vulden elkaar daarin goed aan en door samen na te denken kwamen we echt verder. Zo zou samenwerking altijd moeten gaan! Bovendien hebben we ook daarin natuurlijk het nuttige gecombineerd met het aangename, ik denk even aan dat mijmeren over onze toekomst op dat heerlijk zonnige terrasje in Heerlen na een topinterview.

Ook aan Lieselot heb ik veel gehad, waaronder natuurlijk de fijne wandelingen zo tussendoor, waarin we goede gesprekken hadden over ons onderzoek, het proces daaromheen, de onderzoeksgroep, het werken in de wetenschap en andere dingen die ons bezighielden. En dan Brenda, wie van cruciaal belang was in mijn promotie. Allereerst maakte zij mij attent op een fout bij bestuurskunde waardoor mijn sollicitatie op de verkeerde stapel was beland. Vervolgens heeft zij mij in mijn promotietraject wegwijs gemaakt in het land van AMOS en mij heel goed bijgestaan op moeilijke momenten in het proces. Ten slotte was zij degene die zei: gewoon doen Iris, dat traject bij de RMO, volgend jaar zit je daar niet meer op te wachten. Ik ben je heel dankbaar voor al die fijne tips en ondersteuning op precies die momenten dat het zo nodig was! En Ruth, ik kende je al vanuit mijn tutorschap bij bestuurskunde. Een nuchtere superwoman! Wat heb ik jou bewonderd in hoe jij doorgezet hebt in werk en privéleven. Ik kom je zeker opzoeken in Duitsland. Daarnaast wil ik mijn kamergenootjes nog even uitlichten. Ik begin met Warda en Rianne, wat een superfijne gesprekken over de actualiteit - en dan met name over media, beeldvorming en ongelijkheid - heb ik met jullie kunnen voeren. Ook kwam ik zeker geen lekkers of zorgzaamheid tekort met jullie, heel veel dank voor alles wat jullie voor me hebben gedaan, meiden. Maar wat heb ik ook fijne discussies en gesprekken gehad met William, Mark, Natalya, Nanny en Diana (mijn eerdere roommate). Ten slotte wil ik Lasse nog bedanken voor de bijzondere gesprekken die we hebben gevoerd tijdens onze interviews aangaande het Stadionpark in Rotterdam. Veel dank voor je luisterend oor, de kracht die je me gaf om door te gaan op de weg die ik was ingeslagen en ook voor de ervaringen die je met mij deelde.

Ten slotte wil ik de Rotterdamse collegialiteit nog even illustreren aan de hand van de *International Review In Science of Perfect Marriages* (IRISPM), een speciaal uitgegeven tijdschrift, ge-edit door Erik-Hans en Lasse, uitgegeven door van de Walle University Press ter gelegenheid van mijn bruiloft (Geweldig hè!). Hierin stonden fantastische artikelen, geheel in wetenschappelijk format en wetenschappelijk discours. Zoals het QCA onderzoek naar het falen van huwelijken

van beroemdheden van Stefan (wie anders, het gaat om QCA) en Joris, met zeer goede lessen voor de praktijk natuurlijk. Of het onderzoek over vakantieliefdes waarin zelfs de tijdmachine zeer geloofwaardig werd toegepast door Jolien, Ruth en Danny. Of de lange termijn effecten van een romantisch huwelijk van Tessa en Brenda. Echt een fantastisch cadeau, dat ik koester.

Naast die lieve collega's in Rotterdam kreeg ik er ook nog nieuwe collega's in Den Haag bij. Het werken bij de RMO was ontzettend leuk en het gaf me ook weer energie voor mijn promotietraject. Tijdens het adviestraject over gedragsbeïnvloeding en nudging heb ik heel leuk samengewerkt met onder andere Jasper. Het traject verliep soepel en voorspoedig, en ja, ook gezellig natuurlijk. Met Jasper heb ik heerlijk kunnen praten over onze ambities en ervaringen tot nu toe. Daar ben ik hem erg dankbaar voor. Vervolgens, in het traject over journalistiek heb ik zeer prettig gewerkt met Rienk, Willemijn en Frank. Het gezamenlijk nadenken over de rol van de overheid met betrekking tot journalistiek en het formuleren van een Raadsadvies was van grote waarde. Daarnaast wil ik jullie bedanken – en Rienk in het bijzonder – voor het in mij gestelde vertrouwen. Bij de RMO had ik dus ook topcollega's, inclusief de stafleden met wie ik niet direct heb samengewerkt Lotte, Albertine, Anke, Dienneke en Annet: dank voor jullie tips, steun en gezelligheid!

Ten slotte richt ik graag het woord tot mijn man, familie en vrienden. Dank voor jullie steun, afleiding, interesse en liefde! Lieve pap en mam, wat is het heerlijk om met jullie te spreken over politiek, mijn promotietraject en alle andere dingen die ons bezighouden. Jullie zijn een enorme steun en geven me altijd een energieboost! En mam, dank voor het checken van de 'laatste dingetjes' in dit proefschrift. Daarnaast wil ik Sander graag bedanken voor het checken van de drukproef tijdens wintersport! En voor de mentale steun en het bieden van afleiding ben ik in het bijzonder ook Stef, Sandra, Frits, Marije, Tom, Carola en Anneloes dankbaar! Ten slotte, lieve Paul, als ik thuis kwam na een dagje zwoegen, stond er vaak een bord heerlijk eten klaar en een fijne man om even goed te knuffelen. Wat ben ik je enorm dankbaar voor de zaken die je mij uit handen nam in drukke periodes, de rust die je altijd uitstraalt en aan mij overbrengt en alle leuke dingen die we hebben ondernomen in de tussentijd (ik noem een bruiloft :-)). Wat ben ik een enorm gelukkige vrouw van jou!

Iris

Februari 2015



# Chapter 1

## General introduction



## 1.1. GOVERNED BY THE NEWS?

*“Media alluded to emotion, not to facts or the content of the plan. (...) Although it [citizen group’s statement] was bullshit - because we can prove that it is incorrect - we had to react to their story, while the tone was already set. And if media do not hear you at the same time, but the next day after, your story comes second. Then, things become complicated.”* (Alderman - Chapter 5)

News media not only report and comment on politics, but their news reports also have an impact on politics. This interconnection between news media and politics is subject of much societal and scientific debate. One of the main concerns is that news media are biased because they highlight emotions and controversy. This focus on emotions and controversy, an important characteristic of the news media logic, simplifies and downplays political issues. Other concerns have to do with the power of news media in political processes. News reports are often followed by dramatic reactions by politicians, as they want to show their responsiveness to public opinion. News media thereby set the political agenda. Lastly, politicians are criticised for using and misusing news media for their own interests. Politicians are said to sell and to put a spin on their own actions with the emotions and controversy required for news media coverage. Many of such critical evaluations come from the United States and the United Kingdom (e.g. Blumler & Gurevich, 1995; Davis, 2002; Cook, 2005; Bennett, 2009). However, comparable analyses can be found for other Western democracies, including the Netherlands (Brants, 2002; RMO, 2003; Esser & Strömbäck, 2014).

In Dutch public debates, grand statements are made to decry the power that news media have in Dutch democracy; many contributors claim the Netherlands has become a *mediacracy* or *drama democracy*. To illustrate, more than 800 reports in Dutch newspapers and journalistic magazines contain the term ‘mediacracy’, while some 300 reports have been written on the topic of the ‘drama democracy’<sup>1</sup>. Already in 1995, the editorial office of the Dutch newspaper NRC Handelsblad stated: “However fundamental the presentation in Parliament may be, the summary shown on television is more important. The same goes for the political agenda. To an important extent the media determine this agenda. They make a selection of topics, [and] their degree of attention is important for the

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1. This search in Lexis Nexis (including newspapers and some weekly journalistic magazine from 1980) was performed via the general search page using the term ‘mediacratie’, which resulted in 830 publications, and with the term ‘dramademocratie,’ which resulted in 293 publications, on 8 October 2014.

further progress of the debate. It is all part of a full-grown democracy, which is increasingly and not unjustly referred to as a mediacracy.”<sup>2</sup>

The terms ‘mediacracy’ and ‘drama democracy’ suggest that the power of news media is not only present in politics, but in other stages of the democratic process as well – such as decision-making processes. Many policies are formed and implemented through political decision-making processes organised in governance networks (Kickert et al., 1997; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004; Ansell & Gash, 2008). These are networks of public, private and societal actors, such as representatives of municipalities, provinces, private enterprises and interest groups. Remarkably, possible implications of media and their logic for governance processes in such networks are not explicitly part of the discussion on media and politics. The question whether governance processes are also dominated by media and their logic is rarely raised.

An important exception is Hajer (2009: 38), who claims that governance is *mediatised* through the “interpenetration and interdependence of media and governance”. He states that media and their logic shape citizens’ perceptions of governance processes. Furthermore, media logic has a structuring influence on governance processes and affects the way governing authorities communicate about policies (Hajer, 2009). Similarly, the alderman quoted above also pointed out that media have certainly been relevant in the governance process for which he was responsible. Even though the news reporting was not accurate or at least highly dramatised, he felt the pressure to respond to it. It is thus not unreasonable to assume that news media and their logic have an impact on governance processes as well.

In prior research I already showed how a national media hype with many dramatic statements can have substantial effects on policy outcomes (Korthagen, 2013). This case study was however a unique case concerning a national mediahype around a policy issue, which does not show how decision-making processes on policies in general are affected by media and their logic. How effects of media on governance processes work in practice is still under-researched. It is therefore the goal of this research project, titled ‘*Complex decision-making in the drama democracy*’ and financed by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of media and their logic on governance processes.

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2. Redactie (1995). De mediacratie. In: NRC Handelsblad, 25 March 1995, my translation.

## 1.2 MEDIATISATION: THE GROWING IMPACT OF MEDIA AND MEDIA LOGIC

News media have both democratic and commercial tasks<sup>3</sup>. This applies to both publicly and privately financed media companies, although the degree may differ to a certain extent. Publicly financed media organisations are formally mandated to supply democratically relevant information (such as the Dutch NOS or the British BBC), but private companies may contribute to this public task just as much (e.g. newspaper companies). At the same time, publicly and privately financed news media share an interest in the marketability of information: they both need to reach mass audiences. Private companies must gain all their income from subscription fees and advertising revenues, but publicly financed media are also evaluated on their audience ratings and need to procure advertising revenues. The democratic and commercial interests of news media can be at odds with each other. A common complaint is that commercial interests increasingly dominate, resulting in a commercially motivated, uniform *media logic* that determines the content of news coverage (RMO, 2003; WRR, 2005; Bennett, 2009; Landerer, 2013). The selection and tone of news reporting is claimed to be biased due to the commercial criteria of marketability and efficiency. It seems that negative news, human interest stories and drama in particular can be efficiently made and successfully sold (Bennett, 2009).

Such characteristics of the news media logic determine who gets access to the public through media and how their ideas are framed (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Tresch, 2009). For instance, claims and sound bites by the Dutch populist politician Geert Wilders are often negative and dramatic and are widely covered in news reports (Schaper & Ruigrok, 2010). Formulating a message that chimes well with media logic characteristics is thus important for political actors who seek to reach a larger audience through the media. In scientific literature, the growing power of media and their logic in political processes is referred to as *mediatisation*. Studies on mediatisation describe how the media have gained greater social prominence and how media logic has been integrated into other institutional logics (Hjarvard, 2008; Lundby, 2009b). Although much attention has been devoted to the mediatisation of politics (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Kepplinger, 2002; Strömbäck, 2008; Landerer, 2013), mediatisation in the context of governance processes has scarcely been examined (Hajer, 2009).

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3. Besides, news media have social tasks as well, as Costera Meijer (2010) emphasizes. These will however not be part of this research.



### 1.3 STUDYING MEDIATISATION IN THE CONTEXT OF GOVERNANCE PROCESSES

Just as the media operate according to a certain media logic, political systems have a logic as well. Studies on the mediatisation of politics analyse to what extent media logic overrides the political logic (cf. Strömbäck, 2008). More and more scholars have acknowledged that the notion of a political logic is often understood too narrowly in these studies, as they mainly focus on political authorities or political representatives (Schrott & Spranger, 2007; Hajer, 2009; Kunelius & Reunanen, 2012; Esser & Matthes, 2013; Marcinkowski, 2014). Contemporary political decision-making processes do not have such a clear centre (Hajer, 2009); for many policy issues, political decision-making takes place in negotiations between public, private and societal actors, which is referred to as governance processes. This research focuses on mediatisation in these governance processes.

#### Governance processes

Although ‘governance’ has different meanings (see Rhodes, 1996; Kooiman, 1999), three principles distinguish how the word is used in this thesis from other approaches to government or politics:

- 1) The approach is pluricentric rather than unicentric (such as state-centred models);
- 2) Networks play an important role in organising the relations between interdependent actors; and
- 3) Governance processes are characterised by negotiation, accommodation and cooperation rather than by coercion, command and control (e.g. Van Kersbergen & Van Waarden, 2004: 151-152).

A governance approach is necessary in the context of complex societal problems characterised by knowledge and value conflicts that cross institutional boundaries (Klijn, Koppenjan & Termeer, 1995; Kickert, Klijn & Koppenjan, 1997). Institutional boundaries are increasingly challenged by societal problems, particularly because government entities are increasingly specialised and fragmented (Torfing, 2007; Klijn, 2008a). For many policy issues, government entities therefore need to collaborate with other government, business and civil society organisations.

This might seem somewhat abstract to many readers. Why would a government organisation not be capable of solving policy problems on its own? An illustration: the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment seeks to take measures against floods in a specific area. However, the municipality in the area was aiming to build new houses in the same area, which would form a nice bud-

getary solution. A private investor might certainly be interested in investing in the area, but for a lower price than the municipality offered. Farmers that now use the area for their agricultural activities want to keep their land, of course. And citizens who like to recreate in the area would like to have some restaurants nearby. Although such a situation might appear quite complex already, this is actually a rather simplistic illustration of the actors and interests usually involved in governance processes in spatial planning (e.g. Hajer & Zonneveld, 2000; Healey, 2006; Torfing, Sørensen & Fotel, 2009) and water management policies (see Termeer et al., 2011; Edelenbos, Bressers & Scholten, 2013). In many policy domains, examples of governance processes can be found with the same characteristics. Also around safety issues (Prins, 2014) or health policies (Wehrens, 2013), government entities do not possess enough finances, production resources, authority and/or know-how to develop solutions on their own, nor are they capable of dealing with controversies regarding these policies. This makes it necessary to collaborate with other actors. Collaboration moreover has the potential of generating innovative solutions that better suit the complexity of the issues (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004; Sørensen & Torfing, 2012).

Government organisations and other private and societal actors are thus mutually dependent on developing solutions for complex societal issues. At the same time, actors who are involved in governance processes operate relatively independently; they cannot be commanded to think or act in a certain way by one of the other actors (Torfing, 2007: 5). Relations between actors in governance processes are therefore described as horizontal rather than vertical and can be modelled in governance networks. In series of interactions, actors negotiate, collaborate and decide to achieve not only their own goals but also a collective goal (Provan & Kenis, 2008; Ansell & Gash, 2008). Such interaction patterns can be referred to as games, to conceptualise the competition that exists between different strategies of individual actors (Klijn, 2008b: 129). In sum, governance networks can be defined as: *“more or less stable patterns of social relations between mutually dependent actors, which form around policy problems and/or clusters of means and which are formed, maintained and changed through a series of games”* (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004: 69-70). Many policies are nowadays formed and implemented through governance networks (Kickert et al., 1997; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004; Ansell & Gash, 2008).

## **Mediatisation in the context of governance processes**

Governance processes in networks often take a long time. The decision-making processes therefore require a long-term dedication on the part of network actors and trust relations between them in order to achieve collective decision-

making (Klijn, Edelenbos & Steijn, 2010; Ansell & Gash, 2008). At the same time, news reports complain about sluggish governmental performance, zoom in on conflicts and demand swift measures (Klijn, 2008b). This puts pressure on the functioning of governance networks. Moreover, since processes of mediatisation are not limited to political institutions but take place in bureaucracies (Thorbjørnsrud, Ustad Figenschou & Ihlen, 2014) and public service organisations (Schillemans, 2012) as well, it is relevant to ask how news media and their logic affect decision-making processes in governance networks in general.

The degree of mediatisation varies across governance processes, depending on the policy issue, the process, and the decision-making phase (cf. Esser & Matthes, 2013). We must thus bear in mind that many governance processes might not even be covered by the media, as scholars also say applies to legislative processes in parliament (Van Aelst, Melenhorst, Van Holsteyn & Veen, forthcoming; Van Santen, Helfer & Van Aelst, 2013); or the governance processes might not be that personalised or popularised in news reports (cf. Van Santen, 2012 about politics). We should take into account that specific cases cannot always be generalised as a permanent state of affairs. Before turning to the question of the influence of mediatisation on governance processes, I therefore first analyse to what extent media and media logic have been relevant in the specific governance processes. Mediatisation is thus not treated as a given in this research. This differs from the approach of some scholars who describe mediatisation as a meta-process that, alongside other meta-processes such as individualisation, secularisation and globalisation, is fundamentally shaping our society (see Krotz, 2009; Hjarvard, 2013: 137). Approaching mediatisation as a meta-process is socially relevant, but it provides less information about how media and their logic affect particular governance processes.

## 1.4 WHAT THIS RESEARCH IS ABOUT: OVERALL AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As indicated above, the overall aim of this research is to study mediatisation in the context of governance processes. The overall research question is: “*How does mediatisation affect governance processes?*” To recapitulate, ‘mediatisation’ refers to the increasing power of media and their logic over societal institutions.

Media and mediatisation are relevant for governance processes, as media can become entangled in governance processes in many different ways. The involvement of media can be categorised roughly in terms of three different roles (these roles are explained further in Chapter 3). First, media provide information packaged in news reports, as *democratic platform*. Second, media can

have effects on the content and process of governance processes, as a *political agenda setter*. Third, media can be used as an *instrument of strategic communication* to 'sell' messages to the larger public. This research examines the three roles of media in governance processes from the perspective of mediatisation, which emphasises the effects of media logic on these roles. This is translated into more specific research questions.

*1) To what extent can media biases be found in news reports on governance processes and how do they relate to the media platform function for different stakeholders' voices?*

Media provide news reports that frame the content and progress of governance processes, by which they ideally offer a platform for different stakeholders' voices (Schudson, 2008; McQuail, 2013). News media logic is characterised by certain biases in the reporting of news stories that can be efficiently made and successfully sold. Often, the news seems to focus on political authorities in power, as Gans (1979) and Sigal (1973) claimed, and as is empirically confirmed by scholars as Shehata (2010) and Tresch (2009). Further, as described by Bennett (2009): the information in news seem to be increasingly negative (toward authorities), as well as dramatised, fragmented, and personalised. Chapter 4 examines these media biases and analyses how the media biases relate to the range of actors covered by the media.

*2) To what extent can media biases be found in news reports on governance processes and how does that affect the governance processes, their results and their legitimacy?*

The commercialised news-media logic and the logic of network governance may be hard to combine. The media's focus on conflicts and sensationalism (Bennett, 2009) contrasts with the need for network actors to build trust relations and to collaborate (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Provan et al., 2009; Klijn et al., 2010a). Another contrast is the concentration of media on political authorities' actions and personal efforts (Hajer, 2009), whereas network actors strive for collaborative efforts of public, societal and private actors (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004; Mandell, 2001). Chapter 5 analyses how media and information biases affect the voice of different stakeholders in the process, the deliberation process, and the accountability relations. Chapter 6 tests the assumption whether the more media coverage shows biases such as negativity and sensationalism, the more it disturbs effective and efficient decision-making processes in networks.

3) *How do actors within governance networks deal with the characteristics of media logic in their communication strategies?*

Negative media coverage that might form an ‘environmental disruption’ to governance processes can be prevented or at least moderated through a proactive approach to the media (cf. Yan & Louis, 1999). Increasingly, communication professionals are hired by government organisations to help them gain positive publicity in news media (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Tenscher, 2004; Cook, 2005; Neijens & Smit, 2006; Davis, 2002; Prenger et al., 2011). Chapter 7 examines how communication professionals can effectively reconcile the logic of governance processes with the contrasting news media logic.

## 1.5 RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

In the empirical chapters, the impact of media and media logic is examined in decision-making processes around spatial planning, water management and infrastructural issues. In urban renewal and water management projects, different spatial claims and functions are at stake, such as housing, recreation, agriculture, industry, public infrastructure and social facilities. Consequently, public, private and societal stakeholders are involved in the collaborative decision-making process with varying interests and different perceptions of problems and solutions. These cases thus share the main characteristics of governance processes.

*Research question 1*, about relations between media biases and media coverage of different actors in news reporting on complex policy processes, is addressed in Chapter 4. The relations are studied in news reports on five complex water governance cases in the Netherlands over a ten-year period. A total sample of 566 news reports from newspapers and television were coded and quantitatively analysed with SPSS analysis techniques for non-parametric data.

*Research question 2*, about the effects of media and their logic on processes, performances and legitimacy of governance processes, was split into two different studies, with two different methodological approaches. In Chapter 5, the effects of mediatisation on sources of legitimacy within governance processes is scrutinised in three of the five cases, building on the content analysis presented in Chapter 4. These three cases were most similar regarding their main policy issue, which was water storage against flooding. The quantitative content analysis of media reports is combined with interviews with aldermen and citizen group representatives. This mixed method approach enables an analysis of relations between media and media logic with voice, deliberation and accountability at several moments in the governance processes. Subsequently, as reported in

Chapter 6, relations between negative, sensational media coverage and mediated politics on the one hand and trust relations between network actors and performance of governance networks on the other hand were tested in a cross-sectional large N-study. The data was obtained through survey research among 141 network managers in urban spatial planning projects. The survey data are used to test statistical relations using structural equation modelling (SEM) techniques in AMOS.

*Research question 3* is examined in Chapter 7. Through in-depth interviews with ten spokespersons and twelve journalists, it is studied how positive publicity is created around governance processes in the implementation phase. The interviews are nested in four cases of large infrastructure projects in the Netherlands, in order to scrutinise several publicity moments in the cases and to do that from different perspectives (triangulating sources). Through qualitative coding analysis in Atlas.ti, the interviews are analysed and conclusions drawn about how communication professionals reconcile media logic with the logic of governance processes.

## 1.6 OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

This first introductory chapter is followed by two theoretical chapters that lay down the theoretical foundations of the empirical studies. In **Chapter 2**, I reflect on the underlying principles of mediatization theory, using pioneering work by McLuhan (*Understanding Media*), Baudrillard (*The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*), Elchardus (*The Drama Democracy*) and others. I discuss the concepts of media, media logic and mediatization; determinism within the concepts of media logic and mediatization; and the role of emotions in claims about mediatization. **Chapter 3** offers a theoretical discussion on the roles of media in governance processes, which I wrote together with Erik-Hans Klijn and which has been submitted for a thematic section in *Policy and Politics*. We discuss the three different functions more in-depth (media as democratic fora, media as agenda setters and media as instruments for strategic communication). These roles are examined through the concept of mediatization, which suggests that media are gaining importance in governance processes. And more fundamentally, as discussed, the concept of mediatization draws attention to the production logic that is guiding media reporting and is shaping the three roles of media in governance processes.

The subsequent chapters empirically examine the implications for one or more media roles, as shown in Table 1.1 below.

Chapters 4 to 7 have already been introduced briefly in Section 1.4. These are separate empirical articles and can thus be read on their own. An unavoidable consequence is, unfortunately, that parts of these chapters will have some overlap, particularly in their theoretical frameworks. **Chapter 4** presents the results of a content analysis about information biases in news concerning five water governance processes, in relation to the news coverage of different actors. It thereby focuses mainly on the role of media as democratic fora. The article has been published in *Public Management Review*. **Chapter 5**, written together with Ingmar Van Meerkerk, shows how media and their logic affected legitimacy sources within three of the water governance processes. It mainly provides insights regarding the agenda setting function of media, but also touches upon the other two functions. This article has been published in *Local Government Studies*. **Chapter 6**, written together with Erik-Hans Klijn, tests the impact of

**Table 1.1:** *Chapter overview*

Chapter 1 – General introduction			
Chapter 2 – Discussion of the underlying principles of mediatisation theory			
Chapter 3 – Roles of media in governance processes and implications of mediatisation			
Empirical chapters	Media as democratic fora	Media as agenda setters	Media as instruments of strategic communication
Chapter 4 - The relation between media biases and news coverage of different actors in news reports on governance processes			
Chapter 5 - The effects of media and their logic on legitimacy sources within local governance networks			
Chapter 6 - The impact of commercial news media logic and mediatised politics on governance processes and performances			
Chapter 7 - Creating positive news coverage on the implementation of policies in governance context			
Chapter 8 - Conclusions and discussion			

commercialised news and mediatised politics on trust and perceived network performance. The study mainly addresses aspects of the role of media as political agenda setter, but also provides some insights into the democratic fora function. The article has been published in *Public Administration*. **Chapter 7** deals with media as an instrument for strategic communication, in a study about the creation of positive publicity around governance processes. This article has been submitted to *Administration and Society*.

**Chapter 8** concludes this thesis. It provides conclusions about the impact of mediatisation on governance processes and the theoretical and practical implications. It also acknowledges the limitations of the current research and suggests directions for future research.



# Chapter 2

## Reflections on the underlying principles of mediatisation theory



After introducing my PhD research in the first chapter, in this chapter I will discuss the concepts of media, media logic and mediatisation more extensively. As these theoretical notions underpin my empirical studies, it is relevant to examine the underlying principles in the light of philosophical and sociological literature.

First, I discuss media as being an important precondition for contemporary societies. Afterwards, I explain how the initial thoughts of McLuhan (1964) about the transformation of information by media have been applied in the conceptualisation of media logic. Further, I discuss whether the concept of mediatisation implies a deterministic perspective on the impact of media on society. Lastly, I assess underlying normative ideas about the role of emotions in claims about mediatisation.

## 2.1 MEDIA: PART OF OUR HUMAN CONDITION AND SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENTS

Media are natural for us, modern human beings. Media are just there, self-evidently, in our lives. Who does not read newspapers, watch TV or search the internet? Human beings use media on a daily basis. Media are also natural in the sense of having become part of the human condition (cf. De Mul, 2014). Media can therefore be described as extensions of man, as McLuhan (1964) does. Media, as mass media or the internet, extend our senses and nerves; through media things can be experienced that take place or have been taken place in another time or place.

Media belong to one of the crucial cultural and technological supplements that have been shaping and will continue to shape mankind (cf. De Mul, 2014: 18). Media make human beings evolve, they have a major impact on the functioning of human beings in society. Hence, the diverse set of media that form the extensions of our nerves and senses is an important precondition for contemporary high modern societies. “The contemporary complex condition could not be handled without mediated communication. What would politics be without media? What would trade, finances, and commerce be without information and communication technologies?” (Lundby, 2009a: 2).

The interference of media in our experiences and in societal processes can however never be completely neutral. Media have impact on these experiences; media alter sense ratios or patterns of perception (McLuhan, 1964: 19). The “medium is the message”, McLuhan famously argued: (...) “it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action” (McLuhan, 1964: 9). The grammar, principles and coercive mechanisms of a medium shape the message in its transport. “Each form of transport not only carries, but translates and transforms, the sender, the receiver, and the message. The use of any kind of medium or extension of man alters the patterns of interdependence among people, as it alters the ratios among our senses” (McLuhan, 1964: 97-98). Experiencing things that take place or have taken place in another time or place through a medium thus means that the experience has been translated and transformed by that medium.

Translation and transforming effects are actuated by the technological features of the specific medium, McLuhan (1964) argues. Communication through a medium means that information is translated and transformed by the format criteria of that specific medium. Television generally shapes information into moving images and sound; in a newspaper, information is expressed in written words and photographs or illustrations.

## 2.2 MEDIATISATION: THE IMPACT OF NEWS MEDIA AND THEIR LOGIC

Having discussed the natural use of media in daily life and how this is a basic condition for contemporary societies, I now narrow the scope to *news media*. News media are of particular importance for governance processes. News media provide information on political issues and decision-making processes, can set the agenda of decision-makers, and are an instrument for actors to communicate their message to a larger public.

News media share some specific translation and transforming effects referred to as (news) media logic. In fact, the initial idea of McLuhan (1964) about the grammar, principles and coercive mechanisms of media is clearly recognisable in the most cited definition of the (news) media logic: “Media logic consists of a form of communication; the process through which media present and transmit information. Elements of this form include the various media and the formats used by these media. Format consists, in part, of how material is organized, the style in which it is presented, the focus or emphasis on particular characteristics of behavior, and the grammar of media communication” (Altheide & Snow, 1979: 10).

Whereas McLuhan (1964) primarily focused on the technological transformative factors of media, the social norms and practices by which media are used also transform information. Although different news media outlets have varying format criteria, they operate according to similar norms and practices (Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2011; Landerer, 2013). Thus, besides the technological medium-specific format criteria that McLuhan initially emphasised – such as image, text or sound – the aims and interests of journalists that create news and owners of medium outlets that sell news also affect information media transport and publish. Media logic therefore consists not only of media-specific format criteria, but also includes shared professional standards of newsworthiness and journalistic norms such as independence, as well as the organisational pressures on journalists instigated by the commercial interests of media outlets, such as deadlines and audience ratings (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Strömbäck & Esser, 2014).

Although media logic is thus a very broad concept that in principle points to the overall functioning of news media, in practice it is applied in a narrower sense. As Landerer (2013) argues, the dominant conceptualisation of media logic actually mainly addresses the commercial interests that guide news production processes. “Wherever media logic refers to newsworthiness and to particular characteristics of media formats, the idea of competitiveness and hence the commercial logic is the dominant underlying rationale” (Landerer, 2013: 244).

To sum up, in news media the organisation of material, the presentation style and the focus or emphasis in news reports is the outcome of how journalists construct news stories for a media outlet that has commercial interests. This notion of media logic forms the basis of mediatisation theory.

In the literature about mediatisation it is claimed that societal institutions are increasingly submitted to or becoming dependent on the media and their logic (e.g. Hjarvard, 2008). Hence, mediatisation firstly describes the increasing importance of media for societal institutions. Secondly, the concept emphasises the transformative power of media logic in its increasing interference in communication, as opposed to the more neutral term of mediation. In other words, mediatisation research examines what it means for society when communicating, deciding and acting in ways that are compatible with commercial news media logic characteristics becomes the norm in more areas of social and cultural life (Marcinkowski, 2014). Many societal institutions reach their larger public through mass media. The inevitable interference of media and their logic shapes communication by and between these societal institutions, which might be at the expense of the institutional logic of the institutions concerned.

Most scholarly attention has been devoted to the mediatisation of political processes. For example, the often cited Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999: 250) discuss how commercial news media logic overrules political logic: “mediatized politics is politics that has lost its autonomy, has become dependent in its central functions on mass media, and is continuously shaped by interactions with mass media”. They thus claim that politics loses its own autonomous logic to the extent to which it adapts to media logic in political practices. Mediatisation has also been analysed in other social contexts such as religion (as Hjarvard, 2008; 2013), consumption (Jansson, 2002) and public services (Schillemans, 2012). Before discussing consequences of mediatisation, I first address how consequences of mediatisation are being studied. Particularly, I will discuss whether the concept of mediatisation implies a deterministic approach to reality.

### **2.3 MEDIATISATION: A DETERMINISTIC CONCEPT?**

De Mul (2002) distinguishes two broad philosophical perspectives on technology: the instrumental approach and the substantial approach. According to the instrumental approach, technology should be treated as a neutral and value-free instrument that can be applied for various purposes. By contrast, the substantial approach claims that technology has certain characteristics that determine how people use it. The latter approach is often associated with problematic deterministic theorems (De Mul, 2002: 30). Although new techniques, as the

printing press or the computer, have had a major societal impact, this impact cannot be explained by technological features only. Whereas scholars with softer approaches to determinism recognise other factors besides technology as causing societal change, they still see technology as the decisive factor.

As an alternative for hard or soft determinism, but within the substantial approach, De Mul (2002: 31) outlines a position of technological interactionism. Technological interactionism describes how technological developments are caused by an interaction of many heterogeneous factors; moreover, they are caused by societal developments as well as the cause of societal developments. So technological interactionism describes how technical development is formed and becomes consequential through interaction with its local, cultural context, by the meaning people give to it and the reasons and motives that guide their use of technology (De Mul, 2002: 32). The social factors, on the other hand, should also not be seen as absolute, decisive factors, as social constructivists seem to do. Technological developments can lead to unforeseen and even undesirable consequences due to interactions between heterogeneous factors. Such effects are not the result of intentional rational processes, as social constructivist often presume. Technological interactionism therefore emphasises the interactions between social and technological factors that result in societal and technical changes, without giving primacy to either of these factors (De Mul, 2002: 35).

Some scholars claim that the concept of mediatisation is sometimes used as a deterministic approach to study media effects (cf. Couldry, 2008; Thorbjørn-srud, Figenschou & Ihlen, 2014). McLuhan (1964) generally represents such a deterministic perspective, and his work has clearly been used in constructing theory about media logic (Altheide & Snow, 1979). However, the interpretation and application of the concept of mediatisation by the majority of the scholars can be seen as a technological interactionism perspective on the relations between media and society. The majority of scholars see mediatisation processes as interaction processes of heterogeneous factors, without clear causal relations. As Schulz (2004: 90), one of the founders of mediatisation theory, argues: “As the concept emphasizes interaction and transaction processes in a dynamic perspective, mediatization goes beyond a simple causal logic dividing the world into dependent and independent variables”. For Hjarvard (2008: 120), the ways in which mediatisation affects society is about media interfering in social interactions between individuals within a given institution, within different institutions and in society at large. Because of the interactions between media and society, the degree of mediatisation can vary in different local contexts.

In the Netherlands, news media logic clearly interconnects with social processes of de-pillarisation, commercialisation and globalisation. In the 1960s, so-

cial structures became increasingly less reliant on social, cultural and religious pillars. The pillarised press has also been transforming gradually into a more homogeneous press for the masses since then (Wijfjes, 2002; Hjarvard, 2008). Media became cultural institutions themselves, more and more disengaged from other social institutions. They came to approach various institutions and interest from a more general perspective (Hjarvard, 2008). The rise of mass media consumption – pre-eminently television – thereby contributed to the commercialisation of society and vice versa; “The advent of television and the emergence of consumer society were part of the same historical conjuncture” (Kellner, 1990: 41).

Content and formats within news media became largely explicable by the commercial interests of the mass media: the maximisation of their audiences, in order to boost (advertising) revenues. News needed to appeal to the mass public to increase circulation and have greater success on the advertiser market, and hence evolved into a form of amusement. Baudrillard, already in 1995, argues along this line that the Gulf War was a media spectacle that held citizens glued to their television or radio. “Stuck in traffic, one can always amuse oneself by listening to the Gulf radio reports: the time of information never stops, the slower things are on the roads the more things circulate on the wavelengths” (Baudrillard, 1995: 78). Whereas news is often seen as informative for citizens it thus needs an entertaining ingredient as well, to keep the public attracted and amused, even when it concerns war.

In conclusion, mediatisation should be understood from a technological interactionist perspective. The techniques of mass media, in interaction with social factors of de-pillarisation, consumerism and globalisation, have led to the commercialisation of news media. Accordingly, the interaction between news media and politics have resulted in societal change, which is characterised as the mediatisation of politics. I will discuss these developments and their implications in the next section.

## **2.4 THE MEDIATISATION OF POLITICS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS**

Since news must be saleable, information in news media has certain biases in contrast to other forms of information. News reports often emphasise emotions, conflicts, power positions and personalities, in order to dramatise events. Baudrillard (1995) strongly criticises this dramatisation of reality by media, as being fraudulent and deceptive toward the mass media public. He claims that mass media offer “a masquerade of information” (Baudrillard, 1995: 40); a “dis-

figuration of the world” (Ibid.); and a “structural unreality of images” (Idem: 46). Mass media only deliver simulacra, forming a hyper-reality. Similarly, Elchardus (2000: 189, my translation) defines news as “the cultural genre that generates an understandable, symbolic self-created version of the world, day by day, hour by hour”. According to these critics news thus creates new realities, mediated realities, which deceive the public (see also Bennett, 2009).

In his essays on the Gulf War, Baudrillard (1995) describes the Gulf War as a virtual reality, a simulacrum of the mass media. He in fact refutes the real occurrence of the Gulf War altogether. In my opinion this provocative statement goes too far, as people were killed during the Gulf War. Nevertheless, the question *to what extent* the Gulf War was made up of dramatised, virtual events is clearly relevant and could also be applied to other contexts. These could be similarly tragic contexts such as the disastrous crash of flight MH17 or the present war against IS, but the question is also relevant in the context of more or less regular political events and processes. Even when simulacra or dramatised events do not reflect reality, they can have real effects because of the functions media fulfil in political processes. In many cases the public, and even some actors involved in the political processes, perceive political reality through the media (democratic fora function of media). Mediatized realities consequently become their reality, which they use as a basis for their opinions, decisions and actions (agenda setting function of media). Mediatized realities thus “become enmeshed in the ensuing material and social reality” (Baudrillard, 1995: 11).

The enmeshing of mediatized reality and societal practice also stems from the need of some societal institutions to communicate through media. These societal institutions make their communication fit for the news media logic in advance, thus incorporating the (commercialised) news biases in their communication. “Real news is bad news”, said McLuhan (1964: 227-8); good news can only be sold in combination with a substantial amount of bad news, images, conflict and/or human interest. This also includes adapting to different media format criteria. A famous example is the debate between Kennedy and Nixon. The listeners of the radio chose Nixon as the winner, while the television viewers preferred Kennedy. Kennedy appeared to be an “excellent TV image. He has used the medium with the same effectiveness that Roosevelt had learned to achieve by radio” (McLuhan, 1964: 367).

If political actors know how they can adapt to media and their logic, media can also function as deceptive instruments for them (Baudrillard, 1995). The commercial news media logic is about how to attract and retain the attention of mass publics, and political actors are motivated to respond to and feed masses. Masses are responsive to images, feelings and associations such as fear,

discontent, hostility and power. Populist politicians especially – and explicitly – respond to and feed these moods of masses and use mass media deceptively. Populist politicians in the Netherlands for instance claim to speak on behalf of the people, but actually they speak on behalf of “the members of a specific ethnic group (white), nationality (Dutch) or social class (‘the ordinary citizen’)” (De Mul, 2011: 151, my translation). Moreover, populist politicians working in the parliament in The Hague (or aiming to) “flaunt in the media their aversion to the intrigues in The Hague or question the principles on which the constitutional state is based – non-discrimination, freedom of speech – with regard to certain groups [in society]” (De Mul, 2011: 160, my translation). Despite the deceptiveness, their political communication is mediagenic as it alludes to impulses and emotions of mass publics.

This enmeshing of mediatised reality and political practice might have further consequences in governance contexts. Actors in governance may feel they need to do something with the discomfort, whether this is stirred up by news media logic and/or populist politicians or not. Negative public opinions explicated in news reports, opinion polls or statements on Twitter (all alluding to impulses and emotions of the mass) can affect decision-making processes and even policies, when authorities “govern by poll” (De Mul, 2011: 159). When mediatised reality dominates the political and policy debate over facts and figures it can result in real policy effects (Korthagen, 2011; Ihlen & Thorbjørnsrud, 2014).

In general, the mass media with their commercially-oriented news media logic are thus seen to give preference to emotions, to images, human interest and conflicts over rational, deliberate reflection on issues in our democratic society. However, can we justify such a sharp contrast between emotions and rationality?

## **2.5 ON OUR WAY TO A MELODRAMATIC DEMOCRACY?**

Elchardus (2002) calls the drama democracy a monstrosity. When media logic and its dramatisation dominates political processes, it results in a melodramatic democracy which impairs democratic political processes. He argues that “a vast number of democratically elected representatives appear to act as if the opinion of a few journalists and some crudely expressed emotions are more important than the ballot of the voter. In that way, the representative democracy is marginalised” (Elchardus, 2002: 25, my translation). His and comparable negative views of the dominant role of media in democracy (such as Fischer, 2003; Meyer & Hinchman, 2002; Cook, 2005; Bennett, 2009) imply an overall negative evaluation of emotions. Their underlying rationale is that the focus of media



on emotions usually affects political deliberations for the worse. This implicit reasoning in the majority of mediatisation research requires further reflection.

The negative evaluation of emotions suggests that to the extent that humans can free themselves of emotions they can be more rational (Evans, 2002: 497). This traditional negative conception of emotions – originally rooted in the work of Plato – has in recent times been criticised by scholars that argue for a positive view of emotions (as Damasio, 1994; Evans, 2002; Goldie, 2004). These scholars claim, by contrast, that emotions affect reasoning for the *better*, and moreover, that humans are *less* rational to the extent that they lack emotions (Evans, 2002: 498).

Within this positive view, Evans (2002) presents the search hypothesis of emotions: emotions help us delimit the range of consequences and the range of outcomes to be considered in rational decision-making processes (see also Damasio, 1994). Evans (2002) suggests it might be our gut feelings that prevent us from making decisions that would lead to a negative outcome. Gut feelings are what enable people to quickly evaluate situations as good or bad, as a threat or an opportunity (Kahneman, 2011). Likewise, Goldie (2004: 255) argues that “emotions can reveal saliences that we might not otherwise recognize with the same speed and reliability; for example, we can immediately see that something is frightening or disgusting in a way that we would not be capable of if we were not capable of feeling these emotions”.

Although a positive view emphasises the capacity of emotions to help us gain knowledge of the world and to make decisions, the role of emotions is not always considered to be positive (see also Kahneman, 2011). At certain times emotions hinder our ability to gain knowledge or make decisions, when they distort our ability to see things as they are. Emotions distort our perception and reason when our epistemic landscape becomes skewed to make it cohere with the emotional experience (Goldie, 2004: 259). This happens when one is not open to being disproved by new evidence, but ignores the new evidence or doubts its reliability for the sake of internal coherence. The preservation of emotionally held *idées fixes* then have the upper hand at the expense of unemotional thoughts (Goldie, 2004: 260). A deep aversion to a certain political party might hinder an open-minded evaluation of their latest action, for instance.

These two-sided reflections on emotions and rationality are also relevant in the context of mediated/mediatised realities. As discussed before, many perceptions of (political) realities only come to us indirectly; through media we experience issues that take place or have taken place in another time or place. Media extend our senses, as McLuhan (1964) explained. So emotions that come to us through media can either hinder or help our ability to gain knowledge or

to make decisions. Nonetheless, in literature on the drama democracy emotions seem to be more or less equated with melodramatics, as a distortion that per definition hinders our ability to reason about political issues. This, however, is jumping to conclusions. The appeal to our gut feelings in media and politics can constructively support our political considerations. For instance, the personalisation of politics can be positive because personal sympathy or disgust for particular politicians or specific decisions can help in voting decisions, and can contribute positively to citizenship (Van Zoonen, 2005; Hajer, 2009). Emotions can stimulate political processes and public opinion and should not be rejected altogether. Moreover, “the idea that there could be a deliberative style of speech which is free from emotion is false” (Hoggett & Thompson, 2002: 113).

Political processes inevitably involve emotions, particularly within contemporary societies characterised by pluralism and diversity (Hoggett & Thompson, 2002). A governance approach addresses knowledge and value conflicts and mutual dependencies among a diverse range of actors. These political decision-making processes are rational as well as emotional. Emotions are involved in governance processes for at least three reasons: actors must be able to empathise with each particular actor; expressive and bodily aspects of communication are as important as rational aspects of communication; and the atmosphere for relaxed and open communication – by establishing trust and respect – is a crucial precondition for political deliberative processes (Hoggett & Thompson, 2002: 108-110). In sum, emotions can help as well as hinder processes of political deliberation, but, more fundamentally, they can never be excluded from decision-making processes.

## 2.6 IN CONCLUSION

This dissertation started with the discussion on the problematic connection between news media and politics. This second chapter has further clarified why many scholars criticise the pervasive role of media and their logic in political processes. Since news media can be seen as extensions of human senses and nerves, which are crucial in contemporary societies, the quality of news reports is an important concern. The logic by which news media translate and transform information causes scholars to question the quality of the information. Mediatized information has important biases, such as the focus on emotions and drama. Scholars therefore claim mediatized information to be only an illusion, a simulacrum, which does not represent reality (Baudrillard, 1995; Elchardus, 2002; Bennett, 2009). In their view media logic thereby disables news media from being well-functioning democratic fora.

Furthermore, scholars reproach political actors for letting themselves get carried away by mediatised political realities. Hence, news media biases are not only troubling because they affect the problems, issues and worldviews of citizens and actors, but they also tempt political actors to act in (responsive) ways that fit mediatised political realities (Elchardus, 2002; Cook, 2005: 114). Scholars thus similarly question the way in which media have effects on political decision-making processes, for example how they can set the agenda.

The interconnection between media and politics is moreover criticised because political actors use media as a deceptive instrument for their strategic communication. Media and politics are claimed to deceive their publics by appealing to gut feelings instead of providing rational facts or reasons that reflect reality (as Baudrillard, 1995; Elchardus, 2002; De Mul, 2011). These three lines of criticism will be elaborated further in the next chapter about the roles of media in governance processes and the implications of mediatisation.


Two other considerations should be kept in mind when discussing mediatisation in general. First, the blame should not be laid at media's door only. Mediatisation is not a deterministic concept, for which explanations should principally be sought in technical characteristics of the media. Mediatisation should be applied as a 'technological interactionist' approach to studying relations between media and society (De Mul, 2002). The presence of media biases, the degree of mediatisation and its impact thus depends on the (local) context. Crucial contextual factors are for instance the type of policy issue at stake, the actors involved, the democratic tradition and the media system of a country or region.

The last remark concerns the implicit unilateral negative evaluation of emotions in many studies about mediatisation. This seems to disregard the fact that concerns, fears, emotions and conflicts are inseparably linked to political processes. Mediatised emotions can indeed distort perceptions of reality, but they can also contribute to reasoning processes (Evans, 2002; Goldie, 2004). Studies on mediatisation so far have neglected the possible positive functions of mediatised emotions.



# Chapter 3

## Mediatisation and governance: a theoretical overview



Chapter 2 discussed the concept of mediatisation in depth. In Chapter 3, mediatisation will be discussed in relation to governance processes. This chapter was written with Erik-Hans Klijn and has been submitted to the journal *Policy and Politics*, and it can therefore be read as a separate article (this implies that some elements will overlap with parts of other chapters).

The chapter offers a theoretical overview of relations between media and governance. Media are not often part of the scope of research about governance processes. However, media are relevant for governance processes in the different functions this article identifies: as democratic fora for the dissemination of and deliberation on information; as agenda setters; and as strategic communication instruments. These functions are elaborated by streams of literature that have strong historical roots. At the same time there is a more recent stream of literature on mediatisation that emphasises that other spheres of society are increasingly permeated by the logic of the media.

This article has three main aims. First, to provide an overview of the insights from earlier literature on the three functions of media in governance. Second, to connect these insights to the recent literature on mediatisation. And last, to identify the impact mediatisation can have on governance processes. The article thereby combines two not very often connected branches of literature (literature on governance and mediatisation) and offers new conceptualisations and avenues of research.

### 3.1 MEDIATISATION IN THE CONTEXT OF GOVERNANCE PROCESSES

Until recently literature on governance and literature on mediatisation were two separate bodies of literature in scientific debate, although news media and governance considerably interact in practice (Hajer, 2009; Marcinkowski, 2014). Moreover, the literature on mediatisation could benefit from a more realistic conceptualisation of political decision-making processes, while the literature on governance could profit from an understanding of what mediatisation implies (Hajer, 2009). Although much has been written about the mediatisation of society and particularly about the mediatisation of politics (Schulz, 2004; Cook, 2005; Hjarvard, 2008; Landerer, 2013; Strömbäck & Esser, 2014), the implications for decision-making processes in governance are rarely addressed (Marcinkowski, 2014). The purpose of this article is threefold. (1.) To discuss the main functions of media in governance processes based on existing (classical) literature: media function as democratic fora, disseminating and deliberating on information; as agenda setters; and as strategic communication instruments. (2.) To connect these functions to the growing more recent literature on mediatisation. (3.) To identify mechanisms by which mediatisation influences governance processes.

*Governance: complex interaction processes around policies*

Governments the world over seem to be looking for or are experimenting with new forms of horizontal governance, like public-private partnerships (Osborne, 2000), interactive decision-making and stakeholder involvement (Edelenbos & Klijn, 2006) or various forms of citizens involvement (Torfing & Triantafillou, 2011). Many conceptualisations of governance exist. Most conceptions share the idea of a shift from government – with an emphasis on the organisation and the uncentric power of governments – to governance – with an emphasis on the inclusive decision-making process in which outcomes are achieved (Pierre & Peeters, 2000; Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003).

We use the concept of governance to designate complex interaction, decision-making and implementation processes around public policies including a diverse group of public, private and societal actors (Kickert et al., 1997; Ansell & Gash, 2008; Torfing & Triantafillou, 2011). These governance processes take place in webs of relationships between government, business and civil society actors, referred to as governance networks (cf. Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004). Crucial to the emergence and existence of governance networks are dependency relations between actors (Hanf & Scharpf, 1978). The resource dependencies around policy problems or policy programmes require actors to interact with one another and to create intensive and enduring interactions (Mandell, 2001;

Agranoff & McGuire, 2003). At the same time, however, actors have different perceptions of the problem and will choose their own specific strategies, which makes interactions unpredictable and complex (Kickert et al., 1997; McGuire & Agranoff, 2011). Governance processes are thus time-consuming and require the dedication of actors as well as active management (Klijn et al., 2010b; McGuire & Agranoff, 2011).

#### *Governance and news media*

The role of news media has been studied mainly in relation to political processes and less so in relation to decision-making processes around policies (Wolfe, Jones & Baumgartner, 2013). Nevertheless, the main mechanisms described in literature about media and political processes are also relevant in the context of governance. The relation between media and governance processes can be studied in terms of three different functions of media:

- media as *democratic fora*: News media form important fora where actors publicly discuss issues and where actors obtain their democratic information (Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Schudson, 1998, 2008; Graber, 2004; Aalberg & Curran, 2012a);
- media as *agenda setters*: News media determine to a certain extent what issues are put on the agenda of decision-makers and how the issues are handled (Cobb & Elder, 1983; Baumgartner & Jones, 2009);
- Media as *instruments for strategic communication*: News media provide important platforms for actors to reach a wider audience (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Davis, 2002; Cook, 2005; Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011).

#### *Implications of mediatisation*

In the literature on mediatisation it has been argued that media do not neutrally transmit information but, like all institutions, shape and select information in certain ways (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Cook, 2005; Parkinson, 2006). The process of news-making led by the media's rules, aims, production routines and constraints is known as media logic (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Brants & Van Praag, 2006; Hjarvard, 2008; Strömbäck & Esser, 2009). Media logic includes aspects such as media's tendency to select negative issues over positive ones and to dramatise and sensationalise issues in the news. Many scholars describe how the institutional rules of media penetrate into the political sphere, as politicians follow an electoral logic, strive for media attention, and so adapt their behaviour to characteristics of news media (cf. Landerer, 2013). Only a few publications have described or empirically explored aspects of the mediatisation of governance processes (as Spörer-Wagner & Marcinkowski,

2010; Voltmer & Koch-Baumgarten, 2010; Kunelius & Reunanen, 2012; Schillemans, 2012; Esser & Matthes, 2013). In this overview, we combine these recent studies on mediatisation with previous research on the relations between media and governance processes to obtain a full overview of the relevant mechanisms of mediatisation in governance processes.

We continue this article with a systematic discussion of the literature about the three roles of media in governance (section 2). Subsequently, implications of mediatisation for the roles of media in governance processes are described (section 3). Next, we identify important tensions between media logic and the logic of governance processes (section 4). We conclude our article with a framework in which different mechanisms of mediatisation in the context of governance processes are recognised (section 5).

## **3.2 ROLES OF MEDIA IN GOVERNANCE PROCESSES**

Relations between media and governance can be studied through the lens of various theoretical approaches and concepts. In the introduction we stated that the different branches of literature identify three theoretical functions of the media. We first discuss these three functions (section 3.2.1-3.2.3), examining some of the classic literature on media. Subsequently, we contrast the three perspectives with each other and show they are related (section 3.2.4.).

### **3.2.1 News media as democratic fora**

Democracy requires that citizens and (societal) groups interact and discuss policy problems and political choices. This has been emphasised in most democratic theories, but especially in the deliberative democratic theories that have dominated democratic theory building for the last two decennia (Dryzek, 2000; Held, 2006). News media offer platforms for democratic discussion, making media a common carrier of perspectives of various groups in society (Schudson, 2008: 12). This democratic fora function also means that they provide a window to the vast world beyond our direct experience (McCombs, 2004, 3).

News media *provide information* on relevant political and societal processes so that citizens (and stakeholders) are able to make informed political choices and to 'check' authorities on their performance (Hulteng & Nelson, 1983; Schudson, 1998; Graber, 2004; Aalberg & Curran, 2012a). News media can alert citizens and other stakeholders to the corrupt practices or other sorts of misbehaviour on the part of public authorities and others, which is often referred to as the watchdog function (see Schultz, 1998).



In order to perform this function, news media *select and frame* important, relevant societal and political issues and give them meaning. Frames are interpretation schemes that reduce the complexity of information. In the words of Entman (1993: 52) “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation”.

Through their selection and framing, news media *affect views of the public* on specific issues (Gerbner, 1998; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Entman, 1993; McCombs, 2004; Scheufele & Tewsbury, 2007). The most prominent issues in the news become the most prominent concerns of the public (McCombs, 2004). Furthermore, the news guides how people think about governance processes; this is referred to as ‘cultivation effect’ in early research by Gerbner (1998) or ‘priming effect’ in studies by Iyengar and Kinder (1987) and Iyengar and Simon (1993). Scheufele (2000: 300) explains the priming model as follows: “Mass media, Iyengar and Kinder (1987) argued, affect ‘the standards by which governments, policies and candidates for public office are judged’ (p. 63). Political issues that are most salient or accessible in a person’s memory will most strongly influence perceptions of political actors and figures.” Both priming and framing studies – although based on different psychological foundations (Scheufele & Tewsbury, 2007) – argue that news affects public opinion.

Effects of news reports on the public should not be seen as clear causal relations, however. “The public sphere does not begin and end when media content reaches an audience; this is but one step in larger communication and cultural chains that include how the media output is received, made sense of and utilized by citizens” (Dahlgren, 2006: 274). Moreover, citizens do not read all available news; they will survey “the political scene carefully enough to detect major political threats to themselves or their communities” (Graber, 2004: 562; see also Zaller, 2003; Schudson, 1998). Unless unclear causal relations between the selection and framing of policy issues and the effects on public opinion, media set the stage for the definition of problems and solutions in governance processes.

### 3.2.2 The agenda setting function

Agenda forming processes are characterised by continuous *struggles between various actors* (and their strategies) to (re)formulate policy issues. As such they are typical governance processes affected by media attention. The aim of actors is not only to get the issue on the political agenda but also to shape its formulation in a certain way (see Dery, 1984; Kingdon, 1984). As different actors emphasise

different aspects of an issue, a policy issue is rarely treated systematically in the political system (see Baumgartner & Jones, 2009). By *increasing news media's attention for certain issues and certain problem formulations* the issues can be added to the political agenda, thereby influencing the decision-making processes (see Cobb & Elder, 1983; Baumgartner & Jones, 2009; Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). Baumgartner and Jones envisage the process of agenda building as a complex system of actors, institutions and issues that can be in a relatively stable position, but which can suddenly be disrupted by changes in issue formulation and actor participation: "... a change in issue definition can lead to destabilisation and rapid change away from the old point of stability. This happens when issues are redefined to bring in new participants. Similarly a change of institutional rules of standing or of jurisdiction can rupture an old equilibrium" (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009: 16). While Baumgartner and Jones assume media attention to lead to *positive feedback and change*, Wolfe (2012) argues that media coverage also contributes to – temporary – negative feedback and stability. She empirically shows that news media coverage is related to decelerating effects. Most likely due to the input of new information and requests for changes in news reports, news coverage *slows down the speed of decision-making processes around policies* (Wolfe, 2012). The complex interactions between issues, actors' strategies and internal and external events make exact outcomes of agenda setting processes unpredictable.

Moreover, researchers disagree on whether media attention has real effects on the political *and* policy agenda, or whether the outcomes are largely symbolic politics. In their overview article on agenda-setting research, Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006) show that half of the studies find strong effects, whereas the other half only finds limited effects. The effects on, for instance, presidential speeches or other events where rhetoric is employed might be significant, but less effects can be found in the actual political decision-making processes around policies. The actual agenda-setting effects might depend on factors such as the type of policy issue (obtrusive issues or not, the ownership of the issue etc.) and the political context (election time or not, political configuration like the type of government-opposition game etc.) (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006).

Ultimately, it is how actors react to news reports and whether they change their strategies in the decision-making process that is decisive. And although unpredictable in their exact effects, news reports can significantly influence the context in which actors bargain and make decisions (Cook, 2005).

### 3.2.3 News media as strategic communication instruments

Media also function as instruments for actors: different actors within governance processes use media as strategic communication instruments. These actors aim to influence the selection and framing processes of media. They *need media to communicate messages to the larger public*; to legitimise decisions, gain a positive public image or to increase their power position in governance processes (Hurrelman et al., 2009). This function is extensively explored in literature about public and political communication, public relations and related literature about political marketing and branding.

Through the media, actors aim to *build relations with stakeholders and the larger public*. Building a relation with stakeholders can be done in several ways, but the media are primarily used to communicate information, images and brands. A brand is “a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of these, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors.”(Kotler, Asplund, et al., 1999: 571). Brands not only communicate images and meaning to a possible audience but also *simplify* choices (voters do not have the read the complete programme of political parties, for instance) (see Needham, 2006: 179). Brands are strong images that make use of visualisations and emotional associations (see Kotler, Asplund et al., 1999; Arvidsson, 2006; Hankinson, 2004; Malony, 2002; Leesh Marshment, 2009). A famous example of branding in a policy context is Blair’s ‘Third way’. This brand enabled Blair to distinguish his policies from old Labour policies (state oriented), and conservative policies (market oriented).

To use media as a strategic instrument, *actors provide journalists with information subsidies*: “Faced with time constraints, and the need to produce stories that will win publication, journalists will attend to, and make use of, subsidised information that is of a type and form that will achieve that goal. By reducing the costs faced by journalists in satisfying their organisational requirements, the subsidy giver increases the probability that the subsidized information will be used” (Gandy, 1982: 62). Press releases, press conferences, pre-arranged interviews and press tours are examples of information subsidies that are nowadays fully integrated into the process of news production (Davis, 2002). Besides that, you can also think of organised protests, web pages or news leaking.

Several authors observe that there is an increase in the volume of information subsidies aimed at the media, whereas at the same time the number of journalists is declining (see Davis, 2007; Prenger et al., 2011; Esser, 2013). It is therefore claimed that PR information subsidies increasingly shape the news (Davis, 2002; Cook, 2005; Lewis, Williams & Franklin, 2008; Prenger et

al., 2011). Other scholars disagree, however, claiming instead that information subsidies only have limited impact on the political agenda (Tedesco, 2011; see also Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006 for an overview). Also with respect to this role of media in governance, causal lines are thus not easy to draw. The effectiveness of information subsidies varies across contexts and is dependent on factors like the personality of the politician, the approval rating, and relationships with the press (Strömbäck & Kiouisis, 2011).

### 3.2.4 Comparing the three roles

Table 3.1 summarises the main differences between the three broad theoretical functions of media. The three roles of media can be distinguished analytically, but the roles interact and are mutually reinforcing in practice. The functions of media in governance processes are in constant interaction with each other. Whereas news media select and frame issues (which affects public opinion), news media are at the same time steered and fed by actors that aim to use news

**Table 3.1** Three roles of media in governance processes

	News media as democratic fora	News media as agenda setters	News media as strategic communication instruments
<i>Main origin</i>	Democratic theory and political communication	Political science literature about agenda setting	Political communication, public relation literature (and political marketing, and branding)
<i>Focal point</i>	Environment (the democratic forum)	Issue (and decision-making process)	Organisation
<i>Focus</i>	Information and debate for deliberative processes	Affecting agendas of decision-makers, resulting in changes in the content and process of decision-making	Communicating messages using media
<i>Mechanisms</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- media select and frame governance issues in news reports</li> <li>- media reports affect public opinion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- struggles between various actors to increase media attention for certain problem formulations</li> <li>- media add issues to the political agenda leading to changes or postponement</li> <li>- media reports affect the context in which actors negotiate and make decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- relations with an audience are built through the media</li> <li>- images and brands simplify information</li> <li>- actors feed media with information subsidies and brands with the aim of shaping the news</li> </ul>

media as a strategic communication instrument. This interaction between media selecting from various information subsidies and framing the information ultimately shapes the context in which actors bargain and decide. The process of agenda setting might in turn lead to a more strategic handling of the media and/or news reports about the process of policy making and the concomitant struggles.

In the next sections we will see how the three functions are influenced by media logic and processes of mediatisation.

### 3.3 THE PERSPECTIVE OF MEDIATISATION

In the expanding literature on mediatisation it is argued that societies are increasingly submitted to or becoming dependent on the media and their logic (e.g. Hjarvard, 2008: 113; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Reunanen et al., 2010; Strömbäck & Esser, 2009). The perspective of mediatisation thus not only focuses on the importance and impact of media in society – as does the literature discussed in the previous section – but also on the guiding logic behind news reporting.

#### 3.3.1 Rules of media logic

Media form a separate institution with their own rules and *modus operandi* (Cook, 2005; Hjarvard, 2008; Strömbäck & Esser, 2014). This means that we can see media logic as an institutional practice; that is, as a set of rules regulating actors' behaviour (see Scott, 1995; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004; Cook, 2005; Asp, 2014). Media logic provides a set of rules for journalists and others involved in media that enables sensible actions and constrains other actions. By constantly enacting these rules, media logic as an institutional practice is confirmed but also changed over time (Giddens, 1984). Media logic must therefore not be seen as static (Cook, 2005).

An extensive set of rules make up the institutional practice of media logic; various elements are listed in the literature (see Altheide & Snow, 1979; Bennett, 2009; Landerer, 2013; Asp, 2014). Strömbäck and Esser (2014: 17-18) identify three distinctive dimensions that can be used to categorise the various rules and norms of media logic:

1. *Professionalism* (see also Bennett, 2009; Asp, 2014): Journalistic norms and values require journalists to be independent, to maintain standards of newsworthiness in news selection, and to serve the public interest. Scholars stress that rules about objectivity and the separation of facts and figures gradually emerged in the beginning of the 20th century (see Cook, 2005).

2. *Commercialism*: Because of their commercial interests, the media seek to maximise their appeal to target groups that are relevant to advertisers. Rules inspired by commercialism are about running a business, and they have implications for news production, news selection and news presentation. News has to be attractive for an audience, which often results in biases of dramatisation, negativity, focus on authorities, and human interest in the news (see Patterson, 2000; Bennett, 2009). The news production process is also influenced by the need to make efficient use of scarce resources. Most journalists are asked to create several news reports a day, which requires them to do so efficiently, and that includes using information subsidies.
3. *Media technology*: The format criteria of each communication platform set the contours of news presentation. Media technology shapes the production process, the content and the way messages have to be communicated (in an 8 o'clock news format for instance; in images, sound and/or text) (Hjarvard, 2008; Bennett, 2009)

As in all institutions, the rules and norms of the media generally do not form a naturally coherent and unambiguous set. Clear tensions exist between the rules of professionalism and those of commercialism. Indeed, the main concerns of scholars that address the mediatization of democratic information is this tension between professional norms of journalism and the commercial interests of news organisations. "The degree of mediatization may be measured according to how much the respective field's autonomous pole has weakened; eventually, some fields will lose their autonomy entirely. Media, too, have autonomous and heteronomous poles, where the autonomous pole is the site of aspects like professionalized journalism and codes of ethics, and the heteronomous pole is the site of, say, the influence exerted by the advertising market. There is a tension between the poles in the media; in news media, for example, journalistic criteria of news value and the ideals of good journalism often compete with the demands of the need to sell copies, the influence exerted by news sources, and so forth" (Hjarvard, 2008: 126). Rules of commercialism tend to push journalists to a more sensational framing of the news, while journalists' professionalism tends to stimulate giving the facts and to separate news from opinion. Furthermore, growing competition and economic considerations can lead to a decline in journalistic products in a certain area, so that journalists are not able to act as a watchdog anymore; that is, commercial interests can overrule professional standards (McChesney, 1999; Patterson, 2000). Various authors emphasise that commercialism has become a stronger element of the media logic in the past decades and can have negative consequences for democratic processes (e.g. Patterson, 2000; Fischer, 2003; Bennett, 2009).

The concerns about commercialism and its consequences are the most significant motives behind studies on mediatisation (Landerer, 2013). Mediatisation studies generally focus on the consequences of the commercial news media logic's interference in the logics of other societal institutions. Such as studies on the mediatisation of politics which report to what extent and how the adaptation to the *commercial news media logic* is changing politics (e.g. Strömbäck & Esser, 2014; Landerer, 2013; Hjarvard, 2008; Kepplinger, 2002; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). Recently, there has been a growing interest in the consequences of the news media logic with regard to decision-making processes in governance.

### 3.3.2 The implications of mediatisation for governance processes

Above we discussed three roles of the media in relation to governance processes. In this section the implications of the thesis of mediatisation for these roles will be described. The media logic, especially due to a dominating commercial dimension, has an impact on the described relations between media and governance. Media logic affects the information provided in the deliberative process and thereby the framing and priming effects. Moreover, media logic moderates the relations between media and the agenda of decision-makers and the use of media as instruments for strategic political communication. As Lundby (2009a: 9) argues: "The concept of mediatization may help see 'old' questions in communication studies and media sociology in new and more striking and relevant ways". The concept of mediatisation builds on the described theoretical traditions, acknowledging the functions of media in political and policy processes, and it adds the observation that media's functions are shaped by media logic. Mediatisation thus both includes and transcends media effects (Schulz, 2004: 90).

On the basis of the recent literature on mediatisation and its impact, the consequences of the commercial news media logic for the roles of media in governance processes will be discussed.

#### *Mediatised democratic fora*

Hjarvard (2008) argues that one of the principal consequences of the mediatisation of society is that we have a shared experiential world that is regulated by media logic (see also Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). Media select and frame governance issues and processes according to a commercial media logic, resulting in a focus on authorities, personalisation, dramatisation and negativity (toward authorities) in news reports about public affairs. Many scholars therefore express severe criticism regarding the mediatisation of information. Commercial

interests are claimed to be dumbing down political reporting (Habermas, 1989; Bennett, 2009). More entertainment is provided in the content and form of news. The increase in such 'soft' news and in critical journalism are said to shrink the news audience and weaken democracy (Patterson, 2000).

On the other hand, scholars like Graber (2004: 551) accuse the critics of clinging to a non-realistic ideal of news media that cover all politically important issues and present this in the form of high-quality news stories to their news-hungry public. For many audiences political news is not so interesting (Aalberg & Curran, 2012b) or too complicated. Soft news has more potential to reach disinterested audiences. Moreover, soft news or infotainment can also provide democratically relevant information (Aalberg & Curran, 2012b).

#### *Mediatized agenda setting*

From the perspective of mediatization, the role of setting the agendas of decision-makers is restricted by media logic. Only a limited number of issues will be selected by media and framed, due to media biases such as personalisation, dramatisation and the authority-disorder bias. Baumgartner and Jones have argued that the agenda-setting role of the media is biased by the media's fascination with conflict and by the competition between media (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009: 104). At the same time, politicians are even more willing to get involved in these issues in the news. Fischer (2003: 58) states in his book *Reframing public politics*: "Politicians and the media (...) have turned contemporary politics into a political spectacle that is experienced more like a stage drama rather than reality itself." This echoes Edelman's (1977) observations, almost forty years ago, in his book *Words that succeed and policies that fail*. Also governance processes are claimed to be mediatized (Hajer, 2009). Mediatization "entices politicians to show that they matter, and the temptation is to perform authority in precisely the way that fits the preferred media format", although this clashes with collaborative and collective governance processes (Hajer, 2009: 177). The critical notes are clear: politicians, the agenda of decision-makers and (symbolic) interventions are led too strongly by biased media coverage, rather than by thorough analyses and deliberations with involved stakeholders.

#### *Adoption of media logic in strategic communication*

The main driver of mediatization is the symbiosis of the commercially-oriented media landscape and the adoption of the media logic by other institutions and organisations and society (Landerer, 2014). While different actors, collectives and institutions have become dependent on mass media in their central functions, their actions are continuously shaped by the media logic (Mazzoleni & Schulz,



1999; Thorbjørnsrud et al., 2014; Marcinkowski, 2014). Hence, over the last decades the number of communication professionals working for governmental organisations, private companies and interest groups has risen spectacularly (Davis, 2002; Cook, 2005; Neijens & Smit, 2006; Lewis et al., 2008; Prenger et al., 2011). This has gone hand-in-hand with the growing use of marketing tools and brands in political and public communication and the presentation of policy plans (see Leesh-Marsment, 2009; Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011; Eshuis & Klijn, 2012). The communication professionals must cope with media logic in their pursuit of as much positive publicity as possible, as well as in their attempt to protect their organisations against negative or undesirable publicity (McNair, 2003). Many scholars therefore claim that socially relevant information is already reduced to mediagenic information by communication professionals, in their attempt to make it fit for the (commercial) news media logic (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Davis, 2002). It should be noted, however, that much of the research on media communication that describes

**Table 3.2** Concerns in mediatisation literature, differentiated according to the three roles of media in relation to governance.

<i>Functions of media</i>	<i>News media as democratic fora</i>	<i>News media as political agenda setters</i>	<i>Media as strategic communication instruments</i>
General mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- media select and frame (policy) issues in news reports</li> <li>- news reports affect views of the public</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- various actors struggle to increase media attention for certain problem formulations</li> <li>- media set the issues on the agenda of decision-makers, leading to changes or decelerating effects</li> <li>- media reports affect the context in which actors negotiate and make decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- building relations with an audience through the media</li> <li>- actors feed media with information subsidies and brands in order to shape the news</li> </ul>
<i>Concerns within mediatisation literature</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- media select and frame (policy) issues in news reports according to their logic</li> <li>- media biases are dumbing down democratic information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- only issues that fit media logic are selected by media and framed accordingly</li> <li>- because politicians need media performances, they are quick to react to news reports</li> <li>- quick reactions can undermine deliberate policy decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adoption of media logic in functioning of social institutions, particularly in their communication</li> <li>- socially relevant information is reduced to mediagenic information</li> </ul>

the adaptation to media logic in political processes is performed in the context of highly visible actors such as PMs, political candidates in elections or presidents (as Esbaugh-Soha, 2011). Only a few other actors in policy processes have such public visibility.

Table 3.2 summarises the concerns in mediatisation literature, differentiated according to the three different roles of media in governance processes.

### **3.4 MEDIATISATION: TENSIONS BETWEEN MEDIA LOGIC AND LOGIC OF GOVERNANCE**

We conclude this overview with an examination of the tensions that occur when media and their logic interfere in governance processes. Results of interferences can be changes in the process – that is, in interactions between the actors – or in the content, that is in policy decisions and/or discussions about the policy issue. In the introduction we argued that governance processes are complex and require the dedication of the various actors, as well as active management. Leaders in governance networks aim to construct policy solutions that are attractive to the various actors involved. Moreover, flexibility in handling the goals and content proposals is needed to manoeuvre through the process and to create the essential support (see Agranoff & McGuire, 2003; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004). Last but not least, governance processes require a commitment to the long process and skills to create trust relations between actors. Actors must be willing to exchange information and cooperate over a long period of time. When media interfere in governance processes, actors need to deal with news media that tend to zoom in on drama and conflict, and on the personal gains or failures of the authorities involved. This may lead to tensions and to actors changing their strategies, and subsequently to changes in the content of decisions and the interaction processes.

Some pioneering scholars have examined the effects of mediatisation on governance trajectories. On the basis of their work we are able to outline some preliminary answers to questions about the impact of mediatisation on governance as well as to formulate directions for future research. Although effects of mediatisation can be both functional and dysfunctional (see also Schrott & Spranger, 2007), scholars have focused more on the negative effects.

#### **3.4.1 Content**

Media biases like personalisation and dramatisation are claimed to shape the information that media provide about the complex reality of governance processes (Brants & Neijens, 1998, Patterson, 2000; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000;

Brants & Van Praag, 2006; Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2006; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2007; Bennett, 2009). Media create clear story lines that organise the content, which are nice to read or view and easy to understand. Hence, political decision-making is often framed as a conflict with winners and losers, while the policy issue itself can easily be looked at from a human interest perspective and/or criticised as a policy failure.

The reality in day-to-day decision-making processes in governance is much more complex, however, with a wide range of policy options deliberately considered by the public, private and societal actors involved. Moreover, policy plans are constantly changing during the process due to cross-frame reflection which is needed to achieve integrative and innovative policy solutions (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004).

Hence, clashes between news media logic and the logic of governance can be expected. Not only do media reports downplay the complexity of policy issues, but they also affect the range of policy options that can be considered. After the media reports about risks and policy failures, the range of policy solutions which can still be publicly legitimised becomes limited for decision-makers (Veltmer & Koch-Baumgarten, 2010). In addition, discussions framed in terms of winners and losers are difficult to reconcile with a deliberate governance process where integrative policy solutions are developed. In such a mediatised context, actors will avoid making unpopular decisions, fearing unfavourable media coverage (Kepplinger, 2007: 14). Davis (2007) refers to this as the anticipatory news media effect. Also Ihlen and Thorbjørnsrud (2014) report that political realities shaped by negative, dramatised or human interest news reports can substantively change policy decisions. This could also imply positive democratisation effects, such as that media attention opens up governance processes for less well-represented groups (citizens groups etc.) (Korthagen & Van Meerkerk, 2014).

In public communication, tensions between news media logic and governance values exist as well. As Cook (2005: 91) describes: “while officials have an easier time entering the public sphere, they cannot get their message across in an unfiltered way. The production values of news direct them – and us – toward particular political values and politics: not so much pushing politics either consistently left or right as toward officialdom and toward standard of good stories that do not make for equally good political outcomes”. Among both politicians and public managers, there is a growing awareness that media are or can be active actors in governance processes and therefore need to be addressed (see Klijn et al., 2014). Actors will thus adapt their strategic communication to the needs of the media. This need to profile oneself in the media creates tensions, as there is much more ambiguity about the policy issue than fits in a news report.

Communication in the media about the content of the governance process can therefore be risky, as actor perspectives are diverse and policy options can change over time.

### 3.4.2 Process

The tension between media logic and that of governance processes can also impact the process. Sporer-Wagner and Marcinkowski (2010: 9-10) claim that “the rationales of media publicity and political negotiation are incompatible: The media call for transparency in political processes and show specific interest in individuals, conflicts and negative outcomes. Negotiations, on the other hand, require an atmosphere of privacy which allows for compromises, communicated to the public as collective decisions without indicating any winner or loser.” The privacy required for the collective and complex decision-making process clashes with a news media lens that zooms in on individual actions, emotions and failures.

Other effects on the process result from the contradiction between media’s fascination with conflicts and the need for trust relations in governance processes. Trust building is important in networks because many unexpected events can happen; trust is the essential glue that holds the network together in difficult times (Provan et al., 2009; Klijn et al., 2010a). News media will tend to emphasise and fuel the conflicts and competition between actors, and can thus pose a risk to trust relations and put collaborative relations under pressure (Sporer-Wagner & Marcinkowski, 2010; Korthagen & Klijn, 2014).

Furthermore, in news reports the short term is important: there is pressure on the individual actors to show quick results. This is problematic because in a networked world, actors must deal with complex problems for which it is crucial that actors are committed in the long term and are willing to compromise (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004). This is not an interesting and appealing story to tell in the news media, however. Negotiating processes under the media spotlight are therefore complicated by actors that position themselves and their values more decisively (Sporer-Wagner & Marcinkowski, 2010; Esser & Matthes, 2013). Politicians in particular want to be visible in such mediated processes. This motivates them to perform symbolic interventions, such as asking more official questions about a policy issue and by arranging media performances (Landerer, 2014; Melenhorst, 2013). In general, actors in decision-making processes want to react to the media’s pressure for quick results (Sporer-Wagner & Marcinkowski, 2010), and at the same time they are less willing to compromise and make back-stage deals (Votmer & Koch-Baumgarten, 2010). There is thus a clear tension

between long-term collaborative negotiations versus the short-term visibility and score of separate actors.

The tension stems from the desire to have a good public image and to control news reporting to get something done, 'to govern with the news' (Cook, 2005). This requires actors to communicate strong, often controversial statements that will be noticed in the media landscape (Hjarvard, 2008) and to build an authoritative image (Hajer, 2009), which stimulates opportunistic behaviour and go-it-alone strategies. The audiences, and especially the media, want a leader who is responsible for solving the problem and takes ownership of the process; this clashes with the need for a connective leader who connects various actors and communicates on behalf of a wide coalition. In a mediatised political reality, a (political) leader needs to claim success and to criticise the failures of others, whereas in network governance processes success has many fathers, while everyone has had to compromise as well.

### 3.5 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The relevance of news media in relation to governance processes is increasingly acknowledged by scholars (e.g. Cook, 2005; Hajer, 2009; Bekkers & Moody, 2015). This opens up a new research area, with a wide range of questions. The aim of this article has been to provide a theoretical overview of the literature about relations between media, mediatisation and governance. It concludes with a conceptual framework that identifies key mechanism and interesting (research) questions examining the impact of mediatisation on governance processes.

We first pointed out that media can have different functions in relation to governance processes:

- News media can be democratic fora in which information about the policy issue is disseminated and deliberated.
- News media affect decision-making processes by political agenda setting and their impact on the context in which actors negotiate and decide.
- News media can be used as a strategic communication instrument by different actors involved in the governance process.

Secondly, we discussed that media fulfil these functions through an institutional logic. Media as an institution are characterised by a set of rules through which they function. Within this set of rules, commercial interests seem to dominate: at the end of the day, news has to sell. News is therefore efficiently produced (for instance with the help of information subsidies and images and brands) and has information biases such as dramatisation, negativity and human interest. In governance processes, there is an increasing need and even personnel

deployment to address the media and their logic. These developments in media and their effects on other societal institutions are referred to as mediatisation. Studies on the relationship between news media and governance should take account of mediatisation, given the fundamental effect of the news media logic and the adoption of news media logic by actors on this relationship. To that end we have described a number of potential and actual effects of mediatisation on the content and processes of governance, which are summarised in Table 3.3.

We emphasise however that not every governance trajectory will be mediated to the same degree. The degree of mediatisation varies among issues and among policy rounds. In fact, some governance processes will not be covered in the media at all (Sporer-Wagner & Marcinkowski, 2010). The degree of mediatisation and the sorts of effects may moreover vary among different actors and their power position. While the powerful actors will use media as one power resource in addition to other resources, actors with less positional resources are

**Table 3.3** Effects of mediatisation on governance in terms of content and process.

	Mediatised democratic fora	Mediatised agenda setting	Adoption of media logic in strategic communication
<b>Content (the policy issue at stake and substantive decisions)</b>	News media biases such as dramatisation, personalisation and the authority-disorder bias downplay complex policy issues; ignoring the real variation in actors' perspectives, and not really allowing for policy issues and goals to change.	Governance processes need the possibility of collective learning and reframing while media and their logic depict the discussion as a debate between winners and losers and limit the range of policy options that can be publicly legitimised.	There is much more ambiguity about policy issues in governance than fits in news reports. Communication in media about the content of the governance process can therefore be risky, since actor perspectives vary and policy options change over time.
<b>Process (the interactions between actors)</b>	Deliberative governance processes need internal transparency, exchange of argumentation and a 'safe' environment to compromise and learn while media and their logic push the process toward more external transparency and emphasise conflict and controversies.	The focus on conflict and controversies and on the actions of individual actors contrast with the need for trust and collaboration. Such news reports might lead to more go-it-alone strategies by separate actors, which puts the collaborative trust-based relations under pressure.	Governance processes should be communicated on behalf of a wide coalition of actors, while media and their logic pushes toward communication by the individual actors. This is an incentive for actors to profile themselves with their own successes in contrast to the failures of others.

more dependent on media (Kunelius & Reunanen, 2012). Finally, mediatisation effects are moderated by the complex interaction between media logic and the specific logic of institutions involved in the governance process, such as the levels of formalisation, transparency, the binding character of decisions, the exclusion and inclusion of actors, and the frequency of meeting (see Schrott & Spranger, 2007). These interactions could be addressed in future research on mediatisation in the context of governance processes.

# I Mediatised democratic fora

The first research question, about the function of media as democratic fora, will be addressed most extensively in upcoming **Chapter 4**. This chapter examines the extent to which media biases can be found in news reports on governance processes and how they affect the range of different stakeholder voices.

Content analyses of news reports (N = 566) on five water management policies in the Netherlands showed that in a large majority of the news reports, one or more information biases can be found. About two-thirds of the news reports are found to be dramatised, by zooming in on conflict. In addition, about half of the news reports was found to be negative about the policy. Further, about half of the reports demanded that authorities take action (authority-disorder bias). The personalised, human interest bias only appeared in approximately a quarter of the news reports.

When analysing key subjects of the news reports, officials are found to be the key subject in somewhat more than half of the news reports (most prominently ministers, aldermen, ‘the municipality’, and members of the municipal councils). This is less coverage for actors in power than expected, when looking for ‘official dominance’. Even more, the official dominance thesis chiefly describes ruling political authorities as the prevailing actors in news reporting. Distinguishing the ruling political authorities (such as aldermen) from non-ruling politicians (such as municipal council members) and administrative governmental actors (such as actors within the project organisation) even diminishes the percentage of media reports in which ruling political authorities are key subject to one-third. By contrast, non-official actors are found to be the key subject in somewhat less than half of the news reports (most prominently citizens (in associations), environ-



mental organisations, and farmers). These findings to some extent support previous research that have described political authoritativeness as being an important news value (e.g. Bennett, 1996; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Hopmann et al., 2011; Shehata, 2010). However, the thesis that officials *dominate* news reporting over other news sources (as Gans, 1979; Sigal, 1973; Tresch, 2009) is not backed up by the findings. The fact that in governance contexts authorities collaborate with societal and private organization could partly explain this result.

But additional explanation for the less than expected coverage for official actors in the news is provided by the media logic, particularly by the finding that the information biases significantly relate to unofficial and non-governing actors. Tests for relations between the information biases and groups of actors were performed using non-parametric ANOVA analyses (Kruskal-Wallis tests). These tests demonstrated that most information biases are more present when unofficial actors or non-governing officials are the key subject. Reports about unofficial actors show significantly more dramatisation, more personalisation and more negativity in comparison to reports about governing officials. Similarly, reports about non-ruling

politicians show significantly more dramatisation, more negativity and more authority-disorder bias. It thus appears that storylines involving unofficial actors and non-ruling politicians more easily fit media logic criteria.

To conclude: information biases in the news reports about the water management policies can be normatively criticised for simplifying or sensationalising the information around the policy processes, in line with the critical examinations by Patterson (2000) and Bennett (2009). On the other hand, information biases can be argued to be a positive sign of journalistic independence (from actors in power) and a democratisation of the media debate, as suggested by Schudson (2008) and Shehata (2010). The results of this study at any rate show that the information biases contribute to checks and balances in media debates, as they are about the attractiveness of covering non-authoritative news sources.

This might contribute to checks and balances in the actual policy process as well, as mediatised reality can affect actual governance processes. Such effects are discussed when addressing the second research question, about the role of media as political agenda setters (see Chapters 5 and 6).



# Chapter 4

## Who gets on the news? The relation between media biases and different actors in news reporting on complex policy processes

This article has been published as Korthagen, I.A. (2013). Who gets on the news? The relation between media biases and different actors in news reporting on complex policy processes. *Public Management Review*, published online: 02 Sep 2013,

[http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14719037.2013.822529?src=recsys#.Vdf8vGd\\_veA](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14719037.2013.822529?src=recsys#.Vdf8vGd_veA)



## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Much decision making takes place in governance networks, with a variety of official and unofficial actors involved in the policy-making processes (Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004; Klijn, 2008b). In these governance networks, there is much uncertainty and no consensus with regard to the formulation of policy problems and solutions (Hisschemöller and Hoppe, 1995; Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004; Rittel and Webber, 1973). Actors involved in the policy process have dissimilar interests; as a result, there are many perspectives on both problems and solutions. Because these policy issues are contested, they will often be publicly discussed in the media (Voltmer and Koch-Baumgarten, 2010). In public administration, much attention is paid to complex policy processes, but scarcely any to the construction of those processes in news reports.

News reporting is important for all actors in a governance network. Having a voice in the media is an important political strategy to gain power and legitimacy in policy processes (Tresch, 2009). Groups of actors without authoritative power resources in the decision-making process need media to gain power (Cobb & Elder, 1983; Baumgartner & Jones, 2009; Sireau & Davis, 2007; Voltmer & Koch-Baumgarten, 2010; Kunelius & Reunanen, 2012). News coverage of a citizen group's statements, for instance, may change the targets and efforts of decision-makers who use the news as a surrogate for public opinion (Entman, 2007). But officials also attempt to reinforce their own position by publicity, especially if they fail to realise their goals by the traditional means of participation and negotiation in the policy process (Tresch, 2009; Spörer-Wagner and Marcinkowski, 2010). Moreover, governing officials need the media to legitimate their policy plans and decisions (Hurrelman et al., 2009). Media coverage of policy processes in governance networks is therefore an important study object, deserving more attention in public administration research. This is particularly true in times of increasing mediatisation within present-day Western democracies, in which the media and their logic have become more and more important (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Hjarvard, 2008; Hajer, 2009; Strömbäck & Esser, 2009; Reunanen et al., 2010).

Media logic refers to 'the process through which the media present and transmit information' (Altheide & Snow, 1979: 10). The media are not neutral transmitters of information. The process of news-making depends to a great extent on the news value that journalists ascribe to an event or viewpoint, and organisational pressures on journalists such as deadlines and economic goals. This leads to certain patterns in news reporting. Research in the field of (political) communication has identified two media bias trends: firstly, the trend of *official dominance*, indicating that journalists rely heavily on official sources in

their news reporting; secondly, *information biases*, whereby news is increasingly negative (toward authorities), as well as dramatised, fragmented and personalised.

These aspects of media logic have an important influence on who will get access to the public and how those actors' public images are formed (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). To date, studies conducted on official dominance or on information biases mostly concern general trends in (political) news reports (Sigal, 1973; Gans, 1979; Shehata, 2010; Patterson, 2000) or election coverage (Tresch, 2009<sup>4</sup>; Hopmann et al., 2011; Brants & Neijens, 1998; Brants & Van Praag, 2006; Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2006).<sup>5</sup> In a more multifaceted setting of a complex policy process – where it is not all about the politicians, as in election periods, but various public, semi-public and private actors are involved – the results might be different.

In this article, we analyse ten years of news reporting on five comparable water management projects, representing cases of complex policy processes (Van Buuren et al., 2010). We are interested in how much media attention different groups of actors receive and how the identified media biases relate to this media attention.

We distinguish four groups of actors in our analysis. Firstly, there are governing officials: executive politicians such as ministers, provincial governors and aldermen. Secondly, there are non-governing officials, who are members of the lower house and from provincial and municipal councils. The third category, administrative officials, mostly represents the project organisation. Lastly, the unofficial actors' category mainly encompasses various citizen groups. These four groups of actors have different interests in gaining media attention, and they generally represent different perspectives on policies. Governing officials mainly strive to ensure that their policies attract positive attention, whereas unofficial actors and non-governing officials rather try to open up the policy process by publicly questioning these policies.

We start this article with a theoretical elaboration, mainly by zooming in on official dominance and information biases in news reports. In the second section, we discuss our data and methods. Thirdly, we present the results. Lastly, we discuss our conclusions.

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4. More precisely Tresch (2009) studies news reports in the context of two referenda: on a set of bilateral agreements with the EU and on a popular initiative "Yes to Europe."
  5. An important exception is Baumgartner and Jones (2009). They discuss the biases of negativity and conflict in their book on policy processes.

## 4.2 COMPLEX POLICY PROCESSES IN THE CONTEXT OF MEDIATISATION

Many policy problems can be characterised as ‘wicked’ (Rittel & Webber, 1973; Mason & Mitroff, 1981; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004). Wicked problems are ill-defined, and solutions to such problems rely on extensive negotiations between different actors. Planning problems are a good example of wicked problems, with implications for policy making. There is a broader participation of affected parties, directly and indirectly, in the policy process (Mason & Mitroff, 1981). All kinds of actors are part of the decision-making process, such as representatives of municipalities, provinces, private enterprises and interest groups. Horizontal relations between these actors replace hierarchical relations, resulting in governance networks (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004). Interdependencies between actors are predominant in these governance networks. No single actor has the final coercive power to fulfil his/her policy plans, because of these interdependencies (Sørensen & Torfing, 2005a).

In policy games, the actors with divergent interests, goals and perceptions pull and push to bring about problem formulations and policy measures (Koppenjan, 2007). Because little agreement exists between them with regard to the problem or the solution, negotiations among the actors will seldom lead to unanimous consensus. As Sørensen and Torfing (2005a: 203) argue: ‘deliberation takes place in a context of intense power struggles and the presence of disagreements, conflicts and social antagonism that means that political decisions will often be made on the basis of a “rough consensus” where grievances are unavoidable, but tolerable.’

Although no actor has the final coercive power in policy games, power differences do exist, due to differences in power resources such as knowledge, money or political position (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004; Koppenjan, 2007). The ability to anticipate and mobilize media attention is another power resource in policy games (Cobb & Elder, 1983; Baumgartner & Jones, 2009; Hajer, 2009; Tresch, 2009; Spörer-Wagner & Marcinkowski, 2010; Kunelius & Reunanen, 2012). As discussed in the introduction, with publicity for their viewpoint, actors can strengthen their position in negotiations in policy processes. This power resource has become increasingly important in the age of mediatisation (Hajer, 2009).

Competition over media access is, however, guided and restricted by media logic: the process of news-making led by the media’s aims, production routines and selection criteria (Tresch, 2009). This has led to certain trends in news reporting: official dominance and information biases in news reports. We further discuss these trends in the next two sections.

### 4.2.1 Official dominance: News is about the powerful

The more powerful position an actor holds, the more media attention he/she automatically receives. This is referred to as *the incumbency bonus* (Hopmann et al., 2011) or as *official dominance* (Shehata, 2010). Studies dating back as far as the 1970s – still frequently cited – had already concluded that the majority of the news reports are written about officials (Gans, 1979; Sigal, 1973). More recent studies also confirm that officials dominate the news (Tresch, 2009; Shehata, 2010).

Explanations for official dominance in the news mainly include professional journalistic norms and efficiency aims within media businesses (Bennett, 1996; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Cook, 2005; Bennett, 2009). Reliance on officials is partly due to the news value of officials' behaviours and viewpoints. The newsworthiness of actors' perspectives or actions is at least partially determined by the power and influence of those actors (Bennett, 1996; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Shehata, 2010; Hopmann et al., 2011). Actions of the powerful are newsworthy because what the powerful do affects the general public. Tresch (2009: 71) therefore argues that "formal power in the policy-making process therefore easily translates into discursive power in the media, which can further strengthen the political power of an actor and ultimately lead to a self-perpetuating cycle of political influence and media coverage".

Moreover, reliance on governing officials is rooted in journalistic norms of objectivity and in the political obligation to provide some degree of democratic accountability (Bennett, 1996). Officials are seen as providing 'factual,' authoritative and legitimate information.

In addition, governing officials are mostly very efficient news sources. Authorities increasingly invest in 'selling' their policies and managing their public relations (Cook, 2005; Eshuis & Klijn, 2012). Public relations practitioners make governmental information easily accessible to journalists (Gandy, 1982; Lieber & Golan 2011). In times of intensifying pressures on journalists due to the heavy competition in the news market, journalists are increasingly dependent on these 'information subsidies' supplied by official sources (Gandy, 1982). Consequently, many news reports arise in close collaboration between reporters and governing officials, and their media advisers.

Whereas officials are newsworthy because of their influential position, others, who lack habitual access to the media, have to rely on disruptive events (Shehata, 2010) or other news values (Parkinson, 2006) in order to become newsworthy. Hence, one way for other actors to get publicity for their viewpoint is to organise events such as protests (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Terkildsen et al., 1998). This fulfils their need to get media coverage, but it also fulfils the

media's need for news (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Besides this organisation of (pseudo) events and drama, using sound bites and personalising a story are other ways to attract media attention (Parkinson, 2006). The information biases in the news (Patterson, 2000; Bennett, 2009) can therefore be seen as a trend in news reporting that facilitates the relations between journalists and unofficial actors or non-governing officials.

### 4.2.2 The other side: Information biases

Wicked policy processes are either avoided by journalists or drastically reshaped to fit journalistic norms (Davis, 2007). Bennett (2009) describes four trends in current news reporting that, in his opinion, simplify complex governmental issues. He sees trends of personalisation, dramatisation, fragmentation and an authority-disorder bias, which he calls *information biases*. In addition, Patterson (2000) sees a bias toward negativity in the news. These five trends in the framing of news can also be found in other studies on media content.

The personalisation bias refers to the framing of stories in terms of human interest. It brings a human face or emotional angle to the presentation of an issue (Bennett, 2009; Patterson, 2000; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

The dramatisation bias concerns an emphasis on crisis and conflict in stories rather than on continuity and harmony (Patterson, 2000; Bennett, 2009). Journalists tend to describe the situation at hand in terms of conflicts, with winners and losers (Brants & Neijens, 1998; Brants & Van Praag, 2006; Hopmann et al., 2011; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2007).

The isolation of stories from one another and from their larger context is called the fragmentation bias (Bennett, 2009; Iyengar & McGrady, 2007; Patterson, 2000; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2007; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). In this 'episodic' framing, journalists describe issues in terms of specific events; they do not place them in their more general context (Iyengar & McGrady, 2007).

The news is furthermore preoccupied with order, as journalists question whether authorities are capable of establishing or restoring the order (Bennett, 2009; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). At the same time, the media's attitude toward authorities is shifting from a more favourable stance toward an attitude where the media are more suspicious of authorities (Bennett, 2009; Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2006). This bias is known as the authority-disorder bias.

Lastly, the tendency of the news to be more negative in general (Patterson, 2000) reflects a negativity bias.

These five information biases can be seen in two different ways. While factors of personification, negativity and a focus on drama and conflict are part of the classical news factor theory of Galtung and Ruge (1965), nowadays these news



factors give rise to much criticism regarding the quality of news; they are seen as *information biases*. Bennett (2009: 40) introduces the information biases in his book as follows: “In particular, four characteristics of news stand out that public information in the United States does not always advance the cause of democracy.” Many other prominent scholars also accuse journalists of making political news more spectacular and entertaining, while providing less substantive information (e.g. Patterson, 2000; Delli Carpini & Williams, 2001; Davis, 2007; Bennett, 2009). This is explained in the literature by competition for the attention of the news consumer and – again – efficiency aims (Bennett, 2009; Davis, 2007; Delli Carpini & Williams, 2001).

However, the information biases can be approached more positively as well. Shehata (2010: 127) claims that “framing politics as a game rather than focusing on issues, policy positions and ideologies is (...) a way for journalists to distance themselves from politicians and to impose their own ‘professional’ lens on politics.” Reporting on aspects of politics other than those promoted by politicians thus demonstrates journalistic independence. Schudson (2008) even argues that an unlovable press is essential for the functioning of democracy. The very characteristics of media logics that other scholars criticise – the pre-occupation with events, with conflicts, the cynicism – give journalists the opportunity to subvert established power in the deliberative process, Schudson (2008) claims. Conflicts and news dramas therefore do not only “downplay information on complex policy information and the workings of government institutions,” as Bennett (2009: 41) states. Zooming in on citizens potentially affected by the policies shows a different side of the policy story. In contrast to the official dominance thesis, information biases might indicate that a news story is more *independent* of governing officials. More conflict, negativity and human interest in a news story can thus also be a form of checks and balances.

### 4.2.3 Hypotheses

On the basis of the literature discussed, we can develop some – although merely explorative – hypotheses on the media coverage of the complex policy processes under study.

The *official dominance thesis* leads to the following two hypotheses:

*H1*: Officials will be more often the key subjects in a news report than unofficial actors.

*H2*: Governing officials will be more often the key subjects in a news report than non-governing officials.

The *information biases thesis* leads to another three hypotheses:

*H3:* The mean ranks on the information biases in news about governing officials and administrative officials differ significantly from the mean ranks of non-governing officials and unofficial actors.

*H4:* The personalisation bias, dramatisation bias, fragmentation bias, authority-disorder bias and negativity bias are more often present in news about unofficial actors than in news about governing officials.

*H5:* The personalisation bias, dramatisation bias, fragmentation bias, authority-disorder bias and negativity bias are more often present in news about non-governing officials than in news about governing officials.

The data and methods we used to test these hypotheses are described in the following section on methodology.

### 4.3 METHODOLOGY

We studied news reports on five complex water management cases in the Netherlands over a ten-year period. Initiative for these projects is taken by the national government or by provinces. The cases can be seen as representative regional water projects conducted in the Netherlands (Van Buuren et al., 2010; Edelenbos et al., 2013). Information about the main issues, the policy initiator and the current state of the different cases can be found in Table 4.1.

Water management is in all cases combined with other planning activities such as housing, the development of recreational areas or infrastructure. This combination of tasks increases the number of public and private actors involved in the decision-making process. Van Buuren et al. (2010) also note a more general trend of an increasing involvement of citizen groups, not only in water projects, but also in other public decision-making processes.

Regarding the water policy measures executive and non-executive politicians from local, regional and national government; water boards, bureaucrats from ministries, provinces and municipalities; and representatives from citizen groups, private investors and research institutes are involved. Most actors have different interests and different perspectives on the project. Besides this, knowledge on the issues is limited and contested. For instance, conflicting opinions exist on the necessity for extra water storage in the areas and the amount of water that will have to be managed in the future. Van Buuren et al. (2010) therefore characterise these water management issues as wicked.

News media facilitate the public debate on these projects. Moreover, media attention for your stance can be seen as a power resource in decision-making processes. It is thus important to see which actors are covered in news reports on these wicked issues.

**Table 4.1** Information about the five water management cases

	<i>Ijsseldelta-Zuid</i>	<i>Lent</i>	<i>Noordwaard</i>	<i>Wieringerrandmeer</i>	<i>Zuidplaspolder</i>
<i>Time period</i>	2000–to date	1993–to date	2000–to date	1998–2009	2001–to date
<i>Initiator</i>	Province	National government	National government	Province	Province
<i>Main issues</i>	Creating a bypass for water storage, with implications for a railway and a motorway in that area, combined with the building of new dwellings and recreational area.	Shifting the dikes for water storage, combined with the building of new dwellings and a new bridge.	Shifting the dikes for water storage and stimulating recreational activities in the area.	Creating a large lake and building new dwellings (enhancing tourism and creating economic incentives for the area).	Redeveloping a polder (land reclaimed from the sea) and creating space for new dwellings, water storage and space for glass houses.
<i>Current stage</i>	Delayed implementation	Implementation	Implementation	Cancelled	Delayed and downsized implementation

**Note:** Based on the case studies of Van Buuren et al. (2010) and Edelenbos et al. (2013)

#### *Data collection*

We obtained our data from newspapers and the television. We included the regional media newspaper(s) of that region and five national newspapers with different political orientations<sup>6</sup>. The search in the Lexis Nexis Academic NL database<sup>7</sup> concentrated on the period between 1 January 2000 and 1 January 2010. We used the name of the case<sup>8</sup> as the search term.

Reports were deemed to belong to the universe only when more than one paragraph<sup>9</sup> was written on the relevant water management project. If the universe of regional news reports for one specific case comprised more than 150 items, we took a random sample per project.<sup>10</sup> The number of national news

6. Algemeen Dagblad, De Telegraaf, de Volkskrant, NRC Handelsblad and Trouw

7. Although Lexis Nexis is the most comprehensive newspaper database in the Netherlands – containing all national, regional and local newspapers in the country – the coverage of some newspapers with a merely regional character did not start until after 2000. This may have led to some biases in the sample.

8. *Ijsseldelta-Zuid*, *dijkteruglegging Lent*, *Noordwaard*, *Wieringerrandmeer* and *Zuidplaspolder*.

9. Or when the report itself was just one paragraph and it concerned the water management project.

10. Between 150 and 300 reports: the sample consists of the first of every two reports (for Noordwaard and Wieringerrandmeer); between 300 and 450 reports: the sample consists of the first of every three reports (for Zuidplaspolder).

reports exceeded that threshold for sampling in none of the cases. We analysed television items about the water management projects using the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision website (<http://portal.beeldengeluid.nl/>) and regional broadcasters' websites. We included all television items in our analysis, since they were few in number.

The total universe consisted of 1,011 news reports; after sampling the regional newspaper reports, we had a total sample of 566 news reports. More than 10 percent (13.6 per cent) of the reports come from national news media, and the rest come from regional media (86.4 per cent). Newspapers reported significantly more often about the projects than television, with, respectively, 536 (94.7 per cent) and 30 items<sup>11</sup> (5.3 per cent).

*Method: Quantitative content analysis*

The unit of analysis was a news report. We used Patterson's (2000) established coding scheme to typify each report regarding the information biases. We also used his instructions with regard to conceptualisation as can be seen in the appendix. This scheme is more elaborate than those used in other studies, which have tended to focus on just a selection of information biases (see for instance Brants & Neijens, 1998; Brants & Van Praag, 2006; Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2006; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2007). Moreover, Patterson's (2000) codes can be easily translated into the information biases described by Bennett (2009) (because Bennett builds on Patterson's research). In addition, we created a coding variable for the actor who was the key subject of the news report. The categories of this variable (23 actors in total) were based on earlier case study research on these projects (Van Buuren et al., 2010). We recoded this item into four categories for the purpose of this study, into governing officials, non-governing officials, administrative officials and unofficial actors (see Table 4.2).

Five teams of trained coders executed the coding of the news reports, with the help of an extensive coding instruction. We executed two tests of reliability, using conformity tests. Conformity of 0.90 or higher leads to a reliability score above 0.80 on all types of reliability measures (Wester & Van Selm, 2006). First, intra-observer reliability (Krippendorff, 2004) was tested; the stability of the coders was on average 0.94. Secondly, inter-coder reliability (Krippendorff, 2004) was tested, resulting in an average of 0.90. Hence, we conclude that the data set

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11. However, we must remark that it is only quite recently that regional television programmes can be found on the Internet. The earliest item from regional television is from March 2006, and the date regional broadcasters started their broadcasting on the Internet may even differ per outlet. This may lead to small biases in the analysis.

can be seen as reliable: there is not much 'noise' hampering accurate statistical analysis of these data.

To analyse the data, we used SPSS version 20.0. Both the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic and the Shapiro-Wilk statistic were highly significant for the data among the four different groups of actors; this means that the different distributions are all non-normal. We therefore used non-parametric statistical methods. Instead of assuming normal distributions, these methods calculate the test statistics with ranked data (Conover & Iman, 1981). The lowest score in the data - including all groups - is given a rank of 1; the next lowest score is given a rank of 2, and so on. In case of similar scores, this is referred to as ties, average ranks are assigned. The tests are carried out on the ranks rather than the actual data (Conover & Iman, 1981; Field, 2009).

We have examined significant differences between the four groups in our analysis with the Kruskal-Wallis test, which can be seen as a non-parametric ANOVA. The Kruskal-Wallis test calculates whether the mean ranks for the groups differ significantly. With post-hoc tests provided by SPSS 20.0 we calculate pairwise comparisons; we test for significant differences between the mean ranks of two groups. These post-hoc tests correct for type I errors by the Dunn-Bonferroni test; they calculate an adjusted significance value.

#### 4.4 FINDINGS: MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE WATER MANAGEMENT PROJECTS

##### *The official dominance thesis*

We firstly examine whether officials indeed dominated the news reporting on the water management projects. Table 4.2 reports the percentages of how relatively often the different actors were the most important actor in a news report. Per news report, only one of the actors could be chosen as key actor.

In Table 4.2, we see that officials are the main subject of the story in 56.5 per cent of the news reports, against 43.5 per cent of the news reports on unofficial actors. So, officials, including governing officials, non-governing officials and administrative officials, are somewhat more often the key subject of a news report than unofficial actors. It seems that the officials indeed to some extent benefit from the newsworthiness value they automatically possess and the information subsidies that they provide.

However, the contrast between the groups of officials and unofficial actors is not as strong as we expected, following the theoretical notions on official dominance. Particularly, in comparing attention on governing officials (key ac-

**Table 4.2** Media coverage of actors: percentages of actors as key subjects in a news report

		(Prime) minister	6.9%
		The state	0.4%
		Provincial governor	7.2%
	<i>Governing officials</i> (31.6%)	The province	1.9%
		Mayor	1.8%
		Aldermen	5.1%
<i>Officials (56.5%)</i>		The municipality	6.4%
		Water board	1.9%
		Member of the lower house	4.4%
	<i>Non-governing officials (13.8%)</i>	Member of the provincial council	2.7%
		Member of the municipal council	6.7%
		Administrative officials	3.0%
	<i>Administrative officials (11.1%)</i>	Metropolitan region	0.4%
		Project organisation	7.8%
		Inhabitants (association)	17.1%
		Farmers	6.7%
<i>Unofficial actors</i> (43.5%)	<i>Unofficial actors</i> (43.5%)	Environmental organisations	7.1%
		Private investors	3.2%
		Research institute	3.9%
		Other	5.5%

tors in 31.6 per cent of the news reports) with attention on unofficial actors (key actors in 43.5 per cent of the news reports), the conclusion must be nuanced. Governing officials do not really *dominate* the news among the complex water management projects under study. Nevertheless, the majority of the news reports do have an official as their key subject. Although with reservations, we can confirm the expectation stated in H1.

Within the category of officials, we make a distinction between governing officials, non-governing officials and administrative officials. We see that governing officials are the main subject of the story in 31.6 per cent of the news reports, against 13.8 per cent of the news reports mainly concerning non-governing actors. Governing officials' actions have generally more consequences for citizens and have therefore more news value than actions of non-governing officials. Moreover, governing officials generally have more resources to invest in their communication strategies than non-governing officials. We indeed see that governing officials are more often the most important actors in a news report than non-governing officials, thereby confirming hypothesis H2.

*The information biases thesis*

The relatively large share of news reports in which unofficial actors are the key subject might be related to the other trend in news reports: information biases. As discussed in the theoretical section, we expect unofficial actors and non-governing officials to get more publicity by adapting to the media's needs. By providing dramatic events, conflict, critical accounts and human interest, these actors acquire more news value as well.

In Table 4.3, we report the frequencies of information biases. Frequencies in bold show the percentages of the news reports in which the relevant information bias is clearly present.<sup>12</sup>

From the table it is clear that reports are often fragmented, dramatised, include an authority-disorder bias and bring negative news on the project. The personalisation bias appears less often than the other information biases. About one-third of the news reports are heavily dramatised (32.7 per cent), and another third are dramatised to some extent (31.3 per cent). The authority-disorder bias can be found in almost half of the reports (49.6 per cent). More than three-quarters of the news reports are coded as episodic<sup>13</sup> (77.2 per cent). Almost half of the news reports are negative toward the water management projects (47.5 per cent). 'Only' about a quarter of the news reports are highly or moderately personalised (23.8 per cent). It might be less likely to report on these merely technical water management projects with a more personal or emotional approach than on other policy issues.

Examining the number of information biases per news report, we see that 95.6 per cent include one or more information biases (see Table 4.4). Even excluding the fragmentation bias, we note that, in a large majority (71.9 per cent) of the news reports, one or more information biases can be found. Information biases thus definitely seem to shape the news reporting on these complex water management projects.

How do these information biases relate to the different groups of actors studied in the previous section?

12. These emboldened categories were also used to calculate the variable *the number of information biases*.

13. The fragmentation bias frequencies are quite different for the five cases; this may result from different interpretations of Patterson's (2000) instruction on this item, which is quite broad. We have to be careful with conclusions about the fragmentation item because it may not be as reliable and valid in this study as we would like it to be. Nevertheless, in all cases, the bias is found in more than 50 per cent of the reports.

**Table 4.3** The frequencies of the biases categories

	<i>Categories</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Fragmentisation</i>	Thematic	22.8
	<b>Episodic</b>	<b>77.2</b>
<i>Personalisation</i>	No (or merely incidental) human interest	54.6
	Slight human interest content	21.6
	<b>Moderate human interest content</b>	<b>12.7</b>
	<b>High human interest content</b>	<b>11.1</b>
<i>Dramatisation</i>	No conflict framing	36.0
	Some conflict framing	31.3
	<b>Substantial level of conflict framing</b>	<b>32.7</b>
<i>Authority-disorder bias</i>	No authority-disorder bias	50.4
	<b>Authority-disorder bias</b>	<b>49.6</b>
<i>Negativity bias</i>	Clearly positive/favourable/good news	7.1
	More positive or favourable than negative or unfavourable	12.9
	Balanced mix between negative and positive/Neutral story, no positive or negative	32.5
	<b>More negative or unfavourable than positive or favourable</b>	<b>22.6</b>
	<b>Clearly negative/unfavourable/bad news</b>	<b>24.9</b>

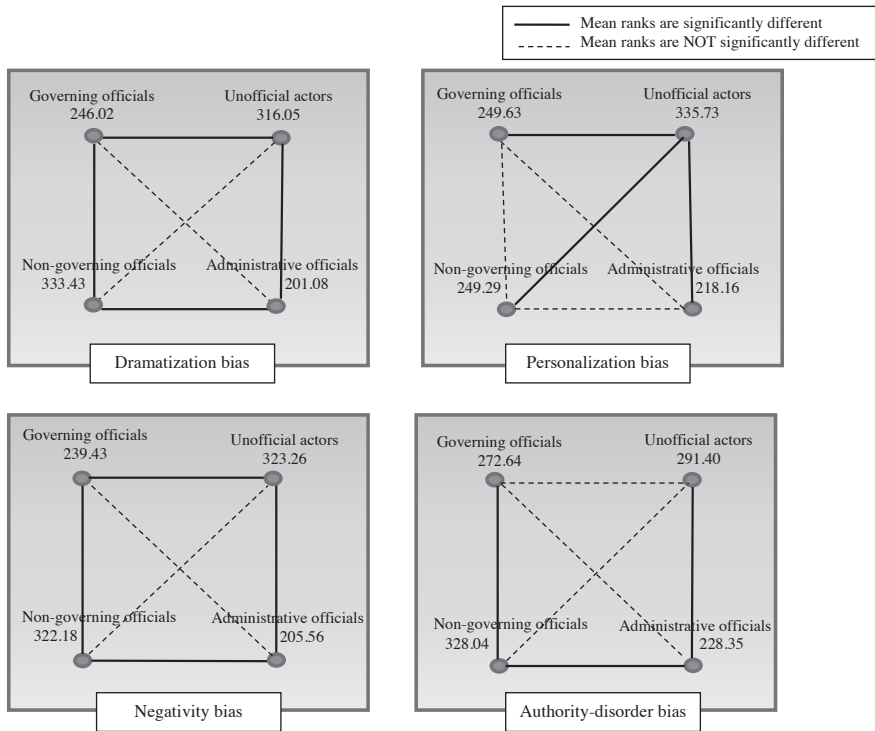
**Table 4.4** The frequencies with regard to the number of information biases

<i>Number of information biases</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number of information biases, excl. fragmentation bias</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
0	4.4	0	28.1
1	28.4	1	23.3
2	25.3	2	23.0
3	20.1	3	18.0
4	17.1	4	7.6
5	4.6	-	

*The relations between different key subjects in news reports and information biases*

Firstly, we show the complete picture, comparing all four groups in Kruskal-Wallis tests. The presence of four of the five information biases in news reports varies significantly when different groups of actors are the key actor in the report. The personalisation bias ( $H(3) = 56,13$ ,  $p < 0,001$ ); the dramatisation bias ( $H(3) = 47,79$ ,  $p < 0,001$ ), the authority-disorder bias ( $H(3) = 19,09$ ,  $p < 0,001$ ) and the negativity bias ( $H(3) = 49,37$ ,  $p < 0,001$ ) show significantly different mean ranks among the different groups of key subjects in the news reports. The fragmentation bias,





**Figure 4.1** Graphic representation of pairwise comparisons: four information biases across four groups of key subjects

however, did not show significant differences ( $H(3) = 2.20$ ,  $p=0.532$ ); we therefore did not perform pairwise comparisons concerning this bias.

In the post-hoc test provided by SPSS 20.0, the mean ranks regarding the other four biases are compared in pairs. Fig. 4.1 presents the results. We adjusted the figures presented by SPSS to increase the clarity and readability of the figures. The numbers represent the mean ranks of the four groups of key subjects on the information biases in the Kruskal-Wallis test. For instance, with regard to the dramatisation bias, ‘*governing officials 246.02*’ indicates that the average of the ranks assigned to scores within the group ‘governing officials as key subject’ is 246.02.

The differences between these mean ranks are tested for significance. Solid lines between groups of key actors indicate significant differences between the groups regarding their mean rank on one of the information biases; conversely, the dashed lines indicate non-significant differences between the groups of actors. The mean rank of governing officials regarding the dramatisation bias (246.02) is thus significantly different from the mean rank of unofficial actors (316.05).

The governing officials and administrative officials score the lowest mean ranks on all information biases (except for the personalisation bias, where the non-governing officials score a few decimals lower than the governing officials). In most of the graphics, these lower mean ranks can be contrasted with the higher mean ranks of unofficial actors and non-governing officials. Thus, most information biases are more present when news reports have an unofficial actor or a non-governing official as their key subject.

The solid and dashed lines clearly show this contrast between the governing and administrative officials versus the non-governing officials and unofficial actors regarding the dramatisation bias and the negativity bias. Non-governing officials or unofficial actors as key subjects lead to more conflict and more negativity in the news report.

Given the line pattern of the personalisation bias, we note that this bias mostly relates to the unofficial actors as key actors in the news report. The unofficial actors can in this regard clearly be contrasted with the other groups of key actors, who all score significantly lower mean ranks on the personalisation bias.

The authority-disorder bias shows a more complex pattern of pairwise comparisons. The non-governing officials have the highest mean rank on this variable; this differs significantly from that of the governing officials and administrative officials, but not from that of the unofficial actors. So far, this is comparable to what we found regarding the dramatisation bias and the negativity bias. However, the mean rank of the authority-disorder bias in news reports on unofficial actors is in itself comparable to the mean rank of news reports on governing officials. In summary, the different results of the Kruskal-Wallis tests confirm that the presence of four of the five information biases vary to the extent that key subjects vary. We can therefore reject these null hypotheses for H3. The mean ranks regarding the dramatisation bias, the negativity bias, the personalisation bias and the authority-disorder bias of the different groups of key actors differ significantly. However, the mean rank concerning the fragmentation bias of the different groups of key actors does not differ significantly; we thus retain this null hypothesis.

In the next sections, we discuss more extensively the comparative analysis of the information biases among reports in which governing officials are key actors versus reports in which unofficial actors and non-governing officials are key actors. We provide the results of the pairwise comparisons with post-hoc tests, correcting for the type I error by the Dunn-Bonferroni test, and the effect sizes, to test H4 and H5 exhaustively.

*Governing officials versus unofficial actors as key actors in a news report*

As revealed in the previous section, news reports with unofficial actors as key subject are more personalised ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $r = 0.29$ ), more dramatised ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $r = 0.22$ ) and more negative ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $r = 0.26$ ) than news reports on governing officials. Stories about unofficial actors, mostly citizen groups, seem to have provided more conflict, more negativity and more human interest to the journalists. The reported effect sizes ( $r$ ) represent all small to medium effects; they are just under the 0.3 threshold for a medium effect.

In contrast, the pairwise comparison of unofficial actors and officials as key subject in news reports was not significant with regard to the authority-disorder bias ( $U = 18,760$ , n.s.). In the news reports, we found governing officials also frequently demanding (urgent) action by their own or other governmental institutions. We presume that therefore no significant difference exists in the occurrence of the authority-disorder bias in news reports where officials or unofficial actors are key subject.

We can thus reject most null hypotheses belonging to H4; the personalisation bias, dramatisation bias and the negativity bias are significantly more often present in news on unofficial actors than in news on governing officials. However, we need to retain the null hypotheses that the presence of fragmentation bias and the authority-disorder bias is more or less similar, whether unofficial actors or governing officials are the key actors in the news reports.

*Governing officials versus non-governing officials as key actors in a news report*

The news reports on non-governing officials are more dramatised ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $r = 0.26$ ) and more negative ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $r = 0.24$ ) than news reports on governing officials. Furthermore, they more often show the authority-disorder bias ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $r = 0.18$ ). Non-governing officials seem to provide more conflict and more negativity to journalists. Furthermore, they seem to make more demands that authorities should take action. The effect sizes all indicate small to medium effects.

In contrast, the pairwise comparison did not show a significant difference concerning personalisation bias ( $U = 0,337$ , n.s.). We did not find many news reports in which officials, governing or non-governing, personalise their message, or in which these officials are part of a human interest story.

In sum, we can reject most null hypotheses belonging to H5; dramatisation bias, negativity bias and authority-disorder bias are significantly more often present in news on non-governing officials than in news on governing officials. However, we need to retain the null hypothesis that the fragmentation bias

and the personalisation bias are similarly present when non-governing officials and governing officials are key actors in news reports.

Combining the results on the official dominance thesis with the results on the information thesis leads to the conclusion that governing officials are newsworthy because of their authoritative position as such; to other actors, newsworthiness is added by information biases. These information biases can be a result of the framing of the message or the organisation of an event on the part of unofficial actors or non-governing officials. Conversely, information biases can also be the product of a more attractive or independent framing on the part of journalists using the perspectives of unofficial actors or non-governing officials. Probably, it will often be a combination of these.

## **4.5 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION: THE ROLE OF INFORMATION BIASES IN THE FIGHT FOR MEDIA ATTENTION**

Media attention is an important source of power within governance networks, especially in times of mediatisation. Actors thus fight to attract media attention. Hence, we have studied how much media attention different groups of actors attract in complex policy processes and how media biases relate to this media attention. We have analysed *official dominance* and *information biases* in news reports on five water management projects in the Netherlands.

We observed that official actors do receive somewhat more media attention than unofficial actors in the news reports; and governing officials more than non-governing officials. Authoritativeness thus indeed seems to be an important news value; this is in line with earlier research on this topic (Bennett, 1996; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Shehata, 2010; Hopmann et al., 2011). Governing officials might at the same time benefit from the information subsidies provided by their communication professionals. However, the contrast between official and unofficial actors is not as strong as we expected following the literature on official dominance (Gans, 1979; Sigal, 1973; Tresch, 2009). From the comparison of relevant smaller subgroups, it even appeared that unofficial actors are more frequently subject of a news story than governing officials. This result might be partly explicable by the governance networks in which actors are organised, where political hierarchy is less important. In these networks, inclusion of unofficial actors is an important principle. Still, governing officials often function as the public face of decisions or policies (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012).

Another explanation is that unofficial actors benefit from information biases in news reports, which were clearly present. Many reports were fragmented,

dramatised, negative toward the project and demanded action by a governmental authority (authority-disorder bias); some were personalised. As discussed in the theoretical section, these information biases in the news can be judged differently. In line with Patterson (2000), Bennett (2009) and many others, we could argue that the complex policy process within the five water management cases are simplified and enlivened by information biases. Although news consumers are to some extent entertained by reading or viewing the news reports, we can at the same time question the extent to which they get really informed on the actual policy process. In contrast, we can also argue that the information biases are a sign of journalistic independence and even of democratisation of the media debate, as Schudson (2008) and Shehata (2010) suggest.

Media attention for unofficial actors and non-governing officials, with generally fewer power resources in governance networks, shows significantly more information biases than news on governing officials. Information biases thus seem to make it easier for these non-authoritative groups to attract media attention to their side. We do not wish to make a definitive moral judgement on information biases, but these empirical results show that information biases function as a form of checks and balances. At least they provide checks and balances in media debates; but because media attention is a power resource in decision-making processes (Cobb & Elder, 1983; Baumgartner & Jones, 2009; Sireau & Davis, 2007; Voltmer & Koch-Baumgarten, 2010; Kunelius & Reunanen, 2012), information biases might similarly affect the policy process.

In our water management cases, publicity indeed seems to have helped citizens to influence the decision-making process (Van Buuren et al., 2010; Korthagen & Van Meerkerk, 2014). In IJsseldelta-Zuid, for instance, a citizen group received much media attention for their protests against the building of new dwellings near their village. Consequently, the municipal council changed their decision in favour of the citizen group. The group clearly incorporated media logic in their strategies, organising protests and dramatising and personalising their communication (Korthagen & Van Meerkerk, 2014). Although agenda setting theory is often studied and applied in public administration, the role of media biases is often neglected in this literature on policy dynamics. It would be interesting to see more research on the role of information biases.

With regard to information biases, we found in this study that these partly differ in the patterns of relationships with the actors. News reports are frequently fragmented, and this bias does not vary across the different groups of key subjects, as the other biases do. The dramatisation bias and negativity bias significantly relate to the media attention on unofficial actors and non-governing officials. Conflicts and negativity seem to make these actors – who

lack the habitual access to the media enjoyed by officials – more newsworthy. Moreover, by organising protests, contra-expertise and press releases (Korthagen & van Meerkerk, 2014), citizen groups provide journalists with information subsidies, which feed these two biases. Unofficial actors gain news value as well by incorporating the human angle in their story.

Furthermore, claiming that there is need for authorities to act increases the attractiveness of their standpoint. However, it is not only non-governing officials that use this in their communication, governing officials also do this to some extent. This is actually the only bias for which the governors do not score significantly lower than unofficial actors. Possibly governing officials to some extent become influenced by the media debate, which is full of drama and negativity, and consequently also feel the need to plead for policy plans to be amended by their own departments or other governmental authorities.

Our mainly optimistic conclusion should be tempered by the fact that we did not study exact qualitative content in this research. It should be borne in mind that, when an actor is coded as key subject of a news report, this does not necessarily mean that his/her perspective is correctly described in the story. According to the more pessimistic accounts of Bennett (2009) and Patterson (2000), his/her vision will often be simplified. Moreover, following this line of reasoning, we cannot and do not claim, on the basis of our results, that viewpoints of groups of actors are equally represented in the media debate. Probably, it is mainly unofficial and non-governing actors that are covered in news reports because of their greater newsworthiness in terms of drama and conflict, and thus obviously information biases are more likely to feature.

Nevertheless, we do not want to downplay the positive side of these information biases. The debate on policy plans can be enriched by issues raised by unofficial actors or non-governing officials in news reports and this can be partly attributed to information biases in news reporting.

**Appendix 1** Conceptualization of the variables

(This conceptualization can be found in Patterson, 2000: 24–6)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Categories</i>
<i>Personalization bias</i>	The use of the human interest frame. Human interest stories use a human example or put a 'human face' on an issue or problem, or go into the private or personal life of an actor and/or journalist, employing adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of sympathy, empathy or outrage.	-High human interest content -Moderate human interest content -Slight human interest content -No (or merely incidental) human interest content
<i>Dramatization bias</i>	Based on story, and the way story is presented, not on the topic of the story.	-Substantial level of conflict -Some conflict (not merely incidental) -No conflict (or so slight as to be inconsequential)
<i>Fragmentization bias</i>	Episodic (story, not topic) mainly in the context of a particular event, incident; the story does not go much beyond that specific event; the story takes the form of a case-study). Thematic (story itself, not topic) mainly in a broader context that deals with its meaning or implications for society, a trend that goes beyond this single event/incident; story places public issues in a broad or abstract context	-Episodic story -Thematic story
<i>Authority-disorder bias</i>	When the story implies a need for action or suggests action should be taken, the action frame is present. We combined this item with another code: the attribution of responsibility. When the story implies a need for action and the government is given the responsibility for that, the authority-disorder bias is present.	<i>Action/non action frame</i> -Story implies/says there is an urgent need for action/describes a problem (and by direct statement or implication indicates the problem needs to be fixed); suggests action should be taken, would be desirable, etc. (can be public or personal action). -Story implies/says there is a non-urgent need for action/describes a problem (and by direct statement or implication indicates the problem needs to be fixed); suggests action should be taken, would be desirable, etc. (can be public or personal action). -Story describes action already taken or being taken to resolve the problem -No action component of note  <i>Attribution responsibility</i> -Not applicable – coded 4 in previous code -Government/some level of government/a governmental institution or an individual public official (e.g. the president, mayor) -A group, or collective, or community in society or a private institution -Private individual

Negativity	<p>This code is designed to pick up whether the story is thought on the whole to be in the good news or bad news category. In some instances, it might be helpful to ask the following questions: If about a news-maker and you were his/her press secretary, would you consider this a favourable or an unfavourable story? If about an institution (e.g. Congress), does this reflect favourably or unfavourably on the institution? If about a development (e.g. a social trend, event or incident) is this a good or bad thing for society?)</p> <p><b>For this research, we coded whether the report was favourable or unfavourable towards the water management project.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Clearly negative/unfavourable/bad news</li> <li>-More negative or unfavourable than positive or favourable</li> <li>-Balanced mix between negative and positive</li> <li>-More positive or favourable than negative or unfavourable</li> <li>-Clearly positive/favourable/good news</li> <li>-Neutral story, no positive or negative</li> </ul>
Most important actor in the report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prime minister</li> <li>Minister</li> <li>Member of the lower house</li> <li>National government official</li> <li>The state</li> <li>Provincial governor</li> <li>Delegate from the provincial executive/councillor</li> <li>The province</li> <li>Metropolitan region</li> <li>Water authority</li> <li>Mayor</li> <li>Aldermen</li> <li>Municipal councillor</li> <li>The municipality</li> <li>Inhabitants</li> <li>Farmers</li> <li>Environmental organizations</li> <li>Project organization</li> <li>Private investor</li> <li>Research institute</li> <li>Other</li> </ul>	



# the Daily paper

On the back of the search for solutions to a crisis, the media is often the first to demand that the government should do more. In some cases, the media has even called for a referendum when the government has not done so. The media's role in the process of decision-making is therefore a complex one. It is not always clear what the media's role should be in a crisis. The media can be a powerful force for change, but it can also be a source of confusion. The media's role in the process of decision-making is therefore a complex one. It is not always clear what the media's role should be in a crisis. The media can be a powerful force for change, but it can also be a source of confusion.



## The mismatch between media and governance logic

More fundamentally, many statements about a crisis and even serious discussions about a lack of understanding of decision-making in practice. Political actors don't always know much about media and their role in the process of decision-making. The media's role in the process of decision-making is therefore a complex one. It is not always clear what the media's role should be in a crisis. The media can be a powerful force for change, but it can also be a source of confusion.

**Media in governance**

Media should be used to influence the decision-making process. It is important to understand the media's role in the process of decision-making. The media can be a powerful force for change, but it can also be a source of confusion. The media's role in the process of decision-making is therefore a complex one. It is not always clear what the media's role should be in a crisis. The media can be a powerful force for change, but it can also be a source of confusion.

# II Mediatised agenda setters

The second question ‘*To what extent can media biases be found in news reports around governance processes and how does that affect the governance processes, their results and their legitimacy?*’ will be addressed in Chapters 5 and 6.

In **Chapter 5**, three of the water management policy processes are chosen for a further analysis of the influence of media and their logic on democratic legitimacy sources. These three cases are selected because the main policy issues in each case concerned water storage (preventing flooding), for which in two cases dikes had to be relocated and in one case a bypass needed to be created. In the other two cases the main policy issues were less similar. The findings are based on a qualitative case analysis of the policy process, quantitative content analysis of 290 news reports and 6 interviews with citizen group representatives and aldermen. Media attention for the policy processes was found to be highly inconstant in the

different rounds of decision-making. The attention of news media clearly increased at times of conflict between citizen groups and political authorities. This points to the role and presence of news media logic; news media were found to focus on conflicts, negativity and authority-disorder in their coverage of the governance processes.

Particularly news reports featuring drama, negativity and human interest give greater voice to unauthoritative news sources such as citizen groups in a policy context (see also Schudson, 2008). This input widens the deliberative process, and in that sense the characteristics of media logic help boost a legitimate decision-making process. At the same time, only unauthoritative citizen groups that have the willingness and capacity to translate their stances into fierce or emotional statements or dramatised protests get such news media coverage. Some citizen groups quickly learn how to do that and thereby increase

their impact. A concrete risk and balancing act for governing authorities in this respect is to not have the overall governance processes be overruled by dramatised and negative images of one group and its mediated statements. Although governing authorities want to be responsive to news reporting, other actors involved in the governance process are trying to reach compromises backstage collaboratively. In all three cases, the balancing act in the mediated stages of the policy process led to relatively small changes in the policy process and the content, in favour of citizen groups who were able to attract media attention.

The quantitative study in **Chapter 6**, based on a survey of 141 project managers of urban spatial projects organised in governance networks, shows that the degree to which these projects are covered in a negative, sensational way varies considerably among the projects. Some project managers clearly saw the news about their project as negative and sensational, but certainly not all of them. Moreover, in general the project managers do not see involved politicians as prioritising news media coverage over policy goals. Although the politicians do not completely disregard the media, most of their behaviour cannot be characterised as mediated

politics, as the political logic is not perceived to be replaced or dominated by the media logic (cf. Strömbäck, 2008, Cook, 2005; Elchardus, 2002; Edelman, 1988).

At the same time, the analysis of the survey data with the structural equation modelling technique in AMOS indicates that when news is negative and sensational this has a negative impact on trust and perceived network performance. And when politicians do prioritise media coverage over policy goals, this negatively affects trust relations. Mediated news realities are relevant for governance networks as they influence the scenery in which negotiations take place (Cook, 2005; Voltmer & Koch-Baumgarten, 2010). The mediated scenery might make some of the negotiating actors change their strategy (Kepplinger & Glaab, 2007; Spörer-Wagner & Marcinkowski, 2010; Schillemans, 2012; Esser & Matthes, 2013).

In sum, media and media logic certainly do not always shape the context of governance processes in urban spatial projects. But the more they do, the more they negatively affect trust relations and network performance.



# Chapter 5

## Mediatised legitimacy within local governance networks. A three case comparative study

The article has been published as: Korthagen, I.A. and van Meerkerk. I.F. (2014) The effects of media and their logic on legitimacy sources within local governance networks. A three case comparative study. *Local Government Studies*, 40 (5), 705-728.

([http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03003930.2013.859139#.VDf1c2d\\_veA](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03003930.2013.859139#.VDf1c2d_veA))



## 5.1 MEDIATISED LEGITIMACY WITHIN LOCAL GOVERNANCE NETWORKS

In contemporary democracies, political authorities often experience tremendous difficulty in legitimating their position and actions, especially in response to complex societal issues that cross different institutional boundaries (e.g. Beck et al., 2003; Hajer, 2003; Peters, 2010). Media play an important role in legitimising processes (Habermas, 2006; Hajer, 2009). In this article, we are interested in the influence of the media, and particularly media logic, on the democratic legitimacy of political decision making in governance networks. Although the democratic legitimacy of governance networks is a highly debated issue in the literature (e.g. Pierre, 2000; Papadopoulos, 2003; Sørensen & Torfing, 2005b), little attention is paid to the impact of the media and media logic in this respect (e.g. Hajer, 2009). Important sources of democratic legitimacy, such as voice, due deliberation and accountability, are influenced by the media. The media could be used as a vehicle for stakeholders to put their issues on the political agenda. They could provide a platform for debate and also act as a forum for political authorities to brand their policies and to create legitimacy for their actions.

However, the media are not neutral information transmitters, but, like all institutions, shape and select information in certain ways (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Cook, 2005; Parkinson, 2006). The process of news-making led by the media's rules, aims, production routines and constraints is known as *media logic* (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Brants & Van Praag, 2006; Hjarvard, 2008; Strömbäck & Esser, 2009). News-making depends to a great extent on the news values that journalists ascribe to events or viewpoints, but also on organisational pressures on journalists such as deadlines and economic goals (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Research by Patterson (2000) and Bennett (2009) has identified general trends in this media logic: news is increasingly negative, particularly toward authorities, as well as dramatised and personalised.

An important question then is how these characteristics of media logic affect sources of democratic legitimacy within governance networks, which we examine in this article. In the literature on mediatisation, it is argued that, within present-day democracies, media and their logic are very influential, even to the extent that media logic overrules other institutional logics, such as political logic (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Cook, 2005; Strömbäck & Esser, 2009).

We conducted a comparative case study of three local water management projects, using a mixed method design. Although we are aware that a variety of actors are involved in governance networks, we concentrate on two important groups of actors relevant to the democratic legitimacy of political decision mak-

ing: political authorities and citizens (organised in citizen groups). To measure the presence of media logic and media attention on both citizen groups and political authorities, we conducted a quantitative content analysis on media reports about the projects (N=290). Case study analyses, and specifically interviews with key representatives of both groups, were used to further examine the way in which citizen groups and political authorities interacted with the media and how this affected legitimacy sources.

In the first part of the article, we elaborate how media logic could theoretically influence different sources of democratic legitimacy in governance networks. In the second part, we discuss our mixed method design. This is followed by an analysis of the results of our study. Lastly, we discuss our findings in the concluding section.

## 5.2 DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY AS A COMMUNICATIVE PROCESS BETWEEN POLITICAL AUTHORITIES AND CITIZENS

In this study we focus on governance networks around complex water projects. Complex water projects could be typified as boundary-crossing public issues, as they cross different geographical, societal, administrative and institutional borders (Edelenbos & Teisman, 2011; Van Meerkerk et al., 2014). The network around such projects consists of a variety of interdependent governmental, private, and societal actors (including citizen groups), who interact with each other to influence the policy and decision-making process by means of negotiation, persuasion, and collaboration (Van Buuren et al., 2010; Edelenbos et al., 2013).

The democratic legitimacy of political decisions in such governance networks is not straightforward as there are no clear constitutional rules and norms that determine what constitutes a legitimate decision. As Hajer (2009: 30) rightly points out: “the primacy of the politics presupposes that the council of elected representatives confers legitimacy on the decisions it takes. Yet when policy problems do not respect the territorial scales, this system breaks down.” This means that, in the words of Warren (2009: 7), “the legitimacy generated by electoral democracy does not carry over to [these] issue-segmented constituencies.”

Many authors therefore stress the importance of communicative relationships between political authorities and affected stakeholders in the construction of legitimacy for political decisions in governance networks (e.g. Bang, 2003; Dryzek, 2010). Traditional policy-making is characterised by a domination of expert-based knowledge and rather unilateral modes of communication between

experts and decision-makers (Crozier, 2008; Wagenaar, 2007). Information flows in governance networks are rather multilateral, and communicative capacity is more egalitarian. Furthermore, 'messages undergo transformations as receivers interpret and process information in creative and self-referential ways that can easily escape the original intentions of the sender' (Crozier, 2008: 9). Media, as an important communication channel, also select and transform information.

Generating legitimacy is for an important part dependent on managing information flows, as relevant information loops concerning policy and decision making are more integrative and dynamic. Different stakeholders part of the governance network contribute to the generation and spreading of information in the policy and decision-making process, not seldom using media.

By legitimacy we mean a generalised preparedness to accept, within a certain margin, a decision or policy by those to whom it is supposed to apply (see Luhmann, 1975). As decisions and policy-making around complex governance issues often take a considerable amount of time (e.g. Teisman, 2000), in which preferences and perceptions of actors can change, we could therefore also speak of a process of acceptance (cf. Dryzek, 2010). This is also emphasised by deliberative models of democracy, which locate the source of legitimacy in the process of deliberation between actors (Manin, 1987). In this process of acceptance, different sources of legitimacy are important.

### 5.2.1 Different sources of legitimacy in governance networks

Various models of democracy stress varying sources of democratic legitimacy. We focus on three different sources of democratic legitimacy that are especially relevant for analysing decision-making processes in governance networks (see Klijn, 2011). These three sources derive mainly from the deliberative model of democracy. This model goes relatively well with the nature of governance networks, as compared to more traditional models of democracy (Sørensen, 2002; Dryzek, 2010; Van Meerkerk et al., 2014).<sup>14</sup>

As a first source of democratic legitimacy in governance networks, *voice* is an important consideration. Voice is about the way in which affected stakeholders can provide input in the decision-making process (Manin, 1987; Dryzek, 2007). To what extent are citizens enabled to express their wishes and interests in po-

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14. As Sørensen (2002: 715) rightly points out: a governance network 'exhibits and aggravates inherent problems in some of the basic concepts of liberal democracy.' However, an extensive elaboration of the relationship between governance networks and traditional models of democracy is beyond the scope of this article. Interesting elaborations in this matter are, for example, provided by Sørensen (2002) and Dryzek (2007, 2010).



litical decision making and how easy is it to get issues on to the political agenda (Bekkers & Edwards, 2007)? Secondly, democratic legitimacy in governance networks is dependent on the quality of the deliberation process: *due deliberation*. To what extent are different perspectives included in the decision-making process? In this sense, legitimacy is derived from the extent a decision receives reflective assent through participation in authentic deliberation by those subjected to the decision in question (Cohen, 1989). Mutual exchange of information, perceptions and preferences could induce a learning process by which well-informed and reasoned decision making could take place. This is grounded on the assumption that individuals' preferences are not fixed, but can change in debate and political dialogue (Held, 2006). The transparency of the decision-making process and open information access are also often mentioned parameters of due deliberation (Dryzek, 2000). *Accountability* of decision-makers to the public is a third source of democratic legitimacy. In governance networks, accountability is often diffuse and spread among different actors and governmental layers (Van Kersbergen & Van Waarden, 2004, Hajer, 2009). However, particular officeholders often function as the public face around decisions or a specific policy (Eshuis & Klijn, 2012). Providing information and explaining certain decisions in the media is important for politically responsible actors to generate legitimacy and to convince their electorate that their actions are right and necessary.

## 5.2.2 Mediatised legitimacy

### *Role of media in democracies*

Graber (2003: 143) summarises four different functions of news media within democracies:

- Providing a forum for discussion of diverse, often conflicting ideas;
- Giving voice to public opinion;
- Collecting information about political events, serving as citizens' eyes and ears to survey the political scene and the performance of politicians;
- Acting as a public watchdog that 'barks loudly' when it encounters misbehaviour (e.g. corruption, abuse of power) in the halls of government.

Although these are *potential* functions of news media, rather than an accurate description of their routine performance (Graber, 2003, 2004), these functions are strongly connected to the legitimacy sources discussed above. The media can open up the political and policy agenda, giving *voice* to citizen groups. Furthermore, as they provide a forum for discussion, they impact on the quality of the *deliberation* process. Thirdly, as they inform citizens about the performance of politicians, they affect the *accountability* relationship of political authorities toward citizens. The media facilitate or mediate these legitimacy sources, at

least to some extent. In this matter, it is important to consider how the media operate, as they are not neutral information transmitters, but have their own logic (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Parkinson, 2006). In the next section, we describe how this media logic potentially affects the role of the media regarding the three sources of legitimacy.

### *Mediatization*

As discussed in the introduction, media logic refers to “the process by which media present and transmit information” (Altheide & Snow, 1979: 10), led by the media’s rules, aims, production routines and constraints. Complex policy processes are often tremendously reshaped to fit the journalistic norms of newsworthiness and media formats (Davis, 2007, Bennett, 2009). Bennett (2009) describes several trends in news reporting that, in his opinion, simplify complex governmental issues. He sees *information biases* of personalisation (a focus on human interest), dramatisation (an emphasis on crisis and conflict) and an authority–disorder bias (a claim that authorities are not able to establish or restore order in society) (Bennett, 2009). In addition, Patterson (2000) observes a bias toward negativity in the news. These trends in the news can also be found in other studies on media content (e.g. Brants & Neijens, 1998; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Brants & Van Praag, 2006; Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2006; Strömbäck & Sheheta, 2007).

Many scholars argue that societies and societal institutions are submitted to, or become dependent on, the media and their logic to an increasing degree; they are increasingly *mediatised* (Hjarvard, 2008; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Reunanen et al., 2010; Strömbäck & Esser, 2009). In the context of politics, Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999: 250) argue: “mediatised politics is politics that has lost its autonomy, has become dependent in its central functions on mass media, and is continuously shaped by interactions with mass media.” Meyer and Hinchmann (2002) even speak of a ‘colonisation’ of politics by media logic. As political actors adapt their communication strategies and even tailor their policy decisions to fit the media’s needs of timing, staging and framing, media logic dominates over political logic. Others expect that some institutions, policy stages and activities in the political process will be more mediatised than others, depending on how compatible they are with media logic (cf. Esser & Matthes, 2013).

In this study, we empirically examine the extent to which and how legitimacy sources are mediatised in different stages of the policy process.

*Mediatised voice*

Voice refers to the opportunities for citizens to participate and influence decisions. To what extent can they influence the decision-making agenda and can they exercise voice during the governance process with the help of media attention?

Citizens often organise themselves in citizen groups. Although these groups are often to some extent involved in processes of network governance, they have less power resources than other actors in the decision-making process. Citizen groups can increase their influence by gaining media attention (Kunelius & Reunanen, 2012; Spörer-Wagner & Marcinkowski, 2010). They then strive to shape the news in order to set their issue and their frame on the agenda of decision-makers; this is also known as agenda setting (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009; Cobb & Elder, 1983; Cook et al., 1983; McCombs, 2004) and framing power (Fischer, 2003; Terkildsen et al., 1998). As Entman (2007) argues, decision-makers use the news as a surrogate for public opinion. In this respect, news coverage of a citizen group's statements may change the targets and efforts of decision-makers in the decision-making processes. News reports influence the context in which officials bargain and decide (Cook, 2005).

Since media logic influences the selection and framing of societal actors' messages (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999), we argue that it plays an intermediating part in the source of voice. Success in shaping the news is often more related to journalistic norms than to actual pressure group strength as Terkildsen et al. (1998) note. They mention the following criteria as influencing this success: spokespersons' accessibility, rules of issue simplicity, drama and event-oriented coverage. Journalists need spokespersons to fill news holes, to meet deadlines and to provide drama (Terkildsen et al., 1998). In other words, citizen groups are submitted to, and become to a certain extent dependent on, media logic if they want to influence the decision-makers' agenda via media attention. Therefore, we could presume that the degree to which they are able to adapt to media logic affects their success.

*Due deliberation and mediatization*

Habermas (2006) argues that the media play an important role in deliberative processes by facilitating flows of political communication throughout the political system in a public sphere. The media collect, select, assemble and interpret relevant issues and require information from the flows of political communication. They ideally could, if only circumstances were favourable, generate considered public opinions (Habermas, 2006).

However, these functions of the media in the deliberative process can become problematic if the media focus excessively on the negative, dramatic or emotional aspects of governance processes (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Habermas, 2006; Bennett, 2009). Rohlinger (2007: 145), in addition, reproaches the media for presenting only the most extreme elements, thereby undermining the deliberative process. In this respect, information biases seem to problematise the function of the media as a public platform for diverse deliberations. Many authors suggest that the legitimacy of political authorities is under pressure in the media debate, merely because of critical reporting about them (Patterson, 2000; Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2006; Bennett, 2009; Hurrelmann et al., 2009).

At the same time, many political actors are assisted by public relations practitioners and spokespersons who bridge the differences between governmental or political logic and media logic (Davis, 2002). They provide information subsidies to journalists to ‘sell’ policy plans; official sources are therefore not only authoritative but also efficient news sources (Davis, 2002; Cook, 2005; Louw, 2007; Eshuis & Klijjn, 2012). In times of increasing time pressure on journalists, these information subsidies have quite an impact on news reporting (Davis, 2002).

An unlovable press can therefore be seen as essential for the functioning of democracy. In particular, the often-criticised characteristics of media logic – the pre-occupation with events, with conflict and the cynicism of the media – may contribute to the subversion of established power (Schudson, 2008). This could prevent interests of minority groups being easily pushed aside by powerful public and private stakeholders in the deliberative process.

#### *Mediatized accountability relations*

According to Hurrelmann et al. (2009: 487), the media serve as “the primary interface [...] between citizens and the representatives of political systems; media debates on political issues juxtapose the self-legitimizing claims of these elites and the legitimacy assessments of important stakeholders or professional observers.” When political actors and governmental institutions want to publicly legitimate their decisions, the media are a highly important resource. As discussed earlier, the degree to which political authorities are able to adapt to media logic influences whether they manage to present their policy decision as successes. Through information subsidies such as press releases, press conferences, pre-arranged interviews and press tours – which are nowadays fully integrated into the process of news production – they proactively communicate their policy decisions and suppress potentially damaging stories (Davis, 2002). Adaptation to media logic may decrease the quality of information that

voters can obtain from media reports on public affairs (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Davis, 2002; Hjarvard, 2008; Bennett, 2009). The authorities have thus professionalised their communication strategies, but Jacobs (2009) points out that the logic in news reporting can lead to coercive, reactive legitimation of decisions made. When the media increasingly focus on drama and conflict and hold authorities responsible for failures in governance processes, authorities have to react to these accusations and increase their efforts to legitimate their decisions.

### 5.3 MIXED METHODS

To examine the influence of media logic on democratic legitimacy sources, we have developed a mixed method design, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to generate more knowledge on the phenomenon (Currall & Towler, 2003).

*Data: three governance networks around complex water projects*

We studied three water management cases in the Netherlands: a bypass in IJsseldelta-Zuid (near Kampen), a dike relocation in Lent (in Nijmegen) and a dike relocation in the area called the Noordwaard (near Werkendam). These cases are part of a national governmental programme, called Space for the River (*Ruimte voor de rivier*), which started officially in 2000. This programme strives for a collaborative, interactive governance approach aiming to increase the involvement of local citizens and investors in the planning process (website *Ruimte voor de Rivier*, Van Buuren et al. 2010). As the national government leaves project development to the regional and local governments, executive local politicians often function as the face of these projects or the first political point of contact for citizens.

The complex water projects are about new ways to improve water safety (reducing flood risks) in combination with spatial quality. As these water safety measures make a big claim on space in and near cities, they are confronted, and often combined, with other planning activities and ambitions of local and regional governments, such as housing, the development of recreational areas and infrastructure.

We approached the projects as governance networks, following previous research on these same projects (see Van Buuren et al., 2010; Klijn et al., 2010a; Edelenbos et al., 2013). These projects (a) involve many actors (public actors such as local government, water boards, province; private actors such as building companies; and societal groups, such as environmental organisations and in-

habitants), (b) have a relatively stable character, i.e. they have been in existence for a long period and are characterised by regular interactions between the actors, and (c) are dominated by wicked problems, i.e. the solutions proposed for problems and challenges are contested because the different actors have divergent perceptions of the problems and solutions (Edelenbos et al., 2013).

In short, the water projects are developed and implemented in networks of interdependent actors, who employ dynamic interaction processes with one another and who lack clear relations of domination and subordination (although power inequalities exist). In all three cases, citizen groups are involved, using different strategies to influence the policy and decision-making process. The interactions between the actors are typified by a mix of negotiation, collaboration, persuasion and mutual adjustment. Besides direct interaction with one another, these actors could also use 'go-alone' strategies to strengthen their position (see Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004).

The three cases have been studied extensively with regard to the governance process (Van Buuren et al., 2010) on the basis of Teisman's (2000) rounds model.<sup>15</sup> We use these decision-making rounds to organise our analysis.

#### *Quantitative content analysis*

The media reports about the three projects stem from newspapers and television. The selection of newspaper reports started at the Lexis Nexis Academic NL database. We used the name of each case<sup>16</sup> as the search term, in the period from 1 January 2000 to 1 January 2011 as the Space for the River programme started in 2000. Besides these newspaper reports, we searched for television items on the website of the Dutch institute for television and radio (<http://portal.beeldengeluid.nl/>) and on regional broadcasters' websites. This resulted in a universe of 290 media reports.

In the quantitative content analysis, we used Patterson's (2000) coding scheme, items and coding instructions, which fit the information biases that Bennett (2009) describes (see also Korthagen, 2014). We focused on:

- *dramatisation* (news report has a substantial level of conflict framing);

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15. In Teisman's (2000) decision-making model, which relates especially to decision making and interactions between actors in governance networks, decision making is defined as an intertwined clew of a series of decisions taken by a variety of parties. The interactions between actors and the interdependence of actors are stressed. Rounds are distinguished by a crucial decision or event (e.g. the involvement of a new actor), defined by the researchers in retrospect, but based on the reconstruction of the process by the involved actors. The crucial decision or event is the beginning of a next round and generally serves as a focal point of reference for the actors involved.

16. IJsseldelta-Zuid, dijkteruglegging Lent and Noordwaard.

- *personalisation* (news report has high or moderate human interest framing)
- *negativity* (news report is clearly negative/more negative than positive);
- *authority–disorder bias* (news report implies a need for action and attributes this to a governmental institution).

Furthermore, we developed an item by which one key subject in the report was identified. The categories of this item were based on case study research (Van Buuren et al., 2010).<sup>17</sup> Three teams of trained coders coded the news reports, with the help of an extensive coding instruction. We executed two reliability tests: intra-coder (0.94) and inter-coder (0.91). These scores indicate that the dataset can be seen as reliable.

### *Interviews*

Besides the interviews used to elaborate the case descriptions and analysis on the basis of the rounds model (see Van Buuren et al., 2010), we additionally interviewed both the politically responsible aldermen and the spokesmen for the citizen groups. These aldermen are the public face of the water projects. We picked the citizen groups most often present in the media reports: Citizen group Zwartendijk in the IJsseldelta-Zuid case, Citizen group Federation of Lent in the Lent case and citizen group Bandijk in the Noordwaard case.<sup>18</sup> In relation to the sources of legitimacy, we asked the respondents about the involvement of the citizen group in the decision-making process, about the quality of the deliberation process and the outcomes. We additionally asked them about their contacts with journalists, whether they made their message more attractive for journalists and, if so, how they did this, and the effects of media attention. All the interviews were face-to-face and took about 100 minutes.<sup>19</sup> The interviews were fully transcribed.

## 5.4 RESULTS

We first report the findings of our quantitative content analysis. Afterwards, we connect these findings to our interviewees' responses, discussing the impact of media logic on the three sources of legitimacy in governance networks.

17. These categories can be found in Table 1. They are recoded as dummy variables. We used the dummy variables of 'citizens group as key subject in news report' and 'executive politicians as key subject in news report' in our further analysis.

18. In Dutch: *werkgroep Zwartendijk* (IJsseldelta-Zuid); *Lentse Federatie* (Lent); *bewonersvereniging Bandijk* (Noordwaard)

19. The interview with the Werkendam alderman (Noordwaard case) is an exception in this matter. This interview was by telephone and took about 45 minutes.

*Media attention in the different rounds of decision making*

From the universe of 290 media reports 20 reports come from national news media (6.9%), and 270 reports stem from local media (93.1%). In addition 280 reports stem from daily papers (96.5%) against 10 items from television programmes<sup>20</sup> (3.5%).

*Who gets on the news?*

Table 5.1 shows the different groups of key subjects grouped in four categories. For the purposes of this study, the executive politician and citizen groups are particularly important. In all three cases, citizen groups are key subject in about a third of the media reports. In IJsseldelta-Zuid and Lent, executives are somewhat more often key subject than citizen groups. In Noordwaard by contrast, executive politicians are key subject in only one in seven media reports, whereas citizen groups feature in almost one in two.

Adding these two groups, we see that in all three cases in a majority of the media reports citizen groups or executive politicians are the key subject. They are thus very important in the media debate.

*Media attention in the different rounds of decision making*

In all three cases, citizen groups were part of the governance network, interacting with the initiating governmental actors and other stakeholders to negotiate and deliberate project plans. However, the juncture at which the citizen groups became involved, the way in which participation was organised and the extent to which they choose for a go-alone strategy varies. These aspects form an explanation for the uneven distribution of media attention among the different rounds of decision making in all three cases, shown in figure 5.1.

In the Noordwaard case, the citizen group was strongly involved from the beginning, when interactive planning sessions were organised with a variety of stakeholders to develop the project plan, creating much room for voice and deliberation. However, in the last round, when the planning process was finishing and the implementation process started, the communication and interaction between stakeholders sharply decreased. At that time, citizen group members became increasingly dissatisfied about the execution of the governmental plans and they publicly started some fierce discussions about the consequences of the plans for citizens and compensation.

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20. However, we must remark that regional television programmes are quite recent phenomena on the Internet. The earliest regional television item is from March 2006, and the date regional broadcasters started their broadcasting on the Internet may even differ per outlet. This may lead to small biases in the analysis.



**Table 5.1** Media coverage of actors: percentages of actors as key subject in a news report

	IJsseldelta-Zuid (N=100) (%)	Lent (N=97) (%)	Noordwaard (N=93) (%)
(Prime)Minister/The state	11.0	14.4	5.4
Provincial governor/ The province	13.0	4.1	2.2
Municipal governor /The municipality	10.0	16.5	8.6
<i>Executive politicians total</i>	34.0	35.0	16.2
Inhabitants (association)	21.0	29.9	28.0
Farmers	2.0	1.0	9.7
Environmental organisations	1.0	1.0	8.6
<i>Citizens (group) total</i>	24.0	31.9	46.3
Administrative officials	-	3.1	8.6
Water board	1.0	1.0	1.1
Project organisation	16.0	2.1	6.5
Member of the Lower House	2.0	12.4	3.2
Member of the Provincial Council	1.0	1.0	2.2
Member of the Municipal Council	9.0	4.1	5.4
<i>Other governmental actors total</i>	29.0	23.7	27.0
Private investors	-	2.1	-
Research institute	4.0	4.1	3.2
Other	9.0	3.1	7.5
<i>Other societal actors total</i>	13.0	9.3	10.7

In the Lent case, the citizen group was part of the advisory committee of the project organisation. However, because they were not satisfied with the proposed project plan and opportunities for meaningful deliberation, they were also developing their own alternative. The number of media reports peaked when the local council supported the citizen group's alternative. This led to a difficult position for the responsible alderman (the political executive), who was negotiating with the national government.

In the IJsseldelta case, the concerned citizen group became involved relatively late. Although interactive sessions were organised here, this citizen group became involved in the sessions when the project plans became more concrete. The peak in news reports is in 2007–2008 when this citizen group strongly protested against the proposed development of the bypass, particularly with regard to the housing plans (see Van Buuren et al., 2010). They were able to put their concerns on the agenda of the local council. Subsequently, housing in the Zwartendijk area was postponed by the local council.

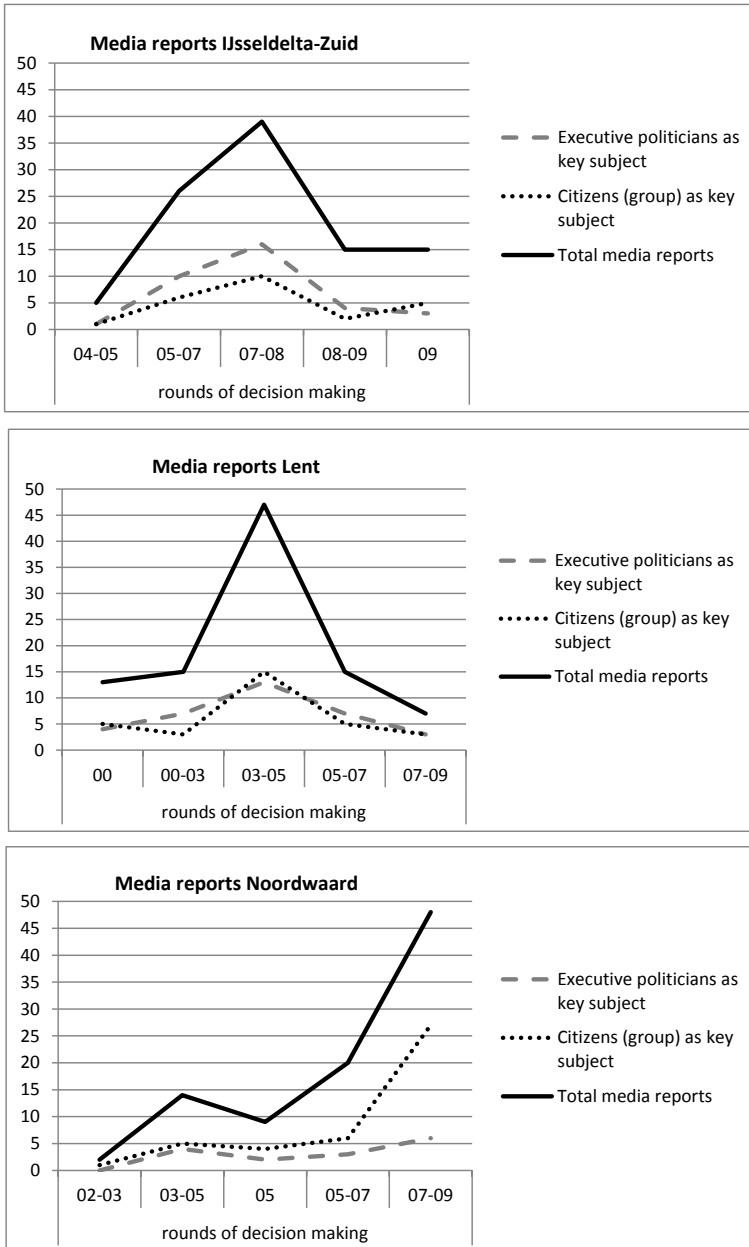


Figure 5.1. Media attention in the different rounds of decision making in IJsseldelta-Zuid, Lent and Noordwaard

Note: X-axis = time period. Each time period is a decision-making round. Y-axis = number of media reports.

We can conclude that media attention was not constant during the three decision-making processes. Media attention increased at times of conflict between citizens and political authorities around the plans. This is when the legitimacy of important aspects of the policy plans were most contested by the citizen groups.

*The presence of media logic in the news reports*

Table 5.2 shows that all information biases appear in the news reporting on the water management projects. In most of the reports (more than 60% of all reports in each project) at least one of the information biases is present. The authority–disorder bias and the negativity bias are most often present, whereas the personalisation bias appears less often. The media logic presence seems to be the strongest in the Lent case (78% versus 64 and 62%). An explanation could be that in this case the citizen group proposed an extensive alternative plan, not only challenging and discussing the governmental plan, but really competing with it.<sup>21</sup>

**Table 5.2** Information biases in the news

Biases	Media reports		
	IJsseldelta-Zuid (%)	Lent (%)	Noordwaard (%)
Dramatisation bias	23.0	46.4	26.9
Personalisation bias	16.0	13.4	19.3
Authority–disorder bias	42.0	68.0	36.6
Negativity bias	45.0	54.6	40.8
<b>1 or more biases present in media report</b>	<b>64.0</b>	<b>78.4</b>	<b>62.4</b>

*Presence of media logic in reports on citizen groups versus reports on executive politicians*

In Table 5.3, we report how the information biases relate to citizen groups as key subject and to executive politicians as key subject. Clear positive relations exist between information biases and citizen groups as key subject, especially with regard to dramatisation, personalisation and negativity. Stories about them contain more conflict, more human interest, more negativity toward the water project. The citizen groups do not seem to demand significantly more

21. Furthermore, the particular history of the small village Lent, ‘annexed’ by the city of Nijmegen (‘David versus Goliath’ as the interviewees called it) in 1998, provided an interesting narrative for the media to mention.

often than other groups of key actors that governmental authorities should take actions (authority–disorder bias).

In all three cases, reports about citizen groups score high on the personalisation bias. Reports on the citizen group in the IJsseldelta-Zuid case score highest in relation to dramatisation and the Lent citizen group in relation to negativity.

In contrast, we see in Table 5.3 no or only small negative relations between executive politicians and information biases. Significant negative correlations would show that, when executive politicians are key subject in a media report, the report has significantly fewer information biases. This would mean that reports are more positive, less dramatised, less personalised and have fewer demands for action by a governmental authority. This is probably what executive politicians strive for in media attention on their projects. Some politicians, especially concerning IJsseldelta-Zuid, seem to indeed succeed in telling their side of the story: reports are significantly less dramatised and more positive toward the project. However, in Lent and Noordwaard, these negative correlations are much smaller and not significant. Apparently, the executive politicians in these projects have more difficulty getting a more positive and less dramatised image of the project into the news.

**Table 5.3** Relations between the information biases and the citizen groups/executive politicians

	Citizen groups in			Executive politicians in		
	IJsseldelta-Zuid N= 24(100)	Lent N= 31(97)	Noordwaard N= 43(93)	IJsseldelta-Zuid N= 34(100)	Lent N= 34(97)	Noordwaard N= 15(93)
Dramatisation bias	.446***	.216*	.257*	-.294**	-.176	-.201
Personalisation bias	.416***	.430**	.388**	-.117	-.193	-.234*
Authority–disorder bias	.091	.138	.081	-.012	-.145	.092
Negativity bias	.207*	.371**	.226*	-.255*	-.182	-.142

\*\*\* Spearman's rho correlation is significant at a .001 level (2-tailed).

\*\* Spearman's rho correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

\* Spearman's rho correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

Note: We measured media attention on the citizen groups/executive politicians by the variable in which they were coded as the most important actor in the news report.

### *Mediatized legitimacy*

In summary, the quantitative analysis of the media reports reveals that the media attention is quite erratic. Media attention increases in the rounds in which the legitimacy concerning the policy plans from the citizen groups' perspective is under most pressure. Furthermore, the findings show that execu-

tive politicians do receive media attention, but this attention does not always show a more positive side of the water projects. Media logic seems to make it harder for executive politicians to publicly legitimate their decisions and obtain broad social support for the water project via media reports, especially because citizen groups attract a lot of media attention as well; but this attention reflects many information biases. At several junctures, the citizen groups criticised the legitimacy of the policy plans and fought for their interests, deploying different strategies, such as arranging protest actions, designing alternative measures and/or participating in discussion fora. Media attention thereby potentially increased their power position. They seem to use the media and media logic quite well.

We conducted interviews with both citizen groups and executive politicians to further examine how they make use of the media in their political communication and how media logic consequently affects the three democratic legitimacy sources.

*Voice: media attention to influence the decision-making process*

In all three cases, we observed citizen groups succeeding in attracting much media attention; in about a quarter to half of the media reports they were the key subjects in media reports (Table 5.1). The media reports were crucial in making them and their viewpoints known to the wider public and to the authorities. This strategy can get a much faster reply from the formal decision-making authorities, as the spokesman for the Noordwaard citizen group argues: *'I was amazed by how soon the Minister of State reacted to such a report in the newspaper.'*

This media attention can contribute to changing decisions within the process. Although in the three cases the water storage plans and the other activities were not that much altered, some smaller decisions were made in favour of the citizen groups. In the IJsseldelta-Zuid case, the municipal council changed its decision about housing in the area in response to the actions of the citizen group and the consequent extensive media attention. In the Lent case, the citizens' alternative plan has been incorporated in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), funded by the national government. Furthermore, the citizens pleaded for measures against seepage water. The publicity around these problems bolstered their viewpoint, as the alderman noted. Consequently, the municipality invested more money in instruments to prevent the area from seepage water and to monitor this. Regarding Noordwaard, the alderman noted that he created fewer recreational facilities to make concessions to the citizens, publicising his stance through the press.

How did these citizens obtain media attention for their story? As stated in the previous section, media attention on the citizen groups related strongly to the information biases of dramatisation, personalisation and negativity. Therefore, citizen groups' representatives used protest actions to attract journalists. 'You need something visual, something which they [the journalists] can see and you must provide some drama,' as the spokesman for the IJsseldelta-Zuid citizen group argued. One of their actions entailed driving a car with a homemade 'dike' on it through the city, with water leaking out of this dike. Children could stick their finger in the little holes in the dike; that led to speaking pictures in the local press. In the Lent case, the citizen group marked the route of the new dike with black flags. These kinds of actions play to media logic.

Besides these protest actions, citizen groups provided journalists with information about their viewpoints directly by emails, telephone calls or even a press conference. Letters written to governmental institutions were often also sent to the media. Furthermore, we found that they often showed awareness of journalistic needs. As the Lent citizen group representative noted: '*Some journalists were interested in the emotions of citizens who had to leave because of the relocation of the dike. I assessed what kind of story they wanted. Did they want a really emotional story? then I sent them to inhabitant A, did they want a more sober story? I sent them to inhabitant B.*'

The citizens also found that less dramatic or negative stories were less attractive to the media. The Noordwaard citizen group representative stated that the press did not report on their collaborative experience with the political authorities in the first rounds of the decision-making process. Although this collaboration did not pass off easily, the citizen group was committed to collaborate. '*The concerned journalist judged "this is not controversial enough, we won't come to report on your story".*'

Overall, the citizen groups' representatives were satisfied with the media reporting on their case. Media logic seems to help citizens, especially when they explicitly protest against the measures proposed by the political authorities. The easy accessibility of the spokesmen and their feeling for media logic, communicating simple and dramatised messages certainly seemed to help in this matter. But what does this mean for the quality of the debate?

*Due deliberation: media attention broadens the scope of the deliberative process*

In all cases, we observed a widening of the scope of the deliberative process consequent to the activities of the citizen groups and the attention they received from the media. By following the media, the aldermen received more information on citizens' viewpoints. By keeping in contact with the local journalist, the

aldermen received more information about citizens' concerns. *'Just by keeping in touch with the local journalist, I got much information about the concerns of citizens in the area. You receive signals. They [the citizens] don't tell me everything, but they do tell [the local journalist] this,'* as the Nijmegen alderman stated. In the IJsseldelta-Zuid case, the alderman noted on this matter: *'I don't experience this [the media attention on the citizen group] all in a negative manner. It has created more attention for certain aspects, such as the safety level, and provided more accurate information and transparency.'* The Noordwaard alderman argued: *'The media performed quite well for the inhabitants, enabling them to express their criticism, as well as for us, making the signals stronger, so that we addressed those criticisms in our conversations with the ministry, on behalf of the inhabitants.'* By providing more information on the citizens' concerns, the media reporting has thus broadened the scope of the deliberation process in the three cases.

However, media logic also caused a certain shift in focus, namely, a focus on negativity, drama, disorder and some human interest. As we saw in the quantitative content analysis, a majority of the media reports show at least one of the information biases. In this matter, the alderman responsible for IJsseldelta-Zuid argued that the media debate *'alluded to emotion, not to facts or the content of the plan.'* Moreover, the media often seemed to side with the opposing citizen groups. *'Generally, the media mainly choose the critical side,'* the Noordwaard alderman noted. The alderman in the Lent case aptly remarked: *'the citizen group receives rather much attention and they realise rather much participation space, although the governmental experts are convinced that the other plan is surely much better.'* The alderman in the IJsseldelta-Zuid case questioned the extent to which the viewpoints in the media really represented the viewpoints included in the decision-making process: *'people who said that they were not involved in the process received maximum attention, whereas people who said they were involved, received minimum media attention.'*

The quality of the deliberation process is thus to some extent increased by more information. However, at the same time, the quality might be decreased, since we can question the diversity of the perspectives covered in the media reporting. Media logic seems to restrict this diversity.

*Accountability: more reactive position than proactive communication due to dramatisation*

The authorities needed media attention to obtain social support for the water project plans. When the national governmental decision about Space for the River had to be made, the ministry also used the press. The Lent citizen group representative argued: *'By short movies with an image of chairs in water, and images of floods in the future in the Netherlands, they argued that the Netherlands should take*

measures. They prepared us for the fact that much money is going to be spent on water management.'

However, it is not that easy to explain decisions in the media. As the correlations in Table 5.3 show, executive politicians cannot always 'escape' the presence of information biases in the media representation of their stories. Executive politicians' stories may be presented in a more negative and dramatised way than they want. In the Lent case, this was indeed so. The local authorities presented the project plans enthusiastically by showing how the area would look after the dike shift. The alderman stated: *'we wanted to communicate that this water project is also an opportunity for the area. But this came back as a boomerang. (...) The press thought it was pitiful for the inhabitants.'* The media focused on the 50 dwellings that had to be removed from Lent village, and thus on stories of grief and the citizen group's alternative plan. A success story for the local authority in the media is *'like rubbing salt in a wound,'* the alderman stated.

However, he kept close contact with the journalist from the local newspaper, the most important news medium with regard to this project. *'I informed him upfront, told him about the considerations. Sometimes I gave him things, sometimes a scoop. I called him a lot, and was always available to him. He could even call me at eleven o'clock in the evening, if he wanted to. And I never ran away from him.'* Nevertheless, this journalist always combined the alderman's story with that of the inhabitants, he argued. This was not always positive for the legitimising of the alderman's actions and decisions. The alderman in the IJsseldelta-Zuid case had a similar experience. He described media reports after press conferences as *'only one quarter of the page which covers our part of the story and three quarters of the page was filled with the citizen group's story.'*

The political authorities had trouble proactively 'selling' their project to the public. According to the Kampen alderman, the political authorities *'were frequently pushed into a reactive position, instead of proactively communicating about the project. This almost killed our project, because it strongly influenced the public image.'* The IJsseldelta-Zuid citizen group played an important role in this matter. According to them, the bypass would create more possible victims in the event of flooding than the scenario without a bypass. This made it very hard for the political authorities to communicate their plans. *'You find yourself in a reactive position, although it [citizen group's statement] was bullshit, because we can prove that it is incorrect. However, you have to react to their story, while the tone is already set. And if the media do not hear you at the same time, but the next day or something, your story comes second. Then, things become complicated.'* This example shows how political authorities sometimes have to fight against a public image which, according to them, is highly incorrect. This public image can delegitimise their proposed decisions



or plans. Recently, the authorities involved in the project consciously decided not to react anymore to all negative stories in the media. *‘When we, the steering committee, gave less attention to these stories, we noticed that journalistic attention for them disappeared as well,’* the alderman argued. Hence, ignoring negative stories in the media can also be a communication strategy.

In contrast, the alderman involved in the Noordwaard project noted that listening to and dealing with the emotions of citizens and showing that he understands them is a major part of his message to the press: *‘always show the press that you can handle empathy and emotions well as a governor,’* he declared. In that regard, he thought it was important to openly make concessions on his plans for recreational facilities and mediate for the relevant inhabitants in the compensation negotiations. This is comparable to the strategies of the alderman in Lent.

Nevertheless, what all aldermen have in common is a more reactive communication strategy, to which they sometimes feel condemned by the role of the media and media logic in the projects.

The findings are summarised in Table 5.4.

**Table 5.4** Influence of media logic on the sources of legitimacy

	Role of media	Media logic	
<b>Voice</b>	The media are a vehicle to generate attention for certain issues and to gain influence	Increases possibilities	The citizen groups succeed in attracting media attention by adapting to media logic and are able to put their issues on the political agenda.
<b>Due deliberation</b>	The media as watchdog, as a check and balance in the process, platform for diverse deliberations	Increases possibilities	The deliberation process is broadened by the perspectives of the citizen groups, partly because of media attention.
		Decreases possibilities	Since media are more interested in entertaining stories, with a focus on conflicts and drama, this partly reduces the quality of the deliberation process. Images seem more important than well elaborated deliberations. The media are a platform more for the citizen groups than for the authorities.
<b>Accountability</b>	The media are a communication channel for generating transparency and accountability	Decreases possibilities	The media sometimes force political authorities into a reactive communication style: they have to fight against a negative image. Proactive communication, such as branding, is difficult in the context of the citizens’ dramatic stories.

## 5.5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Although theoretical and empirical work on the democratic legitimacy of governance networks is growing (e.g. Pierre, 2000; Papadopoulos, 2003; Sørensen & Torfing, 2005b; Van Meerkerk et al., 2014), the role of the media and particularly media logic in this respect has so far been neglected. In this research, we aimed to start to fill this lacuna. Before we present our conclusions however, we want to mention several important research choices and limitations of our study. A first important choice was the local level focus. Media communications by politicians may be characterised by a lower level of professionalisation than is described by the national-level focused literature on PR and news management (cf. Davis, 2002; Cook, 2005). Local-level politicians often have fewer resources regarding communication, but this may differ between organisations and projects. Furthermore, as we studied cases in the field of water management, our results cannot automatically be assumed to hold for other types of public projects or policy domains. The role of the media in less technical and more controversial public issues is likely to be stronger, especially because of media logic.

We can conclude that the media attention in the three cases was highly inconstant. This is in line with other research (Cobb & Elder, 1983; Baumgartner & Jones, 2009). Most media attention occurred in the decision rounds in which citizen groups strongly contested the policy plans. This points to the role and presence of media logic, with its focus on conflict and negativity, as was confirmed by the results of the content analysis.

Although in a lot of the literature the role of the media in legitimacy relations is stressed (e.g. Bang, 2003; Habermas, 2006; Louw, 2007), the role of *media logic* in these relationships is not yet well examined. In this study, media logic extended the possibilities for citizen groups to voice their views. The citizen groups in our cases seem to know how the media work and are capable of adapting their stories to media logic. They often strategically strove for media attention, and they benefitted from media logic to challenge political authorities and influence the decision-making process. This is in line with Schudson's (2008) claim that the characteristics of media logic give journalists and citizens the possibility to subvert established power in a deliberative process. However, these mediatised voice possibilities for citizens are dependent on the capacity and will of citizens to adapt to media logic. This means that citizen groups need to provide some drama and conflicts, otherwise journalists will not be that interested (see also Cook, 2005; Hajer 2009).

In the case studies, we observed that citizen groups deployed media strategies at times when they were losing faith in the interactive governance process

(Noordwaard, Lent) or when they were fighting for their last chance to influence the decision-making process (Ijsseldelta-South). Although these media strategies extend their influence possibilities, they are not without risks. They could influence trust relationships between the citizen groups and the other actors or even isolate them from the interactive governance process. There are also other challenges. To what extent is it legitimate to listen to these actors, barking loudly in the media, while other stakeholders are trying to reach compromises in an interactive setting? The aldermen in both the Lent and the Ijsseldelta-Zuid case experienced this dilemma. Further research could be done to examine what kind of dilemmas actors within governance networks face in this respect and how they deal with them.

Furthermore, through the workings of media logic, the deliberation process broadened, but this did not improve the quality of this process per se, as negative and dramatised images seem to dominate over substantial argumentation. This connects with the literature that doubts the quality of media reporting, providing more drama and less information about the complexity of societal issues from different viewpoints (e.g. Patterson, 2000; Bennett, 2009). Extensive qualitative content analysis of media reports could lead to firmer claims in this regard.

A next conclusion is that local political authorities had great difficulty legitimising their actions. The literature suggests that authorities could proactively use the media to 'sell' their policies (Davis, 2002; Cook, 2005; Bennett, 2009; Eshuis & Klijn, 2012), but the political authorities did not really feel capable of doing this as they were pushed into a rather reactive position (cf. Hajer, 2009).

In this study, we thus see a mediatization of legitimacy sources at certain stages of the policy process, namely, those that contain conflict and drama, leading to some changes in the policy process and outcomes in favour of citizen groups who are able to attract media attention. At these stages, media logic might overrule the logic of deliberative governance processes to some extent.

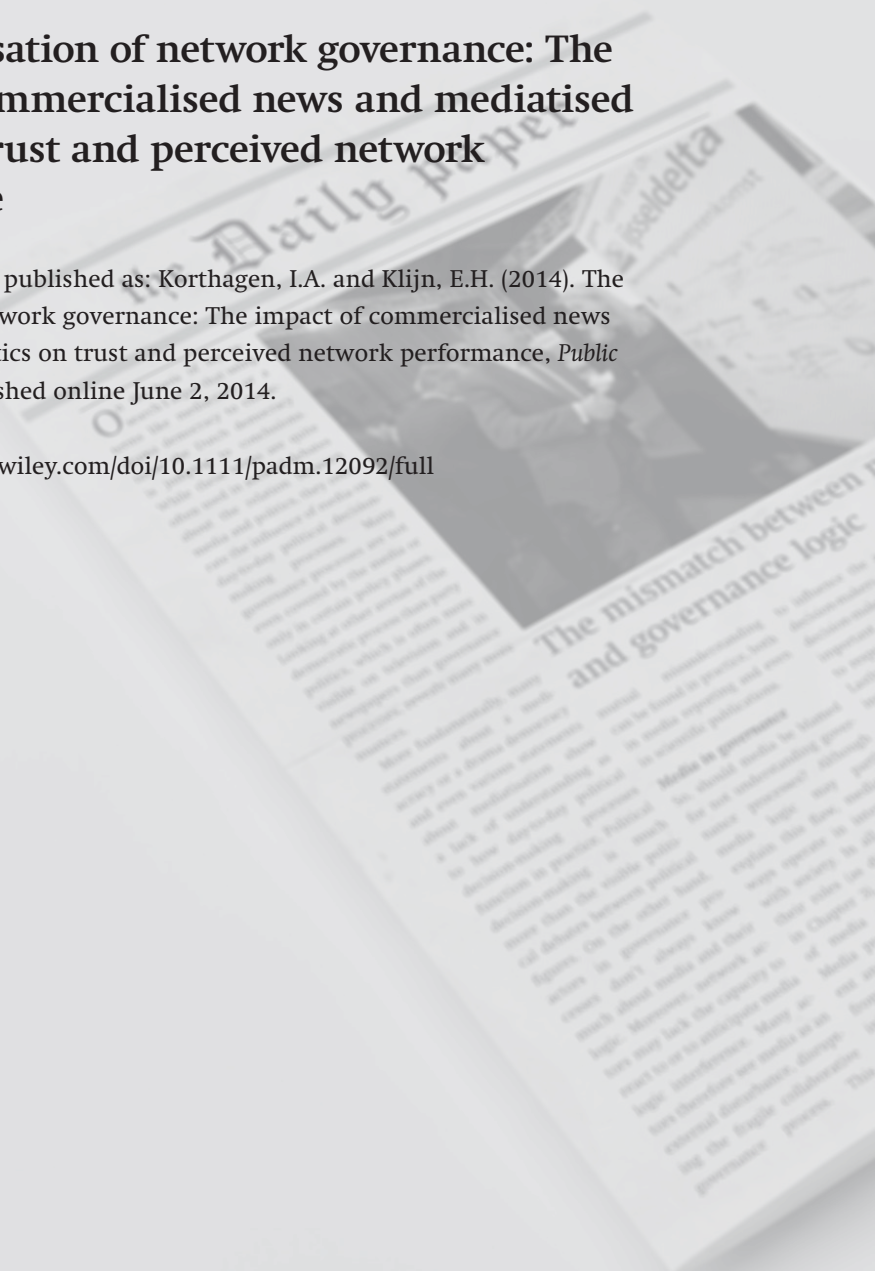


# Chapter 6

## The mediatisation of network governance: The impact of commercialised news and mediatised politics on trust and perceived network performance

The article has been published as: Korthagen, I.A. and Klijn, E.H. (2014). The mediatisation of network governance: The impact of commercialised news and mediatised politics on trust and perceived network performance, *Public Administration*, published online June 2, 2014.

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/padm.12092/full>



## 6.1 MEDIATISATION AND NETWORK GOVERNANCE: TWO WORLDS APART?

The options for building trust relations within governance networks and reaching satisfactory network performance can vary depending on the social context in which the network operates. An important transformation within this context is the mediatisation of society in general and politics in particular (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Cook, 2005; Hjarvard, 2008; Bennett, 2009; Reunanen et al., 2010). Many scholars describe that news media and their logic have a significant impact on society, even to the extent that media logic overrules other institutional logics, such as political logic (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999; Fischer, 2003; Cook, 2005; Hjarvard, 2008; Strömbäck, 2008). Politicians seem to adapt their behaviour in such a way that it fits the requirements of media in form and substance.

The role of political actors in governance networks has received quite some scholarly attention in public administration (Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000; Hirst, 2000; Agranoff, 2006; Sørensen & Torfing, 2007). Less attention has been paid so far to the impact of the news media, media logic and mediatised politics on governance networks, although that could be seen as another dimension of mediatisation. The literature on governance and the literature on mediatisation and mediatised politics are almost two worlds apart, although these phenomena considerably interact in practice (Hajer, 2009).

Media coverage could disturb effective and efficient decision-making processes in networks, because the commercialised news-media logic and the logic of network governance are hard to combine (see Esser & Matthes, 2013). Whereas the media often focus on conflicts and sensationalism (Patterson, 2000; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Bennett, 2009; Korthagen, 2013), network actors need to build trust relations and need to collaborate because of their interdependencies in relation to problem solving or service delivery (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Provan et al., 2009; Klijn et al., 2010a). The media may highlight a specific policy solution (Voltmer & Koch-Baumgarten, 2010), but network performance requires addressing the various perceptions of involved actors and thus requires deliberation of a rich set of policy options (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004; Klijn et al., 2010b). Moreover, whereas the media tend to concentrate on political authorities' actions and personal efforts (Edelman, 1977, 1988; Hajer, 2009), network actors necessarily strive for collective decisions and efforts of public, societal and private actors (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004; Mandell, 2001). At last, politicians who primarily aim to increase their media impact may subvert the privacy needed to reach negotiated compromises that lead to substantial network performance (Landerer, 2013)

Given these conflicting interests of news media and governance networks, “a considerable decline in the quantity and quality of negotiating outcomes seems likely in a mediatised environment” (Esser & Matthes, 2013: 191). We expect strong mediatisation to limit the opportunities for building trust relations and reaching desirable network performance. In this article, we empirically test the possible effects of two aspects of mediatisation that can complicate collective decision making in networks (Esser & Matthes, 2013):

1. *Commercialised news reporting*<sup>22</sup>: Critical, dramatic, and sensational news reporting (Patterson, 2000; Bennett, 2009; Esser & Matthes, 2013; Landerer, 2013).
2. *Mediatised politics*: Politicians involved in the project focusing their strategies first and foremost on the media, to reach their electorate, marketing themselves (Edelman, 1988; Landerer, 2013).

We use data from an internet survey among project managers in the Netherlands who each report for one spatial planning project (N=141).

In the following section we discuss the theoretical framework and the hypotheses. Section three contains the methodology and the operationalisation of the key variables, as well as their descriptive statistics. Section four presents the main findings, and the last section presents the conclusion and discussion.

## 6.2 GOVERNANCE NETWORKS AND MEDIATISATION: A FRAMEWORK

Much decision making on both policy problems and service delivery takes place in networks of actors (Hanf & Scharpf, 1978; Kickert et al., 1997; Rhodes, 1997). Our research fits in a tradition of studies on the political environment of and political support in governance networks (e.g. Hirst, 2000; Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000; Agranoff, 2006; Klijn & Skelcher, 2007; Sørensen & Torfing, 2007).

Politicians often function as the ‘public face’ of policies and the decisions around it. Politicians also affect the network performance by their authoritative decisions. “In virtually every public management network, it is government

22. With *commercialized* news we do not mean news from a commercial broadcast, but news produced via a commercial logic. As Landerer (2013) convincingly argues, in many studies the concept of media logic actually refers to this commercial production logic behind news. “As an economically inspired theoretical model, commercial logic has the conceptual precision and linear rationale that media logic lacks. In this account, both issue selection and presentation formats are subordinated to a single overarching goal: the maximization of audience—readers, viewers, listeners—in order to generate profit” Landerer, 2013, : 244). Public as well as commercial media often have commercial interests: maximizing consumers, to gain advertising revenues.

administrators at federal, state, and local levels who are the core or among the core actors in the network” (Agranoff, 2006: 62). Politicians are politically responsible for the work of the government administrators and are able to make final legislative decisions. Due to this formal authority political actors can set agenda’s and decide on the scope and content of decisions. and subsequently influence the network performance.

In practice, the agenda setting and decision-making power of politicians is limited as politicians are dependent upon other actors in the network that possess resources needed to deal with the policy issue, as knowledge, financial or production resources (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004). Crucial to the emergence and existence of governance networks are those dependency relations between actors (Hanf & Scharpf, 1978). Governance networks are therefore characterised by more or less horizontal coordination and interaction between governmental, private, and semi-private actors around policy problems or policy programmes.

### **6.2.1 Network performance: the need for trust**

Interaction in the governance networks show complexity because actors are relatively autonomous: they are not legally bound in authority relationships but operate from their various institutional and organisational backgrounds; they have their own perceptions about problems and solutions; and they employ their own strategies (Hanf & Scharpf, 1978; Agranoff & McGuire, 2001; Mandell, 2001; McGuire & Agranoff, 2011). Due to the variety in institutional and organisational foundations, network actors differ in their value preferences and they can fundamentally disagree on policy problems and solutions. As a result, decision-making processes are usually characterised by conflicts.

In networks therefore a constant tension exists between the need for cooperation because of the resource dependencies and conflicts about the goals and interests of actors (see Rhodes, 1997; Mandell, 2001; McGuire & Agranoff, 2011; Ansell & Gash, 2008). This makes it hard to achieve good network performances. Good performance means that actors have employed their resources and succeeded in achieving innovative solutions to wicked policy problems (see McGuire & Agranoff, 2011).

Trust is often mentioned as an important characteristic that enables the achievement of good network performance. Trust refers to the actors’ more or less stable, positive perception of the intentions of other actors, that is, the perception that other actors will refrain from opportunistic behavior (Klijn et al., 2010a). As the definition highlights, trust is a perception about the intentions of other actors. The literature on trust both in business administration and



network literature emphasises that trust enhances cooperation and collaborative performance through various mechanisms which are related to each other.

*Trust reduces transaction costs and enhances durable investment.* Trust reduces the risk inherent in transactions and cooperative relations because it creates greater predictability (Ring & van der Ven, 1992; Provan et al., 2009).

*Trust enhances stability in relations.* Trust increases the probability that actors will invest their resources, such as money, knowledge, and so on, in cooperation, thus creating stability in the relationship and providing them with a stronger basis for cooperation (Parker & Vaidya, 2001; Ring & Van de Ven, 1992; Nooteboom, 2002).

*Trust stimulates exchange of information and learning.* Relevant knowledge is partly tacit and only available, for instance, in the form of human capital and human interaction (Sako, 1998; Nooteboom, 2002).

*Trust stimulates innovation.* The outcome of innovation processes is usually uncertain since innovations are novelties rather than proven developments. Actors are not certain whether their efforts and investment in the innovation process will lead to any returns. Trust is therefore crucial for entering in innovation processes (Lane & Bachman, 1998; Huxham & Vangen, 2005).

The core of our explanatory model consists of the relation between trust and network performance.

*Hypothesis 1: Higher levels of trust between the actors in the network around the project lead to better network performance.*

## 6.2.2 Conflicts in networks

Trust is not automatically present; it has to be developed, as virtually all scholars describe (see Sako, 1998; Rousseau et al., 1999; Nooteboom, 2002; Provan et al., 2009). Trust can enhance but also diminish in time as a result of internal and external network characteristics.

We hypothesise that conflict may lead to a decrease in the trust level.

*Conflicts lead to less trustworthy behaviour and less small joint actions.* Trust is gradually built and enhanced in a 'trust cycle' (Huxham & Vangen, 2005) in which trustworthy behaviour, modest small joint actions, small wins, and building of trust expectations reinforce one another. Severe conflicts will harm this trust cycle since it is more difficult to realise small wins and build trust expectations for actors in conflict. More conflicts make it thus more difficult to achieve trust between actors (Lane & Bachman, 1998; Nooteboom, 2002).

Moreover, conflicts can negatively affect network performance.

More conflicting strategies require more coordination costs to achieve consensus. As previously discussed, conflicts in networks result logically from actors' different interests, perceptions and strategies; but, if there are severe conflicts in networks, it hinders (all other factors remaining equal) 'easy' consensus about (packages of) goals (Sørensen & Torfing, 2007). To achieve collective decision-making on integrative solutions in situations of conflicts more transaction costs of coordination have to be made (Nooteboom, 2000, Huxham & Vangen, 2005; Parker & Vaidia, 2001). This reduces the possibility to reach satisfactory outcomes. Some actors are not willing or able to make these transaction costs.

This leads to two hypotheses on the relation between conflicts and trust and conflicts and performance:

*Hypothesis 2a: Conflicts have a negative effect on the trust level between actors in the governance network.*

*Hypothesis 2b: Conflicts have a negative effect on perceived network performance.*

Opportunities to build trust relations within governance networks and to reach satisfactory network performance can furthermore vary depending on societal characteristics. We focus on the influence of media and their logic: the mediatisation of network governance.

### **6.2.3 Four dimensions of mediatisation**

The role of media and media logic in society can be studied among four dimensions of mediatisation, sketched by Esser and Matthes (2013) – building on the work of Strömbäck (2008) –. These dimensions can be seen as four subsequent phases of mediatisation (see Strömbäck, 2008). The third dimension of mediatisation is the main object of our study, but this presupposes a mediatisation in the first and second dimension (at least to some extent).

“The first dimension examines whether media coverage of political affairs is predominantly shaped by media logic or political logic” (Esser & Matthes 2013: 178). Media logic concerns the process of news-making led by the media's rules, aims, production routines, and constraints (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Brants & Van Praag 2006; Hjarvard, 2008). The media logic is mainly guided by commercial interests: competitive, economic considerations guide the processes of news selection, organisation and production (Landerer, 2013). A dominance of this commercial logic results in a simplified, dramatised, and negative representation of decision-making processes (Esser & Matthes, 2013). Moreover, journalists often do not have the time to check the facts in a 24/7 news market and consequently report inaccurately (Witschge & Nygren, 2009; Schillemans, 2012).

The second dimension considers how politicians are guided by elements of media and their logic (Esser & Matthes, 2013). Politicians are dependent on media to reach the public, their electorate. The more they follow a self-interested, electoral logic, the more their actions aim at gaining media attention. The marketing of political symbols and images through media will then overshadow the goal of implementing policies (Edelman, 1988; Elchardus, 2002; Cook, 2005; Needham, 2006). “For political actors this means to increase their electoral strength by subordinating substantial political problems to symbolic issues that are more likely to result in increased public attention and hence electoral gains” (Landerer, 2013: 250). To gain media attention politicians adapt to the requirements of media forms and formats (Edelman, 1977; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Fischer, 2003; Hjarvard, 2008).

“The third dimension investigates how political organisations and decision-making institutions (parties, governments, interest groups, negotiation committees, and bargaining processes) are affected by media logic” (Esser and Matthes, 2013: 178). Media not only highlight certain aspects of the policy problem and thus influence the way actors within and outside the network view problems – as shown in the research on agenda forming (Cobb & Elder, 1983; Baumgartner & Jones, 2009). Media and their commercialised logic also cause changes in autonomous strategies of actors – as Kepplinger and Glaab (2007), Spörer-Wagner and Marcinkowski (2010), and Schillemans (2012) describe in their research.

The fourth dimension concerns “the effects of mediatisation on people’s knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors” (Esser & Matthes, 2013: 179). This dimension is not part of our research, as it asks for another research strategy.

### 6.2.4 The commercial news media logic and the functioning of governance networks

The third dimension of mediatisation thus addresses that trust relations and network performance can be affected by (commercialised) media reporting and by mediatised politicians. We start with explaining how trust relations in negotiating processes in networks can be influenced by commercialised news.

*The commercialised news logic encourages opportunistic behaviour*, as competition over media access is guided and restricted by the commercial media logic (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). Actors using the media to gain power need to fit their message to media logic, for instance by making their message more controversial (Hajer, 2009; Korthagen & Van Meerkerk, 2014). The commercialised media

logic thus stimulates opportunistic behaviour and go-it-alone strategies which undermines the network's collaborative needs.

*News reports affect the behaviour of subjects of news reports.* Subjects of news reports usually overestimate the effect of the content of the articles upon others; this is known as the third-person effect (Kepplinger & Glaab, 2007). This makes that particularly negative news reports have strong emotional and social effects on their subjects (Kepplinger & Glaab, 2007; Schillemans, 2012; Dixon et al., 2013). This causes these actors' behaviour and intentions to become less predictable and less reliable.

*News reports affect the behaviour of other actors in the network.* Other actors' behaviour can also change, when news reports bring new information on issues beyond an actor's own experience or when the reports 'scream' for action. News media help "disjoined actors [to] keep tabs on each other and on what they consider the 'public mood'" (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009: 107). Particularly when news media focus on negativity and drama, trust relations come under pressure as such news reports even seem to require that actors change their behaviour. In these cases the 'meditated reality' might become more decisive than the 'actual reality' (cf. Strömbäck, 2008).

In addition, commercialised news reports can negatively interfere the process of achieving desirable network performance.

*Collaborating and compromising under the media spotlight can be more difficult.* In negotiating processes under the media spotlight, actors will generally have a tendency to position themselves and their own values more strongly (see Spörer-Wagner & Marcinkowski, 2010; Esser & Matthes, 2013). As the media often highlight outsider and extreme positions, and overemphasise differences of opinions, they make it more difficult to achieve compromises and make political decision with due consideration (Voltmer & Koch-Baumgarten, 2010). In negotiating processes in networks actors need opportunities to act on and respond to newly gained insights. Under media pressure, however, negotiating partners are less willing to compromise and to give in, complicating the search for a collaborative solution.

*Media can be used to obstruct the decision-making process.* The very characteristics of media logic that many scholars criticise – the pre-occupation with events, with conflicts, the cynicism – give journalists and opponents opportunities to subvert established power in deliberative processes, Schudson (2008) claims. "As the tone of stories in mass media changes, say, from positive to negative, opponents of a policy have an opportunity to attack the existing policy arrangement" (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009: 26). While this might open the process for

new policy options, it can also lead to a deadlock in the collaborative search for solutions.

*The commercialised news reports limit the range of policy options.* The media's fascination with drama and conflict restricts the variety of solutions which can be chosen by the network actors. "By emphasising risks and policy failures the media systematically limit the range of policy choices that can be publicly legitimated", as Voltmer and Koch-Baumgarten (2010: 8) claim. Consequently, it is harder to reach innovative, effective solutions for policy issues in negotiations.

Although we do not expect the media to report on every urban project in a mainly negative, sensational, and inaccurate way, *when they do so we expect such news reporting to have negative consequences for the level of trust between the actors in the network and for perceived network performance.*

*Hypothesis 3a: More commercialised news reports on the project have a negative effect on the trust level between actors in the governance network.*

*Hypothesis 3b: More commercialised news reports on the project have a negative effect on network performance.*

## 6.2.5 Mediatised politics in governance networks

Another element within the third dimension of mediatisation is the impact of mediatised politicians on governance networks. Mediatised politicians follow an electoral logic, are primarily focused on their impact in news and their personal image, which can damage trust relations.

*Media presume more authoritative, hierarchical politics.* Despite the fact that much decision making takes place in governance networks without a clear authoritative centre, the media generally reproduce a more classical-modernist view on politics (Hajer, 2009). This encourages politicians to show their authority and power in decision-making processes, although these may be limited within a governance network. This go-it-alone strategy can damage the personal connections between the politicians and other actors in the network and may lead other parties to doubt the intentions of these politicians.

*Sound bites only draw attention to the politician and his interests.* "Mediatised politics entices politicians to show that they matter, and the temptation is to try to perform authority in precisely the way that fits the preferred media format" (Hajer, 2009: 177). One form this adaptation takes is that politicians tend to speak in spicy sound bites to increase the likelihood of attracting media attention for their political point of views (Elchardus, 2002; Fischer, 2003; Hjarvard, 2008). Sound bites cannot be nuanced or consider all the pros and cons, and therefore are at odds with the deliberate decision-making process in the governance network involving all the different actors, perspectives, and interests. Such

adaptation to media logic can be seen as opportunistic, entailing, for instance, a decrease in other actors' goodwill.

Mediatized politics might also negatively interfere on achieving desirable network performance.

*News reports bring politicians to take ad hoc policy measures.* The way in which a political or governmental reality is presented in the media influences political responses (Dixon et al., 2013). As a result of the pressure of news reports, particularly negative, dramatised news reports, politicians may feel forced to publicly announce hasty, ad hoc, and strict policy measures without considering the deliberations and relations in the governance network (Fischer, 2003). These interventions, in turn, may cause other actors in the network to react strategically, resulting in damaging or threatening previously achieved agreements. Moreover, as a result of ad hoc policy measures the range of future, integrative policy solutions is diminished.

*Adaptation to commercialised news values can clash with finding collaborative solutions.* When politicians interfere in the policy process because of news reports and not because of relevant developments in a project, news values overrule political values (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Fischer, 2003; Cook, 2005). This in a sense echoes Edelman's analyses in the 1970s. Edelman (1977, 1988) talked about 'words that succeed and policies that fail', by which he wanted to indicate that politics can be mainly a verbal game, whose actual policy outcomes might not be equally successful. This might be particularly true in a situation where politicians feel forced to dramatise stories or to emphasise the wrong facets of the story, or even create events to gain publicity (Edelman, 1977; Cook, 2005). This dramatisation rather leads to controversy and polarisation than to substantial negotiations and an integration of different perspectives (Landerer, 2013). Moreover, as it is important for politicians to sell a consistent message in media, they have limited opportunities to twist and turn in the negotiating process while this twisting and turning is crucial in achieving integrative, innovative and effective solutions (Hajer, 2009).

*The previous mechanisms found in the literature leads us to the following hypotheses:*

*Hypothesis 4a: Mediatized politicians in the network around the project negatively affect the trust level between actors in the governance network.*

*Hypothesis 4b: Mediatized politicians in the network around the project negatively affects network performance.*

## 6.2.6 Mediatisation and governance networks: the full model

To test the hypotheses, we used a survey of managers involved in spatial planning projects in the Netherlands. Since we use a survey which measures the managers' perceptions about the different factors, our study builds on self-reported measures.

Our assumption is that the incidences of media attention on various policy processes in networks will differ in number and tone. As Voltmer and Koch-Baumgarten (2010) argue, large areas of policy-making are entirely unaffected by the media. We expect the level of commercialised news to vary among the projects, enabling us to see whether there is any relation with the reported outcomes of these projects.

Variation in media attention is on the one hand caused by coincidental factors, but on the other hand by certain characteristics of the project. Scholars describe a mutually reinforcing relation between conflicts in policy processes and commercialised news (Baumgartner & Jones, 2009; Reunanen et al., 2010; Esser & Matthes, 2013). Conflicts between the involved actors can be a trigger for more commercialised news and negative, sensational and/or inaccurate news can trigger conflicts.

We also expect commercialised news and mediatised politics to be positively correlated. As politicians follow an electoral logic, they focus their strategies first and foremost on the media. The assumption is that more negative and sensational news attracts politicians who orient their behaviour toward news media, trying to market themselves in the news by for instance demanding improvements or change. These politicians fit their communication to the commercialised news logic, which asks for sound bites, drama and conflict. The combination of the various hypotheses and correlations results in the conceptual framework visualised in Figure 6.1.

## 6.3 RESEARCH METHODS

### *Data collection*

We used data from a web-based survey conducted in 2011 (April–July) among project managers in the four largest cities of the Netherlands (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht) and managers within two private firms (P2 and DHV) which manage urban spatial planning projects. No significant statistical differences exist between respondents from the four different municipalities or consultancy firms in ANOVA-tests, comparing the five groups (the respondents

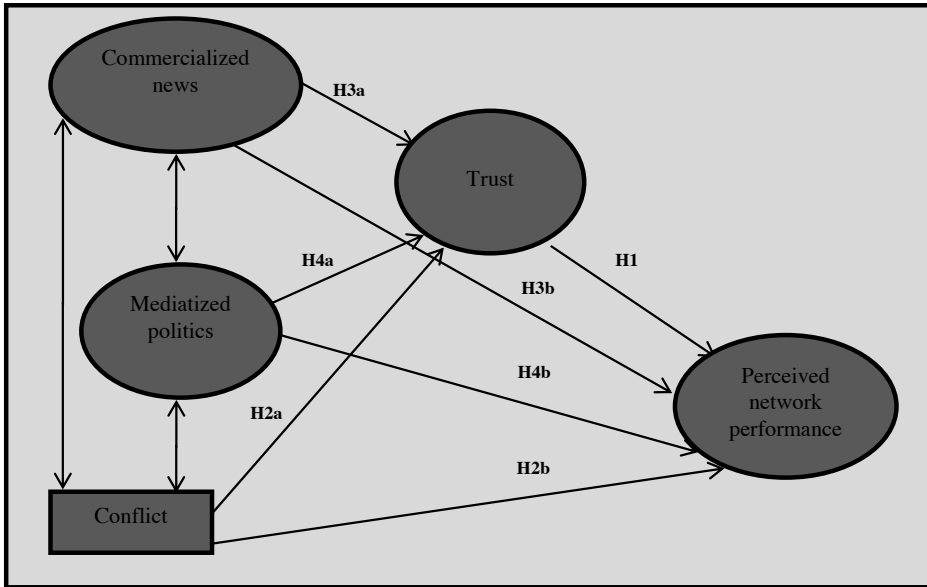


Figure 6.1 Conceptual model

of the two private firms cannot be split in our data file, they form one group that is in size comparable to the number of respondents in one municipality).

We held three preparation sessions with eight project managers from the four participating cities and two firms to discuss the clarity and relevance of the questions, to validate our survey. The organisations undertook the e-mailing to the managers. We sent one follow-up e-mail. In addition, we phoned respondents to remind them of the survey. We asked the organisations to send emails to each leading project manager of a specific project. So we had one possible respondent for each project, as the respondents were asked to fill in the survey bearing in mind the specific urban project in which they are most intensively involved. This means that we collected data for 141 projects, since we had 141 managers. Table 6.1 describes the population and the response rate, which is 40.9%.

The project managers operate in governance networks to realise urban projects. They therefore have the experience and extensive knowledge of operating in governance networks needed to answer our research question. The managers are involved in a wide variety of projects, but most of the projects concern restructuring parts of the city. Projects deal with restructuring/building dwellings, business functions and/or commercial functions (shopping malls etc.) in neighbourhoods. We consider the group of interdependent governmental, private and societal actors around the urban projects as the network; this is



**Table 6.1** *Response to the survey*

	Population	Response (absolute)	Response (percentage)
Municipalities (4)	288	117	40.6%
Private organisations of project managers (2)	57	24	42.1%
Total	345	141	40.9%

also how it was presented to the survey respondents. We now discuss some of the characteristics of the networks (number of actors, involved actors, policy problems, etc.).

#### *Characteristics of the networks around urban projects included in this study*

Networks are characterised, as most authors argue, by 1) a significant number of interdependent actors, 2) that are involved in policy-making or service delivery, and 3) policy issues characterised by task complexity (see Agranoff & McGuire, 2001; Ansel & Gash, 2008; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004).

In 66% of the projects, more than ten different organisations were involved in the surrounding networks, as reported by the managers. A significant number of the managers (27.0%) worked in networks consisting of at least 20 organisations. We can therefore conclude that we are dealing with policy problems that are solved by collective actions of a set of interdependent actors: one of the main characteristics of networks. Most of the networks included societal interest groups (94.3%), private developers (78.6%), architectural firms (79.4%), and various governmental organisations (national government 60.3%; province 58.9%; other municipalities 47.5%).

These network actors work on projects encompassing multiple activities. On average, more than three policy tasks ( $M=3.76$ ) play a medium to large part in the project. These activities include environmental development (public parks), houses, business/shopping areas, water storage, infrastructure (rail and public highways), and social issues (schools, sport facilities, other social facilities). These broad activities all include smaller subtasks in practice.

### **Conceptualisation**

*Trust between network actors:* To measure trust within the network, we used Klijn et al.'s (2010a) existing scale based on business management literature. In this research, we have added one item, feeling a good connection. The project managers in the preparation phase emphasised that trust in a person is partly based

on whether they sense mutual understanding. This more intuitive, emotional connection between persons is also described by Lane and Bachman (1998).

In our survey, the project managers rated the level of trust between the different parties among six dimension of trust, listed in Table 6.2.

Cronbach's Alpha of the six items is 0.80. The mean score on the trust level assigned by the project managers is 3.31 (SD=0.60) on a five-point Likert scale. This indicates a moderate degree of trust between the actors in the networks, perceived by the project managers.

**Table 6.2** *Measurement of trust*

Dimension	Item	Literature
1. Agreement trust	AGR The parties in this project generally live up to the agreements made with one another	Sako, 1998
2. Benefit of the doubt	BEN The parties in this project give one another the benefit of the doubt	Lane & Bachman, 1998
3. Reliability	REL The parties in this project keep in mind the intentions of the other parties	McEvily & Zaheer, 2006
4. Absence of opportunistic behaviour	ABS Parties do not use the contributions of other actors for their own advantage	Sako, 1998; Nooteboom, 2002
5. Goodwill trust	GDW Parties in this project can assume that the intentions of the other parties are good in principle	Sako, 1998; Nooteboom, 2002
6. Good connection	CON Parties in this project feel a good personal connection with one another	Lane & Bachman, 1998; Practical relevance (input project managers)

*Network performance:* Measuring network performance is difficult. Actors have different goals and it is thus difficult to pick a single goal by which to measure outcomes. Measuring network performance is also problematic because policy processes in governance networks are lengthy and actors' goals are likely to change over time (see Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004). Moreover, it is not possible to assess the 'objective' outcomes (realised dwellings, infrastructure, time of decision-making, and so on) because of the variety of projects and the variety in policy goals. This problem is addressed in this article by using network performance as perceived by the project managers as a proxy for the outcomes, taking into account that goals change and that actors have different views about the outcomes. The applied measurement scale, of Klijn et al. (2010a; 2010b), builds on five different dimensions of network performance described in the literature, that focus on the character of the collective policy solution.

Since policy problems in network are complex and need innovative and integrative solutions these are two indicators of network performance (Nooteboom, 2000; McGuire & Agranoff, 2011). Other indicators of network performance address whether the outcome solves relevant policy problems: the problem solving capacity and robustness of the solution (cf. De Jong & Edelenbos, 2007; cf. Innes & Booher, 2003) Lastly the relation between costs and benefits is a feature of performance that is often applied (cf. Mantel, 2005). Table 6.3 presents the items.

Cronbach's Alpha for these items is 0.76. The mean score for network performance, as rated by the project managers, is 3.71 (SD=0.61) on a five-point Likert scale, indicating a quite high satisfaction with the results.

**Table 6.3** Measurement of perceived network performance

Dimension	Items	Literature
1. Innovative character	INN Do you think that innovative ideas have been developed during the project?	Nooteboom, 2002
2. Integral nature of solution	INT Do you think that different environmental functions have been connected sufficiently?	Klijn et al., 2010
3. Effectiveness solutions	EFF Do you think that the solutions that have been developed really deal with the problems at hand?	Fischer, 2003; McGuire & Agranoff, 2011
4. Effectiveness in the future	FUT Do you think that the developed solutions are durable solutions for the future?	Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004
5. Relation costs and benefits	RCB Do you think that – in general – the benefits exceed the costs of the cooperation process?	Mantel, 2005

**Note:** One item has been deleted from Klijn et al.'s (2010a,b) scale because of its low loading on 'performance': 'Do you think that in general the involved actors have delivered a recognisable contribution to the development of the results?' Table 7 shows the results of the factor analysis.

*Commercialised news:* News production is claimed to be guided by a merely commercial logic, an economically inspired theoretical model (Landerer, 2013). The mediatisation literature sketches that the commercial logic suppresses media's ideal of social responsibility, when media exaggerate sensational and negative aspects in the news at the cost of more positive, substantive and accurate news (Patterson, 2000; Bennett, 2009; Esser & Matthes, 2013). This suppression or domination of the commercial logic can be measured more precisely in the, horizontal rating scales. These scales provide two opposite attitude positions and ask them to show where on the ten-point scale – in between two opposites – their own view falls (de Vaus, 2002).

No measurement scale exists on the degree to which media reports can be qualified as commercialised news in a survey. Therefore, we developed our own scale. Respondents rated media reports for their project on the items presented in Table 6.4.

Cronbach's Alpha for these items is 0.84. The mean score is 5.03 on the ten-point scale, indicating a moderate degree of commercialised news on the project. It seems that the news is mixed: containing sensational content as well as informative content, about as much positive as negative reports and accurate as well as inaccurate reports according to the project managers. The standard deviation of 1.85 shows that quite some variance exists in this degree.

So, the degree of commercialised news varies considerably across projects. Not all projects are mainly negatively, sensationally, and inaccurately described in news reports; this to some extent tones down the term *media logic*. The mean and the standard deviation show that some project managers have clearly perceived commercialised news characteristics in news around their project, but certainly not all of them.

**Table 6.4** *Measurement of commercialised news*

Dimension		Rating scale	Literature
1. Sensationalism in news reports	SEN	From informing to sensational	Patterson, 2000; Bennett, 2009; Esser & Matthes, 2013
2. Negativity in news reports	NEG	From positive to negative	Patterson, 2000; Bennett, 2009
3. Mistakes in news reports	MIS	From accurate to full of mistakes	Witschge & Nygren, 2009; Schillemans, 2012

*Mediatized politics*: Politicians involved in the project that focus their strategies first and foremost on the media, to reach their electorate, marketing themselves (Edelman, 1988; Landerer, 2013), we refer to as mediatized politics. We assess whether their orientation on media (logic) replaced their orientation on, the governance network (the political logic) (cf. Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Fischer, 2003; Cook, 2005; Strömbäck, 2008), political image marketing prevailed (cf. Edelman, 1988; Elcharodus, 2002; Fischer, 2003), and therefore the extent to which the politicians were (consequently) ill-informed on the project (Elcharodus, 2002). We again used horizontal rating scales, to measure more accurately what prevails in the behaviour of politicians: an orientation on the media or on the project, see Table 6.5.

The items have a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.76. The politicians are not perceived to be that mediatised, as indicated by the mean score of 4.03 (SD=1.64) on the ten-point scale.

Thus interestingly, our data suggests that the degree of the mediatisation of politics in governance networks is not that high. Although most politicians in governance networks around the urban projects are not totally ignorant of the media, they seem to be more focused on the project than on the media.

**Table 6.5** *Measurement of mediatised politics*

Dimension		Rating scale	Literature
1. Focus on media reporting on the project	BME	Based on development in the project versus based on media reports	Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Fischer, 2003; Cook, 2005; Strömbäck, 2008
2. Focus on 'marketing' personal image	MAR	From fairly involved in the project to working on 'marketing' personal image	Elchardus, 2002; Fischer, 2003; Needham, 2006
3. Ill-informed on the project	ILL	From well-informed to ill-informed	Elchardus, 2002

*Conflict:* Respondents were asked to rate the amount of conflict on a ten-point scale from many conflicts between organisations to no conflicts. The mean score of 4.85 and the standard deviation of 2.0 show that respondents generally characterise the networks by quite some conflicts, but that the amount of conflict differs considerably across projects.

*Control variables:* We selected control variables on two analytical levels. Firstly, we controlled for project-level variables: phase of the project, task complexity and network size. We, secondly, control for the respondent's experience with urban spatial projects, measured by their reported years of involvement.

#### *Data analysis*

We use structural equation modelling (SEM) (in AMOS 18.0) to test the relationships in the conceptual model with our survey data. This has two advantages compared to regression analysis. Most importantly, we hypothesise a research model in which commercialised news and mediatised politics have a negative effect on trust relations and on network performance. To study these indirect (effects via trust) and direct effects on network performance in our model we use structural equation modelling, performing path analysis. The second advan-

tage of SEM is the exact calculation of the latent factors, using separate factor loadings for the different items.

## 6.4 FINDINGS

In this section, we discuss the correlations between the variables, the factor analyses, and the results of our structural equation modelling.

### *Relations between the variables*

Table 6.6 gives the descriptive statistics of the variables discussed in the conceptualisation section and the correlations between these variables.

Between the independent variables commercialised news, mediatised politics, and conflict, the correlations drawn in the research model are significant in our statistical analysis. Commercialised news and mediatised politics have a small positive correlation ( $r=0.253$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). In addition, commercialised news is positively related to conflict ( $r=0.180$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). However, the correlation is smaller than we expected; commercialised news thus seems to be largely explainable by factors other than conflict between network actors.

A positive correlation exists between trust and perceived network performance ( $r=0.404$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Negative correlations exist between conflict and trust

**Table 6.6** *Descriptive statistics and correlations between variables in analysis*

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.Commercialised news (1-10)	5.03	1.85	1								
2. Mediatised politics (1-10)	4.03	1.64	.253**	1							
3.Conflict (1-10)	4.85	2.00	.180*	.155	1						
4.Trust (1-5)	3.31	.60	-.362**	-.295**	.347**	1					
5. Perceived network performance (1-5)	3.71	.61	-.409**	-.233**	-.160	.404**	1				
6.Project phase (1-6)	3.21	1.33	-.136	-.124	-.007	.208*	.164	1			
7.Task complexity (1-6)	3.76	1.58	-.093	-.299**	.021	.204*	.114	.131	1		
8.Size of network (1-5)	3.28	1.29	-.051	-.150	.080	.063	.220**	-.026	.292**	1	
9.Years of involvement	13.01	7.23	-.200*	-.080	.132	.092	.026	.035	.052	.128	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

N is in between 133-141 (pairwise deletion of missing values)

( $r=-0.347$ ,  $p<0.01$ ); between commercialised news and trust ( $r=-0.362$ ,  $p<0.01$ ); and between mediatised politics and trust ( $r=-0.295$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Negative correlations can also be reported between commercialised news and perceived network performance ( $r=-0.409$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and between mediatised politics and perceived network performance ( $r=-0.233$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). However, we do not see a significant relation between conflicts and perceived network performance ( $r=0.160$ ,  $p=0.095$ ).

These correlations give us a first indication of the mediatisation on the trust relations and perceived performance in the governance networks. As a first step in our analysis, the correlations broadly support our conceptual model.

#### *SEM results*

Before testing the hypothesised model, we conducted a factor analysis to ascertain that we were working with a valid and reliable measurement model. Although exploratory factor analysis is generally strictly distinguished from confirmatory factor analysis, in practice this distinction is not that clear-cut (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988: 411). The concepts of trust and performance used in this study have been successfully used in earlier studies (Klijn et al., 2010a,b), whereas the other measures (commercialised news and mediatised politics) are newly developed on the basis of scientific literature. We therefore firstly use exploratory factor analysis and secondly confirmatory factor analysis.

For the exploratory factor analysis we used a principle components approach with oblique rotation (see Table 6.7).

In the confirmatory factor analysis, we test the fit of the measurement model of latent factors with our data. The convergent validity and the discriminant validity of the latent factors (commercialised news, mediatised politics, trust, and performance) are examined. Convergent validity is obtained, since the standardised loadings are all significant and above the threshold of 0.4 (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). These indicate how well they measure the latent factors of trust and performance, and range from 0.454 to 0.888. With regard to discriminant validity, we look at the difference between the constrained (covariance set on 1) and the unconstrained model, checking whether we are dealing with different factors or whether it is actually one factor. The unconstrained model must therefore have a significantly lower chi-square than the constrained model (Bagozzi & Phillips, 1982). This can also be seen as a test for common method bias. The chi-square value for the unconstrained model is 138.663 with (df:113); for the constrained model, 338.789 (df:119). The difference is significant at the  $p<0.001$  level. The overall fit of the measurement model was also good.

**Table 6.7** Exploratory factor analysis

	Trust	Perceived network performance	Mediatised politicians	Commercialised news
INN	-.048	.635	-.090	-.113
INT	.002	.761	-.031	-.014
EFF	-.001	.832	-.088	.113
FUT	.002	.680	.011	-.100
RCB	.206	.582	.151	-.103
MAR	-.151	-.039	.809	-.076
BME	.027	-.109	.755	.153
ILL	.017	.044	.831	-.032
NEG	.045	-.145	.041	.843
MIS	-.037	-.043	.038	.803
SEN	.065	-.016	.039	-.854
AGR	.620	.185	.113	.144
BEN	.749	.011	-.046	.041
REL	.741	.115	-.060	-.070
ABS	.530	-.094	.020	-.192
GDW	.787	-.203	-.115	-.051
CON	.650	.170	-.090	-.020

**Note:** The abbreviations for the items can be found in the tables in the conceptualisation

### Results

Bentler and Chou (1987) have shown that as a rule of thumb SEM is acceptable when the sample size to parameter ratio is 5:1 to 10:1, although fit indices may be biased to some extent with smaller samples. Our ratio is within that range. The ratio is calculated by dividing the sample size (N) by the number of parameters in the model.

Figure 6.2 depicts the results of the SEM analysis. The presented model had the best fit. The statistically significant relations ( $p < 0.05$ ) are presented by the arrows in the figure, at which the standardized regression coefficients are reported. Furthermore, the explained variance is noted in the boxes: the independent variables explain 32.8% of trust and 35.1% of the perceived network performance.

Most hypotheses are confirmed in this structural model with latent factors, but not all of them. In this study, we again confirmed the positive relation between trust and perceived network performance ( $\beta = 0.368$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); this supports hypothesis 1. Trust seems to be crucial in achieving results in the governance networks around urban projects. Conflicts between organisations are



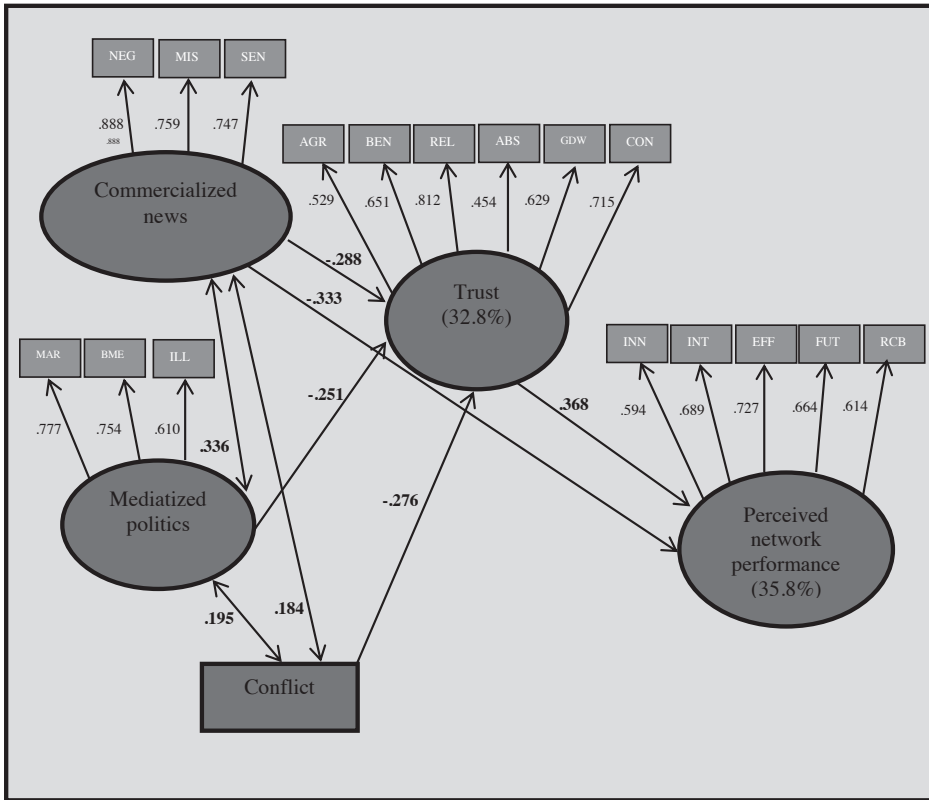


Figure 6.2 Results of SEM analysis

Note: Function estimate means and intercepts used to deal with some missing values. N=141

also negatively associated with trust ( $\beta=-0.276$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), as stated in hypothesis 2a. However, contrary to our expectations, conflicts do not have this negative relation with perceived network performance. We found evidence for hypotheses 3a and 3b: commercialised news on the project is negatively related to trust between the actors ( $\beta=-0.288$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and perceived network performance ( $\beta=-0.333$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Hypothesis 4a is also confirmed; mediatised politics is significantly negatively related to trust ( $\beta=-0.251$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). In contrast, we did not find a significant relation with perceived network performance as predicted in hypothesis 3b. Politicians aiming at media attention for their own interests negatively associate with the crucial trust relations in the network, and only indirectly (through trust) on perceived network performance.

*Model fit:* Several indices are used to evaluate the fit of the model. A good fit would be indicated by CMIN/DF between 1 and 3; TLI and CFI above 0.95; and

**Table 6.8** Fit indices for the model

Model	N	df	CMIN/DF	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	PCLOSE
Full sample	141	128	1.23	0.95	0.96	0.04	0.77

**Table 6.9** Standardized regression coefficients in bootstrapping

	Trust	Perceived network performance
Commercialised news	-.275**	-.353**
Mediatished politics	-.269	
Conflict	-.268**	
Trust		.339*

\*\* **Correlation** is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* **Correlation** is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Bootstrapping with 500 samples.

RMSEA under 0.5 by which PCLOSE is above 0.5 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Hu & Bentler, 1995; Byrne, 2010). The indices of our model are reported in Table 6.8 and demonstrate that the model has a good fit.

*Bootstrapping analysis:* Although skewness of data is ignored by many scholars for different reasons, we wanted to incorporate an analysis for non-normal data since Mardia's estimate of multivariate kurtosis in our analysis is above 5.00 (see Byrne, 2010) Bootstrapping is the principal approach in AMOS to analyse continuous non-normal data (Hox, 2003; Byrne, 2010). However, we should take into account that our sample size without any missing values (N=135) is just below the advised N=150 (Hox, 2003).

In the bootstrap analysis with 500 samples the non-standardized regressions are all significant. Regarding the standardized regression coefficients, which are reported in table 6.9, it appears that the relation from mediatished politics to trust is not significant at the threshold of  $p < 0.05$  ( $p = 0.65$ ). The standardized regression coefficients calculated in the bootstrapping analysis only slightly differ from the results presented earlier.

*Control variables:* We examined one small significant effect of one of our control variables. The more organisations the network contains, the higher the perceived network performance ( $\beta = 0.183$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). However, we must remark here that the effect of size is smaller than any other effect in the model. Chin (1998: xiii) argues that effects smaller than 0.2 should not even be included in AMOS models, because these effect calculations explain at best about 1% of the variance.

*Cross validation of the model:* Besides the evaluation of the model by the goodness-of-fit indices, model validity must be achieved by cross validation of the

**Table 6.10** Results of model cross validation: explained variance in the three samples

Predicted Variable	Full sample	20% sample	80% sample	Difference in R <sup>2</sup> for 20-80% sample
Trust	.328	.223	.272	.051
Perceived network performance	.351	.395	.317	.078

model. The fit measures show how well the parameter estimates are able to match the sample covariances, but they do not tell how well the latent variables are predicted (Chin, 1998: xiii). Cross validation tests whether the explained variance in the sample can also be found in other samples. Because there is no independent sample available, we split the sample into two subsamples (Jöreskog, 1993). The cross validation resulted in generally small differences in the explained variance, and we therefore evaluate the validation of our model positively (see Table 6.10).

## 6.5 CONCLUSION

We have highlighted a disregarded topic in the academic discussion on governance networks: mediatisation. We studied the influence of media logic, through commercialised news and mediatised politics, on network governance.

The study does have some limitations. Our study is based on perceptual measures and is cross-sectional: our concepts are based on the perceptions of the leading public manager within the networks at one point in time. We therefore should be careful making generalisations. Especially self-reported data on performance has some drawbacks, particularly when only reported on one level (see Provan & Milward, 2001), we therefore explicitly use the term ‘perceived network performance’. Longitudinal case studies on networks could provide data on the development of performance, measured at different levels. Such an approach could also contribute in studying the feedback mechanisms between the variables in our model. Although we draw unidirectional causal paths in our model, the relations are probably more dynamic in practice. Another limitation of our study is the relatively small number of respondents (N=141) for the AMOS analysis we performed, particularly for the bootstrapping analysis. However, we believe that, within the constraints of this research, we can draw meaningful conclusions.

Our findings show that there is variation in the degree to which commercialised news reporting and mediatised politics exist in the networks around the urban spatial projects researched. Commercialised news reporting is some-

what more common than mediatised politics. Claims about the mediatisation of politics are often done in the context of elections or national policy issues, politics in the context of urban governance networks seems to be less mediatised, our study shows. This might be explained by the character of governance networks in which politicians are dependent on other actors in the network. To be involved in the project, building on collaboration and trust are more rewarding and needed in negotiating processes, than being covered in media. Another explanation might be that politicians on a more local level have not made such a shift in their adaptation to the media and their logic, practising PR and news management strategies, as is described for national politicians (Davis, 2002; Cook, 2005).

This study at least shows that mediatisation is a relevant aspect to include in network research. When news reports are more commercialised and politicians are mainly focused on their self-image in media, this is significantly negatively related to trust and perceived network performance.

Interestingly, we find a direct effect of commercialised news on performance but not of mediatised politics. Mediatised politics has an impact only on the level of trust, but, the effect is not significant in the bootstrapping analysis. Although we should be a bit careful explaining this, it does seem to indicate that the impact of politicians on network governance processes might not be as large as we would expect given their prominent position in the political system. These findings are consistent with an earlier study in which stakeholder involvement did have a significant impact on perceived network performance, whereas the involvement of representative bodies did not (Edelenbos et al., 2010).

Studying the mediatisation of network governance corrects the sometimes technocratic character of network research. Many studies, and certainly in the US, are strongly focused toward technical elements within management and performance. This disregards that governance networks are political in nature and address public issues that are discussed in media. Mediatised news realities are relevant for governance networks as they affect the playground of the negotiations between the (political) actors, which make some of the actors change their tactical strategies.

At the same time, we introduce a new managerial question into network research. As news reports can affect network governance, how do managers deal with news? Should they look for new managerial strategies? Communication strategies such as branding and public relations might be very important in this regard. Thus, adding dimensions of mediatisation both broadens the discussion and research about governance networks and introduces new research questions.



# III Mediatised instruments for strategic communication

Media and their logic can thus affect the course of events in and the content of governance processes. But to fulfil their functions media need information; they need input to create their news reports. As discussed, news media are used as an instrument for strategic communication. Journalists are called and emailed by actors who want to use the media to communicate to a larger public. However, communication through media implies dealing with media logic. The third research question is therefore about how actors within governance networks make use of media logic characteristics in their communication strategies. This question will be addressed in **Chapter 7**.

Positive publicity about governance processes is important to legitimise decisions, to gain social support, create trust in its performance and to protect the governance process from external disturbances. In four cases of public

infrastructure in the Netherlands, 10 spokespersons and 12 journalists were interviewed. Spokespersons bridge the logic of network governance and media logic in their activities (cf. Tenscher, 2004). Many activities of spokespersons are focused on adapting information to media logic, as discussed in many studies (Curtin, 1999; Philips, 2002; Tenscher, 2004; Cook, 2005; Bennett, 2009). However, a complicating factor in relation to governance networks is the variation in perceptions and attitudes on the part of network actors. Strategic communication to gain positive publicity about governance processes therefore not only involves a translation of the content and process of policy processes in the media arena, but also a translation within the network. This also implies a transformation of practices within the governance network (cf. Van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2014).

Network actors are requested to include proactive news media com-

munication activities in their regular jobs. Moreover, network actors need to commit to a coherent, uniform communication strategy, which is ideally centralised. Such uniform and centralised communication strategy sharply contrasts with the usual practice within governance networks, which are heterogeneous and decentralised by their very nature. Actors thus not only make compromises in terms of content to suit media logic, but also in order to create a coherent image.

In practice, many of the spokespersons organise pseudo-events to which journalists and other stakeholders are invited. At these events, journalists can observe the progress of the building process and they can speak not only with the spokespersons but also with relevant experts in the project and with public authorities. This is an easy path to news reports about the policy implementation; pictures can be taken and relevant news sources are arranged. In two cases this tactic is frequently applied by spokespersons, leading to much free publicity. In one case they sometimes apply such a proactive strategy and in the last case they do not have much experience with such a strategy. This is an indication that the communication around such infrastructure projects has increasingly become professionalised through the activities of spokespersons, but not in all network settings.

A normative question on the basis of these findings is to what extent the media communication contributes to democratic values (cf. van Rooij & Aarts, 2014). Spokespersons' activities are largely about making use of media logic characteristics in order to gain positive publicity, which is criticised by many scholars (e.g. Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Davis, 2002; Bennett, 2009). But spokespersons in network settings do more than that, because they represent a network of actors and sometimes controversial policy measures. Communication within the network is just as important as communication in media, and communication with other stakeholders, such as surrounding communities, is equally crucial.

Communication within the governance network and other stakeholders is essential from a democratic perspective, but is also necessary on pragmatic grounds. As discussed, in the other studies outside actors such as citizen groups appeared to be important news sources for journalists because they provide for some heated criticism. Communication with stakeholders as well as other actors could be a proactive measure to prevent these actors from expressing their criticism in media. Actors within the network, responsible for external communication, should be the first contact to address complaints to.





# Chapter 7

**Bridging the gap between mediatised politics and governance processes. About boundary spanning spokespersons who create positive publicity around policies.**

This article has been submitted to *Administration and Society* and can be referred to as: Korthagen, I.A. (under review). Bridging the gap between mediatised politics and governance processes. About boundary spanning spokespersons who create positive publicity around policies.



## 7.1 BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN MEDIATISED POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE PROCESSES

A broadening gap exists between politics visible in news media and actual political decision-making in complex policy processes which is often more or less invisible (Papadopoulos, 2012). Visible politics is a pale shadow of the governance processes including public, private and societal actors that take place more or less backstage. Hajer (2009: 178) claims that whereas classical-modernist politics is strong in its mediatised representation it is weak in problem closure; conversely, network governance is potentially strong in problem closure but weak in its representation. But news media not only zoom in on political authorities, they also have a commercial preference for conflicts, scandals and policy failures (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Patterson, 2000; Bennett, 2009; Hajer, 2009; Flinders, 2011). In this respect, it is not surprising that Klijn, Van Twist, Van der Steen and Jeffares (2014) find that a significant group of public managers see media as an external disturbance to what is important in their work.

However, the supposition that governing actors are powerless in a mediatised context is a false one (Hajer, 2009: 41; Cook, 2005). Admittedly, in public administration little attention has been given to subjects as how governmental organisations can deal with media and how media communication can be used to advance the work of actors within governance processes (Lee, 2008; Boin & Christensen, 2008; Thorbjørnsrud, Figenschou & Ihlen, 2014; Laursen & Valentini, 2014). But that does not imply that it is impossible. Moreover, media communication is important in governance, as positive news-media coverage can increase public support for policy decisions as well as trust in the performance of governance networks. However, gaining positive publicity in a network setting including different actors with varying views and interests is difficult, since this complicates the development and execution of a coherent media communication strategy. And critical and sensational news media questioning the capabilities of governmental authorities need to be addressed.

Spokespersons within governance networks deal with these challenges. In this article we examine *how spokesperson bridge the contrasting logics of media and network governance to create positive publicity*. To bridge the logics spokespersons translate the diverging perspectives, activities and interests of network actors into a coherent media communication strategy. Spokespersons thereby manage relations with the environment (cf. Ankney & Curtin, 2002). Moreover, positive publicity that is gained through their activities contributes to the long-term survival of the network (cf. Yan & Louis, 1999; Lee, 2008). In other words, spokespersons in governance networks seem to perform boundary spanning activities. To analyse activities of spokespersons we therefore applied the

boundary spanning model of often cited<sup>23</sup> and founding scholars Tushman and Scanlan (1981), yet reversely.

We have examined the boundary spanning activities of spokespersons in in-depth interviews with ten spokespersons and twelve journalists, which we analysed through qualitative coding in Atlas.ti. For triangulation purposes the interviews are nested in four cases in which public infrastructure is implemented. Implementation of infrastructure policies is typically organised in governance networks, characterised by divided tasks and responsibilities among not only public but also semi-public and private actors (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004). Furthermore, public infrastructure policies are generally prestigious projects important within the ‘permanent campaigns’ of politicians (Hecló, 2000). These cases thus suit our aims of studying how the logic of network governance and media logic can be bridged in order to gain positive publicity.

We proceed this article by a theoretical framework in which the concept of boundary spanning is discussed in the context of media communication. In the subsequent section, the interview data and data analysis technique is discussed. The article continues with a discussion of the findings and ends with conclusions and discussion.

## 7.2 SPANNING THE NETWORK – MEDIA BOUNDARY TO GAIN POSITIVE PUBLICITY

Negative media coverage can be an ‘environmental disruption’ for the governance network which can be prevented or at least moderated by effective, proactive dealing with the media (cf. Yan & Louis, 1999; Boin & Christensen, 2008). In and through media actors in governance attempt to achieve and maintain public support and legitimacy for policies implemented (Tresch, 2009; Lee, 2008). The ability to effectively communicate through news media is thus an important aspect of governing (Cook, 2005). Particularly in complex and fragmented societies, “government is more difficult, popular support is more contingent and effective communication is more vital” (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995: 2). An illustration of this importance is the fact that governmental organisations in different liberal democracies spend more and more money on their public communication (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Tenscher, 2004; Cook, 2005; Neijens & Smit, 2006; Bennett, 2009).

The importance of being able to communicate through media can be seen in the perspective of mediatisation (as Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Hjarvard, 2008;

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23. Google Scholar reports 772 citations, December 7th 2014

Hajer, 2009; Esser & Matthes, 2013, Laursen & Valentini, 2014). While different actors, collectives and institutions have become dependent on mass media in their central functions, their actions are shaped by the media logic (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Thorbjørnsrud et al., 2014). Actors adapt their behaviour to requirements of news media on form and substance, which are based on commercial goals of audience maximisation (Landerer, 2013). Mediatisation is also claimed to be consequential in the context of governance networks (Hajer, 2009; Flinders, 2011; Korthagen & Klijn, 2014).

The commercial news-media logic and the logic of network governance are however hard to combine (see Esser & Matthes, 2013). Whereas news media often focus on conflicts and sensationalism (Patterson, 2000; Bennett, 2009; Korthagen, 2014), network actors need to build trust relations and collaborate because of their interdependencies in relation to problem solving (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Moreover, news media tend to concentrate on political authorities' actions and personal efforts (Hajer, 2009) and rapid responses (Esser & Matthes, 2013), while network actors necessarily strive for efforts of public, societal and private actors and collective decision-making in the long term (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004; Esser & Matthes, 2013). Hence, bridging these logics of media and governance networks involves considerable effort. To study the activities of spokesperson we use the concept of boundary spanning.

#### *Boundary spanning activities of spokespersons*

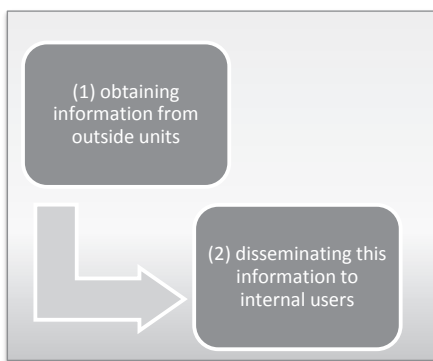
Boundary spanning activities are about the management of relations and interactions with the environment of the organisation (Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Springston & Leichty, 1994; Yan & Louis, 1999; Van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2014). Boundary spanning activities are meant to overcome communication obstacles between internal and external actors, due to specialisation and to local norms, values and languages. Tushman and Scanlan (1981: 291-292) explain boundary spanning as follows: "communication across organisational boundaries requires learning the local coding schemes and languages as well as specialised conceptual frameworks. Boundaries can be spanned effectively only by individuals who understand the coding schemes are attuned to the contextual information on both sides of the boundary, enabling them to search out relevant information on one side and disseminate it on the other".

Aldrich and Herker (1977) distinguish two classes of functions performed by boundary roles: information processing and external representation. Information processing involves the selection, transmission and interpretation of information from the environment. External representation includes maintaining the organisational image, enhancing its social legitimacy and influencing the

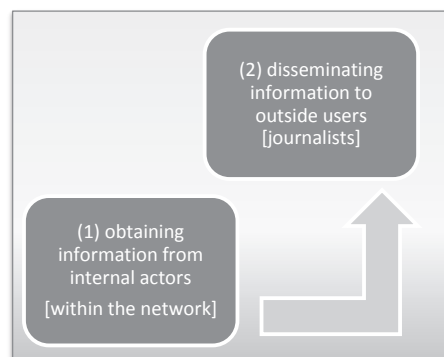
behaviour of target groups. However, the activities within external representation are much more one-sided than in the information processing function, Aldrich and Herker (1977) argue. This is comparable with the view of Tushman and Scanlan (1981) who claim that external communication only involves a one-step information flow and boundary spanning a two-step information flow. The two steps of a boundary spanner are (1) obtaining information from outside units and (2) disseminating this information to internal users (Tushman & Scanlan, 1981). According to them external communication would only involve the one-step information flow of representation. ‘External communication stars’ would have strong linkages externally but not internally (Tushman & Scanlan, 1981: 292,301).

In this study we show that particularly the network setting in which policies are realised requires a two-step flow of activities that bridge the logic of governance networks and media logic. The steps are only taken in the reversed order, as is illustrated by figures 7.1a and 7.1b. Where boundary spanners in the model of Tushman and Scanlan (1981) firstly obtain external information and, secondly, disseminate this information internally (figure 7.1a); boundary spanners in our model firstly obtain internal information and afterwards disseminate this information externally (figure 7.1b). At the same time, in both models boundary spanners are “negotiating the interactions between organisation and environment in order to realise a better fit, which often also means that practices of involved organisations/systems are transformed” (Van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2014: 6).

In a governance setting spokespersons have to connect and include varying organisational views and interests before they can translate information



**Figure 7.1a** Boundary spanning model Tushman and Scanlan (1981)



**Figure 7.1b** Boundary spanning model for spokespersons

into media communication. To span the network – media boundary means to understand, discuss, collect and translate information from different network actors and translating it into coherent newsworthy storylines for journalists. In the two steps we distinguish actor-related and message-related activities (cf. Tenscher, 2004):

(1) Obtaining information from network actors:

- a. *Message-related activities*: creating, discussing and reconciling a coherent media communication strategy
- b. *Actor-related activities*: building, maintaining and intensifying relations with network actors

(2) Disseminating information to journalists:

- a. *Message-related activities*: supplying information subsidies, adapting to media logic
- b. *Actor-related activities*: to build, maintain and intensify relations with journalists

Below we give some theoretical starting points for the analysis of the specific activities of spokespersons within governance networks around policy implementation.

### **(1) Obtaining information from network actors**

Many policies are formed and implemented in a network of public, semi-public, private and societal actors, such as representatives of municipalities, provinces, private enterprises and interest groups (Kickert et al., 1997; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004; Ansell & Gash, 2008; Hajer, 2009; Van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2014). The network actors do not have the production resources, expertise or money on their own to realise policies, which makes them interdependent. At the same time, although they more or less share a common goal, the actors can have diverging and even discordant views, values and interests regarding the implementation of the policy goal. After all, they have different roles in the implementation network, being one of the ordering parties, contractors or politicians.

An important message-related activity is to gather information about the activities of the different network actors. The internal communication system is essential to underpin an effective external media communication programme (cf. Lee, 2008: 15). Furthermore, the media communication strategy should connect the different actors. This might be achieved by concentrating on core values and (emotional) meaning related to the implementation of the policies that are or will be shared among the actors and would be effective in media

communication, as Eshuis and Klijn (2012) describe regarding brands in governance and public management.

Network actors might have different attitudes toward media and corresponding preferences for media strategies. Klijn et al. (2014) empirically show three such attitudes among public managers: actors who feel they need to adapt to the media logic; ‘communicators’ who feel their message will be covered in news media regardless of the ‘fatalists’ who think that media cannot be influenced at all. Spokesperson not only face the task of managing these different attitudes of network actors, but also of collaborating with spokespersons from different network organisations.

Spokespersons are thus expected to develop durable relations with the different network actors to gain information about their work, to connect them and involve them in one coherent media communication strategy.

## **(2) Disseminating information to journalists**

As a second step, spokespersons will accommodate the coherent media strategy to the news-media logic. Pieces of information are made easily accessible to journalists, which are referred to as ‘information subsidies’ (Gandy, 1982). “Faced with time constraints, and the need to produce stories that will win publication, journalists will attend to, and make use of, subsidized information that is of a type and form that will achieve that goal. By reducing the costs faced by journalists in satisfying their organisational requirements, the subsidy giver increases the probability that the subsidized information will be used” (Gandy, 1982: 62). Press releases, press conferences, pre-arranged interviews and press tours are examples of these information subsidies which are nowadays fully integrated into the process of news production (Davis, 2002).

Attractive framing is very important for the success of information subsidies. Media want a good story, not just good information. By dramatising, polarising, personalising and visualising the message spokespersons adapt to the media logic, which contributes to the success of shaping news content (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Tenscher, 2004; Hjarvard, 2008; Landerer, 2013; Laursen & Valentini, 2014). When information subsidies contain news value and are offered in a news style, they can pass almost unimpeded through journalistic gatekeepers (Curtin, 1999).

Interpersonal relations between spokespersons and journalists might also be decisive in this regard (Tenscher, 2004; Neijens & Smit, 2006; Laursen & Valentini, 2014), as they need each other. Spokespersons need journalists to spread the public message; journalists need spokespersons as they are important news sources. Phillips (2002: 233) describes their relationship as “one of favors and

paybacks, guarded by mutual respect”. Journalists and spokespersons interact and collaborate while sharing norms of fairness, objectivity, behavioural propriety (such as anonymity of sources and confidences of off-the-record-disclosures) and a framework of news values (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995). At the same time, the capacity of journalists and spokespersons to exchange resources is constrained by guidelines belonging to their roles and institutions (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Davis, 2009).

Besides making information newsworthy and easily accessible for journalists, spokespersons are thus expected to build relationships with journalists.

### 7.3 METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

Through the analysis of in-depth interviews with spokespersons and journalists the boundary spanning activities that contribute to positive publicity are studied.

#### *In-depth interviews*

The interviews are nested in four cases of large infrastructure projects in the Netherlands. The cases include: a new subway line, a new passageway for a large highway, a new train and bus station and part of a high-speed train trajectory and high-speed trains. The projects are in the implementation phase during the period 2009-2013, which was the scope for this study. The projects received a considerable amount of media attention, in regional as well as in national media; in newspapers as well as on television.

The ten spokespersons that had been interviewed work for the project organisation (4), the responsible aldermen (3) or one of the semi-public organisations involved (3). The twelve journalists that had been interviewed regularly reported on the project and work for national media (5) or regional media (6) (for newspapers (8) or television broadcasters (3))<sup>24</sup>. In two cases two spokespersons insisted to be interviewed together. At one medium another journalist joined the interview. Having interviewed spokespersons that represent different organisations in the implementation network as well as several journalists within the cases serves as a triangulation of sources, to obtain more valid and reliable results in our study<sup>25</sup>. In addition, documents such as press releases and media reports were analysed. Some of the interviewees preferred to be anonymous

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24. The interviewed journalists work for Algemeen Dagblad; Metro (TMG); NOS journaal; NRC Handelsblad; de Volkskrant; het Parool; AD Rotterdams Dagblad; de Limburger, de Gelderlander; L1; Omroep Gelderland

25. In one of the cases a few spokespersons refused to be interviewed, because a parliamentary survey will be held on the project; in this case less triangulation was possible.



respondents, which is why they are described by a number and the cases with a letter, see table 7.1.

The in-depth interviews mostly took about an hour (mean is 67 minutes), but varied from 37 till 86 minutes. A semi-structured interview format was used that contained more general questions about *role perception*; frames and events within *message-related activities*; quality and quantity of *relations* between spokespersons and journalists; (coherence of) *media communication strategies of different actors* in the case; as well as more specific questions about four to five important news events in the project (chronologically ordered) about *news sources*; (the coherence of) *message-related strategies*, *mutual contacts* between spokespersons and journalists at that moment, *competing images*, requirements from the *editor* and *time pressure*. In most cases, the news events were discussed using news reports from the journalists that had been interviewed.

#### *Data analysis*

The interviews have been fully transcribed and analysed through qualitative content analysis using computer software Atlas.ti 7. Through coding analysis the data can be managed, explored and interpreted (Boeije, 2010). Some categorisation and conceptualisation was done beforehand on the basis of theory. During the coding process new categories and concepts were added. We thus combined axial coding with open coding to systematically structure and analyse our qualitative data (Boeije, 2010). In this analysis an average of 89 codes were

**Table 7.1** The interviewees nested in the four cases.

Case	Spokespersons	Journalists
A	I	I
	II	II
	III	III
		IV
B	IV	V
	V	VI
		VII
C	VI	VIII
	VII	IX
		X
D	VIII	XI
	IX	XII
	X	

attached to interviews. This varied from 57 to 122 coded fragments per interview. Some fragments were coded with multiple codes.

Important codes are (between brackets is the number of coded fragments): news sources (149); actor-related activities (116); information subsidies (107); effects of news management on news reporting (97); journalistic norms (91); relations with stakeholders (70); background knowledge of journalist (66); coherence between communication strategies (62); personal relations between spokespersons and journalists (57); message-related activities (53); pseudo-events (48); knowing journalistic needs (47); images (47); competing interests of network actors (44); organisational support of network actors for the media communication (43); time pressure for journalists (40); framing (39); correction of media reporting (37); adaptation to media logic (27); reciprocity (21).

## **7.4 FINDINGS: ACTIVITIES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO POSITIVE PUBLICITY**

The findings are arranged by the two-step information flow of boundary spanning activities, as has been discussed in the theoretical section and illustrated in figure 1b. Message-related and actor-related activities are distinguished in both steps.

### **Step 1a: obtaining information from network actors by message-related activities**

The first step is to internally obtain information from network actors before it can be moulded into mediagenic information. This involves message-related activities as creating and discussing a coherent communication strategy, handling competing interests of network actors and getting informed about the progress of the project.

#### *Coherence*

As various parties are involved in the infrastructure projects with different roles and responsibilities a coherent communication strategy is far from self-evident. Different spokespersons and varying communication roles of network actors can further complicate a strong media communication strategy from the network. While it is common for network actors to have varying views and interests in the governance process, these do not add up to a strong media communication strategy.

When organisations only feel responsible for communicating about their own tasks and not about common goals this result in a lack of coherence: different

messages are then communicated about the governance process, which might be conflicting. Spokesperson VII, for instance, does clearly separate his communication responsibilities from the others: *'We are not the party that ultimately needs to say something about that. That is about the order of the ministry. So the ministry needs to say something about that. You see, it is a difficult and complex dossier, which results in confusion. (...) We sometimes even receive the accusation via mail or telephone: "You with those trains..." To be clear: we do not own any trains'*. Such separated media communication tasks make it difficult to get a full coherent picture of the project for journalists. Journalist VIII reporting on the project above concludes: *'This was, in retrospect, a complicated dossier, also taken into account all the different interests involved (...)'*. Moreover, journalists will more easily get a grasp on differences and conflicts between network actors, which does not contribute to positive publicity.

An alternative strategy is therefore to organise the media communication about the infrastructure project in one organisation. Yet, to organise the external communication in one organisation, representing an implementation network of actors, is quite special. Spokesperson V argues: *'That is quite a unique position and you can sometimes criticise it: should you organise the communication of the client and the supplier that close to each other (...), with dissimilar communication responsibilities? It is great for the outside world however, because there is only one project and that is [name project] about which they want to know everything'*. The centralisation of the media communication makes it easier to communicate coherently externally.

Prerequisite for such centralisation is that other network actors trust the judgemental capacities of the organisation that has the responsibility for the media communication. Particularly political authorities involved as well as their spokespersons should trust the spokespersons of the overall governance process. As spokesperson II states: *'We need to be able to place a message immediately, not that an alderman first needs to look at the text. (...) So you need the trust and you need a short communication line to his spokesperson. That's very important, definitely online'*.

Activities that contribute to a strong, coherent communication strategy are thus to largely centralise the media communication within one organisation involved in the network and to have many meetings for consultation and agreement around common goals and messages. Adapting to media's logic thus not only involves mediagenic framing of information about the governance process, but also organising media communication centrally, having one spokesperson that can tell journalists 'everything' about the project.

*Handling competing interests*

Although a coherent strategy might be the overarching goal of all network actors, during the process there can still be some competing interests spokespersons have to deal with. Like spokesperson X states: *'Everyone wants the same, namely social support to carry out the work. You just represent slightly different perspectives and need to discuss whether something happens or not'*. For instance, project communication goals and political communication goals can differ, as spokesperson III reports: *'It can sometimes be: who brings what news? (...) They have a director that restored the order there. I have an alderman who restored the order politically, and he is actually the head of that director.'* and *'They concentrate on the press, but there is also the city council that is superior, also to the aldermen and the mayor, in a democracy. Then I need to say: "not a press release, because we have to inform the Council first"'*.

Commitment and trust from the different network actors are needed to handle diverging interests. Centralisation of the communication contributes to this as well, spokesperson IV explains: *'Since we have a joint team for communication, we see that this discussion [about conflicting interests] is gone. Beforehand, I endlessly talked to explain that it can never be the case that the contractor gets a good grade for his performance from the environment and the client fails or conversely, that will simply never happen. You just share a wonderful grade or you fail jointly'*.

Negotiating competing interests as well as making clear that the common communication goal for this project should be more important than the individual organisational communication goals of the network actors are thus also important message-related activities of spokespersons.

*Getting informed*

The spokespersons attentively follow developments in the infrastructure project, to look for possible news items. Spokesperson I describes: *'every week or every two weeks, we have consultations on "What is the progress of the construction?". Everyone tells something about his work and then I hear things. (...) In no-time you have a year full of milestones and special moments. (...) What I want to say with this though, you need your internal information provision to be at least as good as your external information provision'*.

Hence, one of the most crucial activities is getting informed on the progress within the work of network actors in order to create and organise future media moments.

## Step 1b: obtaining information from network actors by actor-related activities

Besides linking information into a coherent media communication strategy by message-related activities, spokespersons employ actor-related activities to get cooperation of network actors.

### *Attitudes toward media*

The media communication strategy of governance networks benefits from network actors that approach the media with a positive and proactive attitude, spokespersons argue. As spokesperson IV tells: *'you need the organisations on board. You need managers, executives and directors and they are sometimes people with a fairly old-fashioned or traditional approach that say "on request, we will explain it"'*. The spokesperson therefore aims to stimulate a positive, proactive approach.

It helps when network actors just have experienced some positive media attention for their work, spokesperson I sketches: *'So I call the guy, he says, "Well, the press, that's what I detest. I really don't want them at my work floor," I say, "Well, I'm actually appointed to get the press on the work floor and I have very good experiences with them. Because if you are willing to give a journalist valuable information then you also get something in return. (...) In the end these guys also began to see these opportunities, that not every piece in the newspaper was negative or worthless. So when they realised that, they opened up the gates for our boats to go [through the construction site]. Well, fantastic pieces in the newspaper.'*

Developing positive, proactive attitudes of network actors toward media contributes to a strong media communication strategy. Changing organisational practices is needed since spokespersons need network actors to cooperate, such as when journalists want information from experts.

## Media performances of network actors

For journalists it is much more interesting to speak with directors, constructors and builders than with the spokespersons. Spokesperson IV therefore has the following media communication strategy: *'If we have a press briefing or a press visit on location, then we prefer construction workers to do the talking as much as possible'*. Most journalists appreciate this. Journalist VII, reporting on the project spokesperson IV works for, states: *'I also think that that's a great advantage of [name spokesperson], she always gets people on the ground there in person, not just the project manager but if we are at such a construction site, then also the supervisor comes by. And I don't get the feeling that he is briefed in advance about what he can and cannot say'*.

Journalist IV similarly mentions experts, who do the actual work on the ground, as his most important news sources: *'particularly the technical people who*

do the job. A tunnel drilling engineer, the guy with the tattoos, who drills all over the world, a commander of the immersion of the tunnel sections, they were the most interesting'. All these news sources of journalist IV were facilitated by spokesperson I and II. About the tunnel drilling engineer spokesperson I says: 'Look, one is better than the other. We had that [name], one of the main drillers, guy with all the tattoos. That's a natural. That guy is so real and unique, and he fits perfectly in our communication strategy of giving the construction work a human face'.

So, facilitating contacts with network actors that do the job contributes to strong media communication. Journalists appreciate the talks with experts and report their stories. This results in a coherent media communication strategy: messages are not only underlined by the spokesperson, but also by other network actors. Contact between these network actors and journalists are however facilitated by spokespersons.

#### *Relations with other stakeholders*

All spokespersons that have been interviewed emphasise that media communication should be combined with broader environmental communication. Well-organised direct communication toward stakeholders contributes to gaining positive public image. Spokesperson IV argues: 'Press communication is so much easier when your communications and information toward the neighbourhood is very good. (...) I think it's mostly that mix of communication, purchasing marketing items in mass media, central external communication, being in contact with people in the neighbourhood: that total package ensures that the [positive] atmosphere is as it is now'.

Good relations with the environment can prevent or soften adversarial sounds in media. Public adversaries challenge positive publicity. In one of the cases a citizen group has dominated regional news reports for quite a long time. In that situation journalists consult the public organisation only to hear the other side, spokesperson VI claims: 'Usually it [our story] is then confronted with [the stories of] the people that are negative. (...) Newspapers then only speak with people who have complaints, who go all out, and subsequently my statements are placed'. The journalist working for a regional newspaper that reports on this project indeed mentions local residents as being his most important news sources.

All spokespersons explained that they have several platforms to communicate with external stakeholders. In addition to news media they use websites, social media, newsletters, posters and watch-towers at the construction side to disseminate their information to external stakeholders.

## Step 2a: disseminating information to journalists by message-related activities

In step 1 we described message-related and actor-related activities obtaining information from the network. We discussed activities of managing a coherent media strategy which implies the centralisation of media communication within governance networks, stimulating proactive and positive attitudes of network actors toward media and the investment in relations with other stakeholders. In the subsequent section we describe activities in which information is disseminated to journalists. This step includes the translation of information in mediagenic stories. Moreover, information is made easily available for journalists – providing information subsidies –, often via pseudo-events.

### *Messages and framing*

Spokespersons transform messages so the framing fits in media logic characteristics such as human interest, dramatisation and personalisation. A message about a drilling operation in case A, for instance, has been translated into a story about the craftsman that performs the drilling. This translation resulted into *'A very large article in the newspaper de Volkskrant, (...) For the first time we saw that that person, that craftsman, can also be described as a hero, even stronger than we had expected, had dared hope. (...) That spread in the Volkskrant, also led to a number of other journalists saying: Wow, we also want to see that, and can we also speak with him?'*, spokesperson II tells.

Apparent from the success of the storyline about the craftsmen, some journalists seem to like and even prefer stories that are made newsworthy, adapted to the media logic. As journalist VIII: *'What we, from the perspective of the newspaper, have noticed is that organisations who contact us have become more professional. Or at least more mediagenic. You shouldn't come with a thick report with figures, because that doesn't sell it toward us. "Sell" sounds a bit weird, present. How do you present news to us? It must be something usable'*.

Key is to make the various developments in the project interesting for journalists, spokesperson I describes: *'Journalists must feel like there is another element, another aspect. (...) In this case, yes, we have had like a hundred thousand breakthroughs. Only, this is the very very last. (...) And the funny thing is, I have framed it as "the last connection, now the tunnel is really open. And if you would like, you virtually would be able to walk through it from North to South" (...) So that was again picked up as news'*. A week later a the Metro newspaper had a front page that people could actually walk from North to South. Apparently the spokesperson had succeeded in again making that moment mediagenic.

The translation of the information on the progress of the implementation into mediagenic news stories is thus a crucial message-related activity of spokespersons, which contributes to positive publicity.

*Information subsidies: many pseudo-events*

The majority of the spokespersons that have been interviewed provide lots of information subsidies, such as press releases, press conferences, short-films or animations, up-to-date information on their website and tweets and they have organised many construction site visits for journalists.

Spokespersons organise (pseudo-)events around milestones in the project development. When parts of the construction work are finished or a 'special'/ 'outstanding' part of the construction work will be done, they invite journalists and other stakeholders to take a look and get informed on the progress. *'Sometimes, those moments are very natural. Then, you're a step further in the process, there is such a moment. It may also be that you feel like well it has been silent for a long time. Although quite a lot is happening, we have little communicated externally and we should be looking for a reason. So for instance that we sign a contract, or they are concreting a large surface or something is finished – which can be something quite small –, but then we invite the press'*, spokesperson IX explains.

For journalists one important task is to select from the many information subsidies they receive during a project. This selectivity is actually part of the journalistic autonomy, as is illustrated by the statement of journalist I: *'We have tried to dose, thus not every news fact of the spokesperson, not every press release about a breakthrough or an important step in the construction, a turning point or an important moment. We decide whether we come'*. Despite this journalistic selectivity many information subsidies lead to news reports.

Journalists need different sorts of news input per day; they use information subsidies for varying reasons. It may be a newsworthy event, a funny event or an event with striking images. The same journalist I, working for television explained why he covered a certain event: *'That tunnel was finished and that is of course a striking image. So that's also an argument to make an item'*. Also in other interviews striking images of construction sites form an important reason to cover the event, as journalist XII motivates her news decision to cover the placing of a bridge for cyclists: *'Because it is really spectacular. I think that we have filmed the whole operation and showed it live on the Internet broadcast and an accelerated version [on television]. These are things you can almost never see'*.

Most of the journalists that have been interviewed are quite pleased with the way spokespersons provide them with information at the pseudo-events and they use it for their news items. Journalist VII reflects on such construction site



visits: *'You can talk a lot about the theory, but if you are on the construction site, then you only really see, oh that's how it works, that's what's going on and how they build it. That is very useful'*. Or, as journalist XI argues, it is a good opportunity to stay in touch with key actors within the project: *'Look, the moment that they search for positive publicity, is for me the moment to talk with the project leader or project manager, people that are normally protected, but then under the charge of a spokesperson they walk with me and we can have a short conversation, you keep in touch.'*

Providing information subsidies increases the chances for positive news reporting, that support your communication strategy. As spokesperson II explains: *'At the time that you're the first, you're the first building block for a story of a journalist. (...) that usually gets a more important place in a report than when the journalist confronts you with a story'*.

Otherwise, other sources will be providing the first building blocks. Three of the twelve journalists that have been interviewed prefer other news sources to initiate the news story; citizens, rival companies, builders or other anonymous sources. As journalist III: *'I mainly look for the dirt, the bad news. I rather look for news that a municipality does not want to publicly share. Whatever they themselves publicly communicate I find less interesting'*. In that case the rebuttal of the public organisation is only heard as the other side, which results often just in a short fragment in the news report. Journalist II states: *'I rather give much more room for the other side [the project organisation]. But in this case the news and the explanation is more important. For the rebuttal remains only two or three sentences. This is where the frustration of the spokesperson comes from, I think'*.

But although these journalists are reluctant to use information subsidies, at the same time, colleague-journalists, even within the same medium, use the information subsidies because of the need for news and the felt relevance, journalist III 'admits': *'These do concern technical masterpieces and many readers are interested in that. Colleagues of mine make these reports. It's not my style, but we bring it big. From time to time we have large reports'*.

#### *Keeping journalists up-to date*

The information subsidies serve to keep journalists up-to-date about the progress of the project. Information subsidies thereby also direct journalistic interpretations of future events. Spokesperson IV therefore ascribes differences in interpretation of events to the knowledge journalists have about the project. *'The main difference between national media that know little of [name project] and the local media is that they can interpret that [the bulge] much better. The bulge was a result of a bore. National media even said, because of the word bore: "so you are drilling a tunnel and the drilling of the tunnel failed". They freely associate on the event and greatly*

*exaggerate*'. This is claimed by most of the other spokespersons that have been interviewed. It is therefore important to take journalist along with you and to keep them up-to-date although this will not always directly result in free publicity. Also journalists confirm the importance of regularly being updated, as journalist VII, who covers the project of the above quoted spokesperson IV: *'They regularly organise press conferences, until recently once every month (...) I think that is very important, since it keeps you informed'*.

Hence, message-related activities, as providing many information subsidies contributes to positive publicity. Although some journalists are quite reluctant to use the provided information by the spokesperson, many journalists (even colleagues within the same medium) use the information in their news reports because it fits in their medium. At least, it keeps journalists informed.

## **Step 2b: disseminating information to journalists by actor-related activities**

Having relations with journalists increases the chances of getting information across in news media. Actor-related activities are thus focused on relations between spokespersons and journalists.

### *Personal relations*

Relations between spokespersons and journalists are partly built through personal conversations, also talking about other things than work. As spokesperson I describes: *'So I invited [name of a journalist] once to chat, just for a nice conversation, to meet each other. (...) This led to another appointment at the pub, drinking beers together. I like that, drinking beers with journalists'*. Spokespersons as well as journalists benefit from short communication lines. Small talks at news events as well as being available for journalist as a spokesperson contribute to the relationship. Journalist IV that was referred to by the spokesperson in the quote above argued: *'They gave the impression that they speak frankly. And they were always available, they never hide. Even if they were on holidays for winter sports, [name spokesperson] answered the telephone call on the mountain in the snow'*.

Although the contact is partly based on the personal connection between the spokesperson and the journalist, it is of course a connection to pursue their own business goals (positive publicity versus saleable and independent news). That is why journalist II argued that he never has a true friendship with a spokesperson: *'Someone is called a befriended journalist when people get along with each other, when there is confidence. Everything is about trust for me. You must be able to look each other in the eyes and there has to be trust.'* The personal connection and trust make the relationship stronger. This is confirmed by journalist VII when asked

about the reliability of different news sources: *'You do make such a distinction, for instance when a citizen calls me and says there is a subsidence, I really do not write that in the newspaper, but if [name spokesperson] calls me and says there is a subsidence, I presume that that is correct'*. The reliability of spokespersons is decisive for a journalist and his/her news decisions.

Other spokespersons (particularly the two spokespersons that had been interviewed for case C) experienced more negative contacts with journalists. In a period of complaints about noise nuisance around the project trajectory, the contacts with journalist felt destructive, spokesperson VII expresses: *'What I found is that it was a bit hostile toward us. As of: you guys are the bad guys'*. Beforehand, they haven't had established relationships with journalists. The concerned spokespersons sketch that the contacts are different nowadays. Now journalist have more an inquiring attitude, spokesperson VI ventilates: *'[The journalists ask] much more questions: what is exactly is going on?'*. This however indicates that relations with journalists are still not that close and not that proactively built by the concerned spokesperson. This is also illustrated by a more limited accessibility of spokesperson VI: *'The day before yesterday I was called at home by a journalist at my day off. She was startled that she called me at home, so she quickly hung up. But it does indicate that she has my private telephone number. And that they can approach me'*. The relationship here is less close in comparison to the spokesperson that even answers his phone being on skiing holiday.

Personal relations characterised by a proactive approach, reliability, mutual trust and accessibility are beneficial for positive publicity. Nevertheless, not all spokespersons have been building such personal relations with journalists.

#### *Knowing journalistic needs*

Spokesperson III argues her activities are about serving journalists' needs at their timing: *'(...) You always want to help them, also if it doesn't suit you or if you are tired. Then I have to get back to that one man in the project, which I've already harassed ten times over the last few weeks, again asking something technical that he needs to explain to me while I'm not a technician'*. Answering information requests is one of the activities to invest in a relationship with a journalist, such investments mostly pay off.

Reciprocity only works when both parties know each other for some longer time, have built trust and know each other's needs though. Journalist XI therefore grumbles about the varying spokespersons he had to deal with in the project *'Well at the municipality it changes not that fast, but at [name organisation] I believe I had contact with about seven or eight spokespersons and they know sometimes less than I do'*.

Spokespersons need to understand the job of journalists, different spokespersons explain in the interviews. A few of them had actually been a journalist before. Spokesperson I discusses an internal conflict about the access for journalists, in which other network actors asked him: *'Can't they just get a picture from us? Can't they just use our images? - I replied: no, every journalist wants to make one of his own. That is where they get paid for. You thus need to ascertain that journalists are able to make pictures themselves'*. Two journalists that had been interviewed indeed felt that spokesperson I forms a valuable information source and facilitator. As journalist I: *'He very well understands how media work. And he feeds you a lot. We have filmed numerous times with the camera at a construction site (...). They were very accessible and they knew us very well'*.

As a spokesperson you thus invest in the relation with journalists, by handling information requests, offering (mediagenic) information and providing access. Those investments result in reciprocal gains.

#### *Correction*

Through the (personal) relations with the journalists, spokespersons also aim to correct negative reporting. Some spokespersons contact journalists, after or just before a negative news report. Spokesperson I describes how he approached a journalist that continually made negative news about the project: *'We watched an item together, "you call that positive?" Negative start and ending. "While the [project name] has today a breakthrough, we still remember... And there you go, those previous images.. Which is fine, these things happened, the [project name] has a negative image, that speaks for itself. And quite right that you have attention for it, but there's been a lot of attention for that already. If you look at the new situation, then you should also objectively pay attention to that. Otherwise you're not objective as a journalist, you're biased."* It changed his attitude somewhat'.

Putting some pressure on the journalist and the relation is not always that effective. Moreover, it can only have certain impact when the journalist has actually had some positive experiences with the spokesperson in the past. Otherwise the journalist will not take it seriously, as illustrated by journalist X: *'At [name organisation] my general experience is that you do not really gain something from the spokespersons. The spokespersons are very good at making angry phone calls when you have written something they don't agree with, they are very quick in doing that. Well, not really professional spokespersonship I think, they just tell you very little.'*

In established relations of spokespersons and journalists spokespersons sometimes get news reports before they get published. In one of the cases the municipality – after some journalistic pressure – wanted to communicate about risks in the project, a sensitive subject. Because spokesperson III had facilitated

that the journalist could inspect the extensive list of risks, she had the opportunity to slightly influence the content of the news report. *‘[name journalist] has told me: “we are going to place this on the front page”. That was nice to hear in advance. He had firstly described the risks alone. I said: “you have to add: those risks are present, but we [the municipality] also do something with those risks”’.* But in most instances a spokesperson can only check and correct technical details before the piece gets published, as is confirmed in the majority of the interviews.

In sum, actor-related activities of – some of the – spokespersons lead to personal relations with journalists that are based on trust and knowing each other’s needs. Spokespersons make use of the relationship to keep journalists up-to-date on the progress, to provide greater access for information subsidies and to be able to slightly correct disproportionate negative reporting.

## Summing-up: boundary spanning activities of spokespersons

We conclude our analysis with a scheme of all message-related and actor-related activities of spokespersons in governance networks that contribute to positive publicity (see figure 7.2).

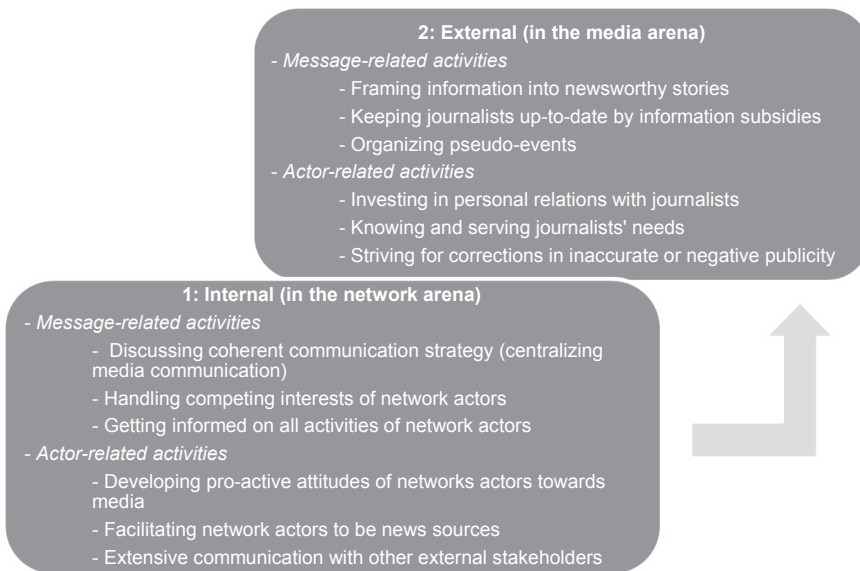


Figure 7.2. Concluding scheme boundary spanning activities contributing to positive publicity.

## 7.5 CONCLUSIONS

Papadopoulus (2012) has described a broadening gap between politics visible in news media and actual – but more or less invisible – political decision-making in complex policy processes. Positive publicity around governance processes could bridge this gap, as it contributes to the legitimacy of taken decisions, to social support for policies and to trust in the performances (cf. Pfetsch, 2008). However, up to now little is known about how positive news can be gained and how it can advance the work of actors in governance processes (Lee, 2008). In fact, often media are seen as a disturbance to what is really important in governance processes, particularly because media are claimed to have a preference for sensationalism, conflicts and policy failures discussing visible politics (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Patterson, 2000; Bennett, 2009; Flinders, 2011; Klijn et al., 2014). The question this article has addressed is therefore how differences between media logic and the logic of governance processes can be bridged in order to gain positive publicity.

The results of this study show that gaining positive publicity around governance processes is certainly possible, but that it requires considerable boundary spanning efforts in the network and media arena.

In the network arena we found efforts of spokespersons to reconcile the different perspectives into one coherent communication strategy; to overcome competing interests during the process; and to stay informed on the different activities of network actors. Spokespersons also invest in proactive attitudes of network actors toward media, because they sometimes have a more fatalist and defensive attitude (cf. Klijn et al., 2014). Furthermore, spokespersons facilitate media performances of network actors as they form interesting news sources for journalists and contribute to the coherent communication strategy. These internal boundary spanning activities indeed imply that practices of network actors are transformed to a certain extent (cf. Van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2014). Network actors are requested to include proactive news-media communication activities in their regular jobs. Moreover, network actors need to commit to a coherent, uniform communication strategy, which is ideally centralised. Such a uniform and centralised communication strategy forms a sharp contrast with common practices within governance networks that are heterogeneous and decentralised by their very nature. Compromises are thus not only made in terms of content that fit in media logic, but also in terms of content that fit a coherent image.

In a governance context it is also crucial that media communication is part of wider external communication with other stakeholders, such as surrounding communities. This increases their understanding of the project, their support

and their trust in the performance of the governance network (see also Lee, 2008). Moreover, it might prevent that these external stakeholders approach journalists because they do not understand the cause of the nuisance and/or why they are not being heard by the actors implementing policies.

Such activities of spokespersons in the network arena have been largely neglected in literature on political and governmental communication through the news. In these studies most attention is devoted to activities of spokespersons in the media arena, in which primarily adaptation of information to media logic and relations between spokespersons with journalists have been described (as Curtin, 1999; Phillips, 2002; Tenscher, 2004; Cook, 2005; Bennett, 2009; Laursen & Valentini, 2014). Comparable activities are found in the communication strategies of spokesperson in the context of governance. Yet, the addition of activities of boundary spanning spokespersons in the network arena distinguish communication in governance from political and governmental communication. Such activities are particularly relevant due to the specific setting of governance networks, in which different actors with varying interests and value preferences are involved in the decision-making processes around policies. Further research could address the differences between policy and political communication more comprehensively.

Besides providing new insights about media communication around governance processes, this article included an innovative application of the concept of boundary spanning. The concept of boundary spanning has been often used in relation to governance networks and other forms of inter-organisational collaboration. Boundary spanning activities are then typically analysed as gaining useful information from the other network actors/collaborative partners that can be applied in the organisation to create a better fit with the network/the collaborative partners (see Tushman & Scanlan, 1981; Williams, 2002; Baker, 2008; Van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2014). In the literature less attention has been paid to how organisations or a network can be protected against potential external disturbances (cf. Van Meerkerk, 2014) and how the environment of the overall network can be influenced and used to its advantage. This article shows that boundary spanning activities of spokespersons that focus on the external environment can be studied through a reversed application of the two-step information flow model of Tushman and Scanlan (1981). Future research could examine applications of this reversed model in other external contexts, such as the wider political contexts in which governance networks operate.

Because we have focused on infrastructural policies, some of our findings might be less applicable in other policy areas. For instance, anticipating on the attractiveness of images for journalists might be more applicable in the infra-

structural domain than in other policy areas. Secondly, the use of pseudo-events for journalists and stakeholders, in the form of construction site visits, might be more realisable in the context of infrastructure projects. At the same time, inviting journalist to other organisations or project meetings is not unthinkable, as Boin and Christensen (2008) illustrate in the case of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Nonetheless, the exact translation of information from within the network to mediagenic information will probably have diverging characteristics in different policy areas. It would be interesting to study these diverging characteristics more in-depth.

Another limitation of this study is the focus on the implementation phase of the policies. The implementation of policies leads to other dynamics than phases of agenda setting or policy formulation (see McBeth & Shanahan, 2004). During these phases different actors will be even more motivated to solely focus on their own interests, goals and images and conflicts around policies are often more public.

Despite these limitations, what are the implications of the findings in societal perspective? A relevant question on the basis of these findings is to what extent the media communication contributes to democratic values (cf. van Rooij & Aarts). Critics have major concerns regarding the adaptation of communication of public institutions to make it fit with the media logic. They claim accommodation to journalistic demands leads to a decrease in the political value of public messages (as Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Davis, 2002, 2009; McBeth & Shahanan, 2004; Hjarvard, 2008; Bennett, 2009). As Blumler and Gurevitch (1995: 43) argue: “The system has more or less settled for the reduction of political messages to the demands of journalism, with its emphasis on the dramatic, the concrete, the personalizable and the arresting – and with its turbulent and episodic view of the flow of civic affairs”. These scholars worry about the information voters obtain from media reports on public affairs. This is why spokespersons should also have much attention for communication with stakeholders. Information about the governance process should also reach them without the interference of the news media and their logic. Moreover, interactive *conversations* with them would greatly increase the democratic value of communication around the governance process (Aarts & Leeuwis, 2010).

At the same time scholars question to what extent journalists are still able to perform their watchdog role. The relationships of mutual dependencies might be getting skewed at the expense of journalistic autonomy. The number of journalists has decreased within news organisations while at the same time the number of spokespersons increased. As journalists have less time for research and verification, they will use more input from spokespersons and other com-




munication professionals within public institutions (Curtin, 1999; Davis, 2002). While public organisation should strive for more understanding and legitimacy for their policy plans through media, journalists must always keep an independent, critical perspective. Most of the time the interviewed journalists kept such a perspective, but sometimes this could be improved by taking more time and having more news sources.



# Chapter 8

## The media logic versus the logic of network governance



In this research, the focus was on the impact of mediatisation on governance processes. The findings and sub-conclusions on how media and their logic affect governance processes have been discussed in the empirical chapters and in the interludes about mediatised democratic fora, mediatised agenda setters and mediatised instruments for strategic communication. This chapter addresses the overall conclusions of the research and analyses its implications.

The implications of mediatisation for governance processes appear to be somewhat paradoxical:

- The often-criticised news media biases have democratising effects
- News coverage not only contributes to complexity, but also to more adequate decision-making
- Strategic communication through the media about governance networks – decentralised by nature – requires centralisation.

In the different studies reported in this dissertation, many decisions in research design were made that have consequences for the findings that were reported and the conclusions that were drawn. These theoretical and methodological decisions are reflected on in this chapter as well, which also leads to an identification of directions for future research.

## 8.1 MEDIATISATION IN THE CONTEXT OF GOVERNANCE PROCESSES

This book began with the debate about the presumed problematic interconnections between media and politics. News media are presumed to considerably shape political realities, in part by having the tendency to highlight negativity, conflicts, emotions and failures, while politicians in turn seem to get carried away by these mediatised political realities. The dramatics in news reports can thus be enhanced by the dramatic actions and reactions of political actors. Moreover, politicians do not just sit back to watch media dominate their game, but they aim to influence news media with authoritative information subsidies which often appears to be a successful strategy. Such connections between media and politics are seen as fundamentally problematic, as they can undermine democracy (Blumler & Gurevich, 1995; Davis, 2002; Cook, 2005; Bennett, 2009). Instead of the *demos* governing, the *media* seems to be governing; Western democracies such as the Netherlands are therefore characterised as being a ‘mediacracy’ or a ‘drama democracy’ (Brants, 2002; Elchardus, 2002; Meyer & Hinchmann, 2002).

These far-reaching statements are often done in the context of visible politics, regarding national politicians and/or politics in times of elections. Yet the terms ‘mediacracy’ or ‘drama democracy’ suggest that the power of news media is not only present in politics, but also in other stages of the democratic process – such as in decision-making processes around policies. Effects from the interference of media and their logic in governance processes can indeed be expected, as some clear tensions exist between the logic of news media and the logic of complex decision-making processes. News media’s attention for sensationalism and conflict contrasts with the need for network actors to build trust relations and to collaborate. Furthermore, the focus of media on actions by public authorities and their personal efforts contrasts with the collaborative efforts of public, societal and private actors in governance settings.

On the basis of the research reported in this book, several effects of mediatisation on governance processes can be described.

## 8.2 CONCLUSION: THE IMPACT OF MEDIATISATION ON GOVERNANCE PROCESSES

Despite the grand statements about the power of media in democracy, the findings of my sub-studies do not add up to an overall state of affairs that we may rightly call a mediacracy or drama democracy. News media and their logic do not constantly interfere in governance processes, as the findings in Chapters 5

and 6 indicated. Moreover, if media even give attention to governance processes, news coverage often only concentrates on certain phases or aspects of the decision-making process. This should tone down discussions about media and political processes: the presumed close and dramatic interconnections between media and politics are often not so tangible at the level of governance processes.

At the same time, when news media do interfere in governance processes, then this has considerable impact. However, it results in different dynamics than predicted in much of mediatisation literature, because these studies mostly focus only on effects of media and their logic on political authorities. Effects of mediatisation in the more complex context of governance processes are not that clear-cut, but paradoxical.

#### *Democratising effects of the criticised news media biases*

Information biases within news media are often criticised for distorting information on public issues and political decision-making processes (e.g. Bennett, 2009). The information biases appeared to be clearly present in the majority of the news reports concerning five governance processes, analysed in Chapter 4. About two-thirds of the news reports was found to be dramatised by zooming in on conflict; half of the news reports was found to be negative about the policy; in about half of the reports, action by authorities was requested (authority-disorder bias); and the personalised, human interest bias was found in approximately a quarter of the news reports. The information biases are thus indeed consequential for the framing of the policy issues and the governance processes.

Nonetheless, these information biases also appeared to preserve democratic potential. In my research, the information biases of dramatisation, personalisation and negativity were particularly related to unauthoritative and outside actors in governance processes, as shown in Chapter 4. These results indicate that particularly the often-criticised sensationalism and dramatisation in news reports have a positive side as well: these media biases contribute to checks and balances within the media debate. These findings are in line with claims of Schudson (2009), but the mediatisation literature pays little attention to this democratising mechanism. Because of the news coverage of non-authoritative and outside actors, governance processes might open up to these actors and their views on the issue.

At the same time, this democratic potential is also limited to the extent that messages and events fit media logic criteria. Mainly actors that are willing to communicate messages and events that are dramatic, personal and/or critical and to 'sell' these to journalists are able to open up the governance processes

for their input. In Chapter 5 we saw that actors were less able to sell their statements to journalists when they showed commitment to collaborating with the other network actors. Controversies better fit media logic characteristics, but this more or less assumes that actors have a go-it-alone strategy. Nonetheless, mediated input should certainly not be rejected altogether because of its focus on controversies or emotions. The mediated input of outsiders can open up relevant perspectives on the policy issue that had been neglected before. Media and their logic can thus help to bring such perspectives to the attention of decision-makers in governance processes.

*News media coverage contributes to complexity AND adequateness of decision-making processes*

As discussed, media's focus on conflicts, sensationalism and political authorities' actions that encourages go-it-alone strategies of actors contrast with governance processes in which network actors collaborate on integrative solutions. A media spotlight therefore puts pressure on all actors; negotiations under a media spotlight are much more complex than negotiations that are more or less shielded from the larger public. News media coverage makes actors position themselves more strongly or even differently from before. Actors might be less inclined to give in, while this is often necessary in governance processes. Such dynamics presumably explain the negative relation between news that is more sensational and negative and trust relations between network actors, as found in Chapter 6. Furthermore, if news media focus on certain policy proposals and zoom in on failures, possibly just a limited amount of policy options can be publicly legitimised as a result. Negotiating under the media spotlight therefore not only makes governance processes more complex, it limits the content that is negotiated, potentially leading to less innovative and integrative results. The mechanism could explain the negative relation between negative and sensational news and perceived network performance as reported in Chapter 6. Hence, news media coverage contributes to the complexity of decision-making in networks, and negative and sensational news media coverage may ultimately have negative effects on governance processes.

However, as discussed in the previous paragraph, negative, emotional and dramatised news coverage also has democratic potential, since this news especially covers the views of outside actors. And actors in governance networks – particularly politicians – want to be quick to respond. The voice and deliberative process became more inclusive in the governance processes analysed in Chapter 5, because the unauthoritative and outside actors are heard in and through media. It also resulted in some changes in the content of the

governance processes: some modest changes in policy decisions were found. Hence, it is through the negative and sensational news coverage that governance networks are also prevented from making inadequate decisions that exclude views of other stakeholders. The news media coverage, and particularly the coverage characterised by the much-criticised news media biases, breaks open the governance process for alternative views. This mechanism has been described in the agenda-forming literature (e.g. Baumgartner & Jones, 2009), but has been virtually neglected in the literature on mediatisation. Negotiations between actors with the most powerful resources are challenged by news coverage that has many characteristics of the commercial news media logic, which could be positive and democratically enriching for the content and process of governance networks.

It also leads to important dilemmas for actors in the network, however. For why would it be more valid and legitimate to respond to such mediated input in comparison to the input of other stakeholders already involved in the network? Governing authorities are thus compelled to strike a balance between mediated requests and the input of network actors.

*Strategic communication about (decentralised) governance networks requires centralisation*  
Media should however not only be seen as an external disturbance to the governance process. News media coverage can also be an instrument for actors within governance to strengthen their position in the network, to legitimise decisions and to create public trust in and support for the performances of the network. Such positive publicity can be created: media need to be fed with information and by adapting to the news media logic, news coverage can to a certain extent be ‘managed’, as the analysis in Chapter 7 showed. Increasingly spokespersons are hired that are able to bridge the logic of governance and news media logic in their communication about the overall processes and content within the governance network.

This takes considerable effort, since actors in governance networks have varying interests and perceptions. Spokespersons therefore not only need to have a constantly updated overview of all responsibilities and activities of the actors, but they also need to create and negotiate a coherent communication strategy with them. Paradoxically, spokespersons need to ‘centralise’ communication lines, which is actually the exact opposite of how communication lines within governance networks are organised. Conflicting perspectives and interests of network actors are common in a network context, but in media such differences are likely to be dramatised. An overall media strategy of the network thus necessarily includes all network actors, which to a certain extent contrasts with

their autonomous position in which no actor can be commended to act or think in a certain way. A communication strategy therefore needs constant discussion with and information provision from network actors and spokespersons. Only then can spokespersons provide journalists with the quotes of authorities and experts within the network, images and other information, and use media logic characteristics to their advantage. Spokespersons that only communicate about the responsibilities of their organisation – which they clearly differentiated from their own responsibilities – have more difficulty in managing the news. Journalists then find it harder to understand the governance process, see more conflicts, or zoom in on other (outside) news sources, as discussed in Chapter 7.

In addition, in the context of governance processes the success of strategic media communication measured in positive publicity not only depends on good internal network communication, but also on extensive environmental communication or consultation. The spokespersons that were interviewed all emphasised how media communication should be embedded in an overall communication strategy, which includes extensive communication to and conversations with surrounding communities and other stakeholders. As we saw before, outside actors disagreeing with policies can also easily generate negative publicity around governance processes.

### **8.3 LIMITATION OF THE RESEARCH AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

In the paragraphs above I described the conclusions that can be drawn from my research. Many decisions were taken in the course of the study that had implications for the answers obtained to research questions and the conclusions that could be drawn. In this paragraph I will therefore reflect on important choices and limitations of this research, which should be taken into account before generalising findings and conclusions to other contexts. By doing so, directions for future research are identified.

#### *What about social media?*

In this research, the effects of media and media logic were studied with respect to mass (news) media. This means that, for the most part, no ‘new’ media – social media such as Twitter and blogs – were included. This is a common approach in mediatisation literature (Landerer, 2013). Despite contemporary technological developments, mass media are still a very important channel for news consumption and also an important intermediary institution for news to have effects. Although new media like Twitter, Facebook and other internet



platforms are gaining prominence in society, individuals still massively consume television and newspapers (SCP/NPO, 2014; Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2014). Issues discussed in mass media and online media also partly overlap: the content of news discussed online and offline often correlates (Bennett, 2003; Cornfield, Carson, Kalis & Simon, 2005; Meraz, 2009). Moreover, and even more relevant to my research, in order for ideas and statements in new media to have effects on governance processes, mass media still tend to be an important intermediary institution that amplifies such effects. Mass media play an important role by strengthening the frames that individuals publish in new media and by giving these a larger 'well-known' and respected platform, which helps to draw political attention and to open policy windows (Bekkers, Beunders, Edwards & Moody, 2009).

This makes research on the effects of mass media and their logic very valuable. But a natural next step would be to study communication among network actors and outside actors that only takes place through social media such as Twitter, Facebook and blogs. Direct online communication, either among citizens or between citizens and network actors could influence policy processes and problem definitions and solutions as well. For instance, future research could examine whether online conversations between citizens and municipal councillors or aldermen could have such effects in governance contexts. This is especially relevant since local and regional mass media are declining and even disappearing in many parts of the Netherlands (*Commissariaat voor de Media*, 2014; Kik & Landman, 2013). Such research should take into account that new media have their own characteristics that results in a distinctive 'new media' logic (Couldry, 2008) or logics. Examining professionalism, commercialism and formats (cf. Esser, 2013) in new media will identify different features than the characteristics of mass media logic. Professional journalistic norms such as *audi alteram partem* – to hear the other side too – and independence are scarcely applied in online media like Twitter (but will be important for online journalistic blogging platforms, though). Regarding commercialism, the number of clicks and views of online contributions are very important, so these might form the commercial motives that guide online production. (However, the commercial goals are often achieved in a much more personalised manner than in mass media and until now it appears to be quite difficult to earn money with journalistic products online.) An endless number of formats can be applied online, some of which limit the content (such as the number of words in a tweet), while others offer and link all sorts of information on the internet (images, videos, texts). Formulating one overall online news media logic might be much more

complicated, if not impossible, due to the different reporting and communication practices online.

*What about other governance contexts?*

The four empirical chapters reported on data collected in three different governance contexts, which all relate to spatial planning. For the studies described in Chapters 4 and 5, data was gathered in a spatial planning context that primarily concerned water storage and other water management goals, besides other issues of land use and the building of dwellings. The study in Chapter 6 concerned urban planning projects, such as urban regeneration projects. In the last study, data was collected in four cases of public infrastructure. A next step would therefore be to examine whether the findings and conclusions also hold for other governance contexts in other policy domains, such as education (as in O'Toole & Meier, 2004); safety (as in Prins, 2014) or health (as in Wehrens, 2013). After all, some policy issues are simply more mediagenic (or 'hot') than others (Voltmer & Koch-Baumgarten, 2010; Ruigrok, Jacobi, Janssen & Van der Beek 2013), for instance because they perfectly fit the media logic characteristics. It could be examined whether more effects of mediatisation occur in the case of more mediagenic policy issues.

A second characteristic of the governance processes that were studied is that they are situated in the Netherlands. In this country, decision-making processes tend to proceed according to a Dutch democratic tradition of consensual politics. Other countries have other democratic traditions to facilitate the functioning of governance networks (Skelcher, Klijn, Kübler, Sørensen & Sullivan, 2011). In addition, the Netherlands as empirical context implies a media system which differs from that of other countries. In comparison, the overall political information environment is shown to be significantly better in the Netherlands than in the United States, for example (Aalberg, Van Aelst & Curran, 2010; Esser et al., 2012). But although comparative studies show differences in the degree to which commercial news media logic shape news production in different countries, it is certainly not a situation limited to the United States (Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2011; Brekken, Thorbjørnsrud & Aalberg, 2012; Hasler, Kübler & Christmann, 2014). The discussion about media logic characteristics in the news and their effects is therefore also important in European countries such as the Netherlands (e.g. *Raad voor de Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling*, 2003; Brekken et al., 2012; [www.nieuwsmonitor.org](http://www.nieuwsmonitor.org)). Future international comparative studies could examine differences in the impact of mediatisation on governance process across different countries, with different political traditions and media systems.

The third characteristic of most of the governance processes that we studied is that regional and local actors were at the heart of the network. These ‘central’ governing actors and network managers work for municipalities. Although actors from national government were also involved, most of the more specific decisions were taken at a local level. Moreover, the decisions taken had the most impact for local actors. This is a common level of analysis for governance studies (as Verweij et al., 2013; Torfing, 2010; Ansell, 2003), which only becomes more relevant as important tasks are decentralised, as is currently happening in the Netherlands. By contrast, in mediatisation studies scholarly attention has been devoted primarily to the mediatisation of politics at a national level (as in Kepplinger, 2002; Cook, 2005; Brants & Van Praag, 2006; Bennett, 2009). Exceptions are studies by Uitermark and Duyvendak (2010) and Hajer (2009), which examine mediatisation in the context of local governance processes. At the local/regional level, media organisations often decrease in both number and size (*Commissariaat voor de Media*, 2014; Kik & Landman, 2013), which makes the media landscape at this level less diverse than at the national level. This might make media more ‘manageable’ by network actors as well as by outside actors, because there is less time to check the information provided by communication professionals. At the same time, the culture of political communication at this local level seems to differ from the political communication culture nationally; media communication tends to be less professional at the local level. Media logic might therefore be less invasive in local governance processes in comparison to national governance processes. A comparative study between the mediatisation of governance processes with local actors at the centre versus governance processes with national actors at the centre could test for such differences. My studies showed however that mediatisation can also be relevant in the context of local governance processes and should therefore not be overlooked.

*What about the positive function of emotions?*

Although I have been formulating my conclusions about information biases in the news with caution and have also shown positive sides to information biases (making room for unauthoritative and outside actors as news sources), the use of the word information *biases* alone implies that these characteristics are undesirable. This is comparable to the term ‘*drama democracy*’, which more or less equates emotions with melodramatics, as discussed in Chapter 2. It seems that in literature on mediatisation, the positive functions that emotions can have in decision-making processes and in the political judgements of citizens are neglected. Emotions and conflicts are inevitably part of political decision-making processes, and are also desirable as they improve the governance process by

contributing to a mutual understanding between actors (Hoggett & Thompson, 2002).

The expression of emotions in media can indeed function in a hindering way, when these distort an open-minded evaluation. Hindering emotions in news reports let one ignore new evidence and doubt its reliability, for the sake of internal coherence. A newspaper with a right-wing orientation might, for instance, use hindering sensationalistic emotions in its media reports to complain about the actions of a leftist party. Such emotions distort the information citizens receive about the actions of the leftist party and might unjustly affect their judgement. But emotional contributions or controversies in media reports can also show that what actors think is really important and help other actors to understand that. Issues that citizen groups bring forward through the media are of major concern to them, and these concerns may become more understandable for others when their emotional stories are covered as well. If decision-makers hear through emotional news stories what it would mean for farmers to have to abandon their house and enterprise due to spatial planning measures, they might better understand the position of a this group of farmers in the governance process.

This study, and comparable research that measures to what extent media logic characteristics can be found in news content (see e.g. Brants & Neijens, 1998; Patterson, 2000; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Brants & Van Praag, 2006; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2007), does not establish to what extent the focus on conflicts, emotions and criticism distorts our views and reasoning (as Bennett (2009) emphasises) or help to reflect on the governance processes. This would however be an interesting question for future research to address. It might be complicated to study this though, particularly since the exact mechanisms that take place between emotions and decision-making processes are still unclear (Evans, 2002). One possible approach could be to combine qualitative content analysis of media reports with interviews with actors, journalists and citizens about the emotions they feel and the journalistic decisions made in reporting the issue. Questions would need to check whether news reports are framed in a way to preserve emotionally held *idées fixes*, due the need for internal coherence within a specific medium or because of commercial interests that guide the use of emotions. Consider for example a journalist interviewed for Chapter 7, who was explicitly instructed by the editor to always give issues in the news a human face. This per definition results in emotional human interest news stories. However, this does not necessarily apply for all journalists. Another approach to studying positive and negative functions of emotions in media biases could be to set up experiments using different news reports with presumably

helping, hindering and no emotions, and then to see how these affect respondents' decision-making. These are just some initial and tentative suggestions for future research; the main point is that the possibility that emotions in news can aid reflection on reported political issues should not be simply brushed aside by future mediatisation studies.

*What is the way forward?*

Mediatisation research is a relatively new branch of research, which is flourishing at the moment. A clear illustration are the lists of books and articles offered on the site of one of the leading scholars in mediatisation research, Jesper Strömbäck, devoted to theory and research on the mediatisation of politics (<http://mediatisation-of-politics.com/>). These lists show an exponential growth of relevant articles and books in recent years. Before 2000 it lists only 3 articles and 3 books; from 2000 to 2009 11 articles and 3 books; from 2010 to 2014 38 articles (21 of these in 2014) and 7 books. Although these lists are definitely not complete, they clearly demonstrate that during my research, the literature has been developing significantly. In 2013 and 2014, several theoretical contributions were published that redefine the mediatisation of politics and address more realistic models of political decision-making processes (e.g. Esser & Matthes, 2013; Marcinkowski, 2014). However, empirical research addressing mediatisation in these decision-making processes is rare. My research clearly contributes to this line of research.

Furthermore, in the other fields of public administration research – studies on network governance and on policy processes – the scholarly attention for media is gradually growing as well (as Klijn, 2008c; Hajer, 2009; Bekkers & Moody, 2015). Nonetheless, only a few theoretical and empirical publications can be found in the field of public administration. My research is an important first step in this regard. However, as discussed in the prior paragraphs, my research also leaves open many questions with regard to other media and other contexts. Due to the interactions between media and society, the degree of mediatisation and its impact can differ in different local contexts. Research in different contexts is therefore needed to formulate more comprehensive conclusions about the impact of mediatisation on governance processes. Longitudinal studies that examine media reports as well as the policy process would be an ideal approach to gain more knowledge on decisive factors and mechanisms.

## 8.4 THE MISMATCH BETWEEN MEDIA LOGIC AND GOVERNANCE LOGIC

On the basis of my research I argue that using terms like mediocracy or a drama democracy to characterise the Dutch democracy is jumping to conclusions. While these terms are quite often used in societal debates about the relation between media and politics, they overrate the influence of media on day-to-day political decision-making processes. Many governance processes are not even covered by the media or only in certain policy phases. Looking at other arenas of the democratic process than party politics, which is often more visible on television and in newspapers than governance processes, reveals many more nuances.

More fundamentally, many statements about a mediocracy or a drama democracy and even various statements about mediatisation show a lack of understanding as to how day-to-day political decision-making processes function in practice. Political decision-making is much more than the visible political debates between political figures. On the other hand, actors in governance processes don't always know much about media and their logic. Moreover, network actors may lack the capacity to react to or to anticipate media logic interference. Many actors therefore see media as an external disturbance, disrupting the fragile collaborative governance process. This mutual misunderstanding can be found in practice, both in media reporting and even in scientific publications.

### *Media in governance*

So, should media be blamed for not understanding governance processes? Although media logic may partly explain this flaw, media always operate in interaction with society. In all three of their roles (as differentiated in Chapter 3), it is a matter of media *and* governance. Media provide fora to present and discuss information from societal actors and this information can affect the views of other societal actors. Media are moreover able to influence the agendas of decision-makers, but only if decision-makers think it is important and appropriate to respond to media reports. Lastly, media are used as instruments for strategic communication by societal actors to reach a larger public and thus to serve their own interests. Mediatisation is thus both driven by and has effects on both media *and* governance.

The main drivers of mediatisation's effects on governance might not be due to the media but to how actors in governance processes deal with media and their logic. In the end it is about them anticipating or even integrating media logic in their own behaviour, instead of brushing media reports aside. The significant increase of communication professionals is illustrative in this

regard; governmental organisations attach considerable importance to their – potential – media image. This is understandable, as governmental organisations need media to explain and legitimise their decisions. They should also be able to defend their position in response to negative publicity (as well as to other actors in governance networks). However, their ‘professionalisation’ of public communication and adoption of media logic also contributes to the presence of media logic characteristics that simplify governance processes in news content.

#### *Governance in media*

Frequently, journalists as well as many (political) communication scholars approach governance processes as if it is only ‘the government’ making policies for which political authorities are responsible. The reality of governance processes is much more complicated, as different government entities collaborate with numerous private and societal actors. Nevertheless, in practice, media usually ask political authorities to solve societal problems (authority-disorder bias) and more or less ignore the interdependencies and collaborative relations with other government bodies, private actors and societal associations.

In the short term, such media interference can help open up policy processes for unauthoritative actors; but a media spotlight makes negotiations more complicated as well. In the longer term, media interference might result in governmental organisations striving for more control and supervision, as they are the ones who are publicly held responsible. Governmental organisations are inclined to structurally overreact to mediatised risks, and seek to control these risks through rules and extensive policy measures (in Dutch this is referred to as the ‘*risico-regelreflex*’<sup>26</sup>). Such a controlling response by governmental organisations obstruct the principles of collaborative decision-making processes. It would diminish the potential of governance processes to more extensively address the varying perspectives, interests and values of stakeholders in more integrative policy solutions. Such a controlling response also demonstrates the fundamental mismatch between the features of governance processes in relation to the functioning of media. Moreover, in such a case media and their logic do not just provide checks and balances; media and their logic would then come to dominate decision-making processes.

26. <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/kwaliteit-en-integriteit-overheidsinstanties/verantwoord-omgaan-met-risicos>





## Samenvatting (summary in Dutch)

### BESTUURD DOOR HET NIEUWS?

De rol van nieuwsmedia in de politiek wordt vaak bekritiseerd. Nieuwsmedia zouden alleen maar oog hebben voor dramatiek en voor poppetjes aan de macht. Daarnaast worden media verweten teveel invloed te hebben op de politiek; terwijl politici weer worden bekritiseerd omdat zij media manipulatief inzetten voor eigen gewin. Veel mensen ervaren de verwevenheid tussen media en politiek als zodanig dat zij claimen dat Nederland een ‘mediacratie’ of een ‘dramademocratie’ is. In meer dan 1000 artikelen in journalistieke dag- en weekbladen zijn de termen te vinden, die aanduiden dat niet het volk maar de media en hun dramatiek zouden regeren. Deze verstrekkende begrippen impliceren dat de rol van media niet alleen groot is in de politiek, maar ook in andere fases van het democratisch proces, zoals in besluitvorming rondom beleid. Ook in veel andere landen wordt de rol van media in democratische processen bediscussieerd.

In de wetenschap is daarbij recentelijk de aandacht komen te liggen op de invloed van de *medialogica* in democratische processen. In zijn algemeenheid duidt *medialogica* het proces aan waarmee media informatie presenteren en overbrengen (Altheide & Snow, 1979), hoe journalisten nieuwsberichten maken dus. Maar meestal doelen wetenschappers vooral op bepaalde kenmerken van nieuws wanneer ze *medialogica* en mediatisering bespreken. Zoals dat het nieuws vaker inzoomt op negatieve dan op positieve gebeurtenissen; nieuws vaak dramatisch is en inzoomt op conflicten en emoties; en dat er veel aandacht is voor (politieke) autoriteiten en hun fouten (zoals Bennett, 2009). Deze kenmerken zijn te relateren aan commerciële aspecten in het proces van nieuws maken, want zulk nieuws verkoopt beter en is vaak efficiënt te vervaardigen (Bennett, 2009; Landerer, 2013). De commerciële aspecten staan zo centraal in het onderzoek omdat ze andere aspecten kunnen overschaduwen. Het willen beoefenen van goede, kwalitatieve journalistiek kan botsen met het streven naar efficiënte productie en hoge verkoopcijfers (Hjarvard, 2008). De aandacht voor het negatieve, het dramatische en het persoonlijke in het nieuws zijn ook bepalend voor hoe nieuwsmedia interacteren met samenleving, politiek en beleid.

Hoewel relaties tussen media en politiek vaak onderzocht zijn, is er nog weinig bekend over interacties tussen media en besluitvormingsprocessen rondom beleid. Om beleid te formuleren en uit te voeren zijn vaak verschil-

lende partijen nodig die verbonden zijn in netwerken (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004). Dit wordt ook wel *network governance* genoemd. Voor het ontwikkelen van een passende oplossing bij complexe maatschappelijke vraagstukken zijn overheidsorganisaties afhankelijk van private en maatschappelijke actoren die bijvoorbeeld in het bezit zijn van bepaalde kennis of productiemiddelen. Door die afhankelijkheden vormen zich relaties tussen actoren die gemodelleerd worden als een governance netwerk. Actoren in een governance netwerk opereren relatief zelfstandig, vanuit hun eigen percepties en belangen. In reeksen van interacties onderhandelen ze met elkaar, werken ze samen en maken ze besluiten, waarmee de actoren niet alleen hun eigen doelen, maar ook een collectief doel trachten te realiseren.

Hoe staat het met de verwevenheid van media en besluitvorming in netwerken? Maarten Hajer (2009) stelt dat niet alleen de politiek maar ook network governance is *gemediatiseerd*. Dat betekent dat niet alleen bepaald nieuws effect heeft op besluitvorming, maar de logica van nieuwsmedia het verloop van besluitvormingsprocessen en de communicatie hierover beïnvloedt.

De medialogica en de logica van netwerk governance staan echter op gespannen voet. De interesse van media in conflict en drama contrasteert met de behoefte aan vertrouwen en de noodzaak tot samenwerking in netwerken. Bovendien zoomen nieuwsmedia in op prestaties van politieke autoriteiten waar het in netwerken nadrukkelijk gaat om collectieve inspanningen van publieke, maatschappelijke en private partijen. De vraag die daarom centraal staat in dit onderzoek is welke impact media en medialogica hebben op de inhoud en het proces van besluitvorming. Oftewel *hoe beïnvloedt mediatisering besluitvorming in governance netwerken?*

## DE ROLLEN VAN MEDIA IN RELATIE TOT NETWORK GOVERNANCE

Nieuwsmedia kunnen grofweg drie rollen worden toebedeeld. Het nieuws is belangrijk voor de publieke beeldvorming over de inhoud en het verloop van besluitvorming in governance netwerken. Daarbij geven media idealiter ruimte aan verschillende geluiden en vormen ze dus een democratisch platform. Daarnaast zijn nieuwsmedia van invloed op de agenda's van betrokken actoren. Omdat nieuwsberichten in zekere zin de publieke opinie vertegenwoordigen, kunnen actoren hun agenda's daarop aanpassen. Ten slotte kunnen actoren media gebruiken om een groter publiek te bereiken met hun boodschap. Media vormen dus ook een instrument voor (strategische) communicatie. Dat media

deze rollen vervullen via een commerciële medialogica werkt door in de impact van nieuwsmedia op network governance.

De hoofdvraag van het onderzoek - de manier waarop mediatisering besluitvormingsprocessen beïnvloedt - is uitgesplitst over de drie functies.

## Gemediatiseerd democratisch platform

Om de rol van medialogica in de democratisch platform-functie te bestuderen heb ik bekeken in hoeverre de medialogica terug te zien is in berichtgeving over besluitvormingsprocessen. Daartoe heb ik nieuwsberichten rondom vijf water governance projecten in Nederland onderzocht. Deze water governance projecten zochten een oplossing voor beleidsvraagstukken met betrekking tot openbare wateren en andere ruimtelijke opgaven. In Lent bijvoorbeeld werden dijken verplaatst om meer water te kunnen opvangen, wat werd gecombineerd met onder andere het bouwen van nieuwe huizen en een nieuwe brug naar Nijmegen. De andere projecten waren IJsseldelta-Zuid, Noordwaard, de Zuidplaspolder en Wieringerrandmeer.

In totaal zijn 566 nieuwsberichten gecodeerd, afkomstig uit regionale en nationale nieuwsmedia (kranten en televisie). Uit de kwantitatieve inhoudsanalyse bleek dat ongeveer een kwart van de berichten inzoomde op emoties en het persoonlijke. Ook bleek twee-derde van het nieuws dramatisch te zijn gezien het conflicten uitlichtte. Ongeveer de helft van de berichten beschreef autoriteiten en hun falen en riep hen op nieuwe maatregelen te nemen. Ten slotte evalueerde ongeveer de helft van de berichten het beleid negatief. De medialogica-aspecten zijn dus aanwezig in het nieuws rondom de water governance processen. In meer dan 70 procent van de nieuwsberichten was één of meer van de medialogica-aspecten te vinden.

Maar hebben die medialogica-aspecten invloed op welke actoren werden beschreven in het nieuws? Om die vraag te beantwoorden zijn nieuwsberichten met verschillende groepen actoren als hoofdpersoon met elkaar vergeleken. Daarbij bleek het overigens wel mee te vallen met de hoeveelheid berichten die primair focussen op autoriteiten. Autoriteiten aan de macht (zoals de minister(-president), gedeputeerde, wethouder of 'de gemeente') zijn hoofdpersoon in iets minder dan een derde van de berichten. Naast deze groep krijgen vooral minder invloedrijke actoren veel aandacht (zoals bewoners(organisaties), boeren en milieuorganisaties), in maar liefst 43,5% van de berichten zijn zij de hoofdpersoon.

Een statistische vergelijking toont aan dat in nieuwsberichten over de minder invloedrijke actoren significant meer medialogica-aspecten te vinden zijn

dan in berichten met autoriteiten als hoofdpersoon<sup>27</sup>. Nieuwsberichten over deze actoren zijn significant vaker gedramatiseerd, gepersonaliseerd en zijn negatiever van aard dan nieuwsberichten over autoriteiten. Verhalen van o.a. bewonersgroepen, boeren en milieuorganisaties lijken dus goed te passen bij die medialogica-aspecten.

## Gemediatiseerde agendabepaling

Maar welke effecten heeft die berichtgeving voor de bewonersgroepen, boeren en milieuorganisaties gehad? Drie van de vijf water governance projecten –de projecten waarin het belangrijkste beleidsvraagstuk waterberging betrof– zijn daarop verder onderzocht. Samen met Ingmar van Meerkerk heb ik betrokken wethouders en vertegenwoordigers van bewonersorganisaties geïnterviewd. De media-aandacht was zeer ongelijkmatig verdeeld over de verschillende fases van besluitvorming in de water governance projecten.

De media-aandacht nam duidelijk toe op momenten van conflict tussen bewonersgroepen en politieke autoriteiten. Bewonersgroepen hadden dan veel contact met journalisten en leerden snel wanneer hun verhaal aantrekkelijk werd voor journalisten. Via protestacties en het verschaffen van nieuwshaakjes wisten zij hun boodschap vaak in media te krijgen. Daarbij waren hun conflict, emoties en kritiek belangrijk, want die sloten goed aan op de belangrijke medialogica-aspecten. De media-aandacht versterkte de positie van bewonersgroepen. Bovendien verbreedde de media-aandacht het besluitvormingsproces inhoudelijk. In een van de projecten is een door de bewonersorganisatie uitgedacht scenario voor waterberging bijvoorbeeld opgenomen in de besluitvorming. Ook hebben de tegengeluiden uiteindelijk geleid tot (relatief) kleine aanpassingen in de inhoud van de plannen. Zo is bij een van de projecten de woningbouw beperkt naar aanleiding van zwaarwegende kritiek van een bewonersgroep. Dergelijke interacties tussen nieuwsmedia(logica) en besluitvorming dragen positief bij aan de legitimiteit van het proces.

Tegelijkertijd beteugelt de medialogica die positieve effecten. Immers, vooral actoren die bereid zijn hun boodschap te verpakken op negatieve en dramatische wijze krijgen (eenvoudig) aandacht in media. Een van de bewonersgroepen merkte bijvoorbeeld dat journalisten niet meer geïnteresseerd waren toen zij samenwerking in het netwerk prioriteerden boven conflict. Het netwerk zal daarom goed evenwicht moeten vinden tussen het ingaan op eisen die via media tot hen komen en eisen die binnen het netwerk worden gesteld. Im-

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27. Met behulp van de non parametrische ANOVA toets (Kruskall Wallis test) met post-hoc testen in SPSS 20.0

mers, in praktijk is netwerk governance al een strategie om meer stakeholder-betrokkenheid te creëren. In hoeverre is het gerechtvaardigd te luisteren naar harde schreeuwers in de media terwijl dat misschien ten koste gaat van de samenwerking met actoren in het netwerk? Dit is geen eenvoudige afweging, gezien de druk die media kunnen uitoefenen op hun agenda's.

Niet alleen de inhoud van netwerk governance kan onder druk komen te staan door nieuwsberichtgeving gekenmerkt door negativiteit en dramatiek, ook het proces. Dit negatieve verband tussen negatieve, sensationele media-aandacht en het proces vond ik dan ook in het kwantitatief onderzoek dat ik verrichte in samenwerking met Erik Hans Klijn onder 141 projectmanagers van ruimtelijke projecten in de vier grote steden van Nederland.

Allereerst wat terughoudendheid. De impact van mediatisering in de bestudeerde grootstedelijke, ruimtelijke governance processen lijkt in het algemeen relatief bescheiden te zijn. Bij lang niet alle projecten ervoeren de projectmanagers de berichtgeving als vooral negatief of als meer sensationeel dan informatief. Ook verwijten veel van de projectmanagers de betrokken politici niet mediaberichtgeving en hun eigen imago belangrijker te vinden dan ontwikkelingen in het betreffende project. In meerderheid oordelen ze dus dat betrokken politici niet gemediatiseerd handelen.

Aan de andere kant toonde statistische analyse wel negatieve verbanden tussen negatieve en sensationele media-aandacht en het onderling vertrouwen en (gepercipieerde) uitkomsten<sup>28</sup>. En hoe meer het gedrag van politici als gemediatiseerd werd gekenmerkt, hoe lager het vertrouwen van actoren in het netwerk werd ingeschat. Als er impact van mediatisering wordt ervaren, blijkt dit dus wel in relatie tot een moeizamer proces van besluitvorming in een governance netwerk.

## Gemediatiseerde strategische communicatie

Aspecten van medialogica zijn dus van invloed op de publieke beeldvorming rondom en op proces en inhoud van besluitvorming rondom beleid. Maar om te functioneren, hebben media informatie nodig. Die informatie komt van verschillende actoren in de samenleving, die media vaak gebruiken als instrument om hun boodschap naar een groter publiek te communiceren. Daarvoor moeten zij wel de medialogica adresseren. We hebben al gezien dat tegenstanders daar vrij gemakkelijk in slagen, maar hoe kan een governance netwerk *positieve* publiciteit genereren?

28. Met behulp van structural Equation Modeling in AMOS

In vier grote infrastructurele projecten heb ik tien woordvoerders en twaalf journalisten geïnterviewd om te analyseren hoe woordvoerders een brug kunnen slaan tussen de mediologica en de logica van netwerk governance. Dit is ingewikkeld door de verschillende percepties van betrokken partijen en verschillende houdingen van hen jegens media. Om de brug te slaan ondernemen woordvoerders daarom niet alleen activiteiten richting media, maar ook in het netwerk zelf. Met de betrokken actoren komen zij een mediastrategie overeen waarover continue afstemming plaatsvindt. Richting media is het handig dat er één lijn is per project, dat betekent het bijeenvoegen van de communicatie van actoren met verschillende verantwoordelijkheden. Immers, uiteindelijk wordt het project als geheel beoordeeld door de buitenwereld en krijgen verschillende partijen geen afzonderlijk eindoordeel, zo stelt een geïnterviewde woordvoerder. Als partijen alleen over hun eigen verantwoordelijkheden communiceren, leidt dat in de eerste plaats tot een veel ingewikkelder dossier voor journalisten. Bovendien zullen verschillen in visies snel worden vertaald in conflictsituaties. De verschillende actoren kunnen wel als afzonderlijke nieuwsbronnen fungeren voor journalisten passend in de overkoepelende mediastrategie. Dat vereist wel een pro-actieve houding van hen jegens media, welke niet vanzelfsprekend is.

Om vervolgens door nieuwsmedia te worden opgemerkt, vertalen woordvoerders informatie in voor journalisten aantrekkelijke ‘informatie subsidies’ met behulp van sprekende quotes, beelden en (pseudo)events. In alle projecten worden momenten gekozen die nieuwswaardig worden gemaakt. Het invaren van een enorm tunneldeel dat geplaatst wordt onder een historisch monument (‘wereldprimeur’) kan op die manier een positief verslag in het NOS-acht uur journaal opleveren. Daarbij blijken ook goede relaties tussen woordvoerders en journalisten van belang. Woordvoerders weten waar journalisten behoefte aan hebben en anticiperen daarop. Goede relaties met journalisten kunnen er ook voor zorgen dat negatief nieuws makkelijker te corrigeren is.

Naast de mediacommunicatie is directe communicatie met de omgeving cruciaal. Gesprekken met actoren in de omgeving (zoals omwonenden) zijn belangrijk vanuit democratisch perspectief, maar ook vanuit pragmatisch perspectief. Dergelijke outsiders zijn immers alternatieve nieuwsbronnen voor journalisten die potentieel kunnen zorgen voor negatieve, sensationele berichten.

## **CONCLUSIE: MEDIATISERING IN DE CONTEXT VAN NETWERK GOVERNANCE**

Hoewel netwerk governance in zekere mate ook interacteert met nieuwsmedia en hun logica, lijkt de verwevenheid minder in vergelijking met de verweven-

heid tussen nieuwsmedia en (nationale) politiek. Termen als mediocratie en dramademocratie veronderstellen een dominantie van media en medialogica in alle aspecten onze democratie, dus ook in besluitvormingsprocessen rondom beleid. De bevindingen van dit onderzoek tellen echter niet op tot een mediocratie of een dramademocratie. Nieuwsmedia en hun logica mengen zich niet constant in ‘alledaagse’ besluitvorming rondom beleid. Als ze al aandacht schenken aan de processen, dan alleen in bepaalde fases of ten aanzien van bepaalde aspecten.

Tegelijkertijd, als medialogica in interactie komt met de logica van netwerk governance, treden er wel effecten op. Effecten van mediatisering in de context van netwerk governance verschillen van effecten beschreven in de context van de politiek. Effecten zijn minder zwart-wit, maar eerder paradoxaal.

#### *Bekritiseerde aspecten van medialogica werken democratiserend*

De kritiek op de voorkeuren van media voor drama, persoonlijke aspecten, een roep om actie van autoriteiten en negatieve aspecten lijkt terecht, kijkend naar de studie over de beeldvorming rondom water governance projecten. Die medialogica-aspecten zijn duidelijk te vinden in berichtgeving over de besluitvormingsprocessen en dat kan de democratische informatie over het besluitvormingsproces en het beleid versimpelen. Tegelijkertijd tonen de resultaten van mijn onderzoek ook het democratisch potentieel van deze aspecten van de medialogica. Ze verlagen de drempel voor minder invloedrijke actoren om te worden toegelaten tot het democratisch platform waar informatie over het beleid en het proces wordt uitgewisseld. Dit kan bijdragen aan democratische checks and balances in het besluitvormingsproces.

#### *Nieuwsmedia dragen bij aan complexiteit EN adequaatheid van besluitvorming*

In de context van negatieve en dramatische berichtgeving en/of van politici die erg gefocust zijn op media blijkt het in een netwerk moeilijker om onderling vertrouwen tussen de actoren op te bouwen of in stand te houden. Medialogica lijkt opportunistische strategieën van actoren in het netwerk, en in het bijzonder van betrokken politici, te stimuleren. In de spotlights van nieuwsmedia zullen zij bijvoorbeeld eerder geneigd zijn hun individuele standpunt sterker neer te zetten of hun eerdere strategie te wijzigen, wat het collectieve besluitvormingsproces bemoeilijkt. Een kritische evaluatie van beleidsplannen in het nieuws kan bovendien het scala aan beleidsopties inperken; het is niet aantrekkelijk om een beleidsplan te kiezen dat veel kritiek kreeg in het nieuws. Deze mechanismen kunnen het negatieve verband tussen de negatieve, sensationele media-aandacht en (gepercipieerde) uitkomsten in mijn onderzoek verklaren.

In het licht van negatieve, sensationele media-aandacht blijkt de kans op veel onderling vertrouwen en passend, integraal en innovatief beleid kleiner.

Negatieve, sensationele aandacht voor besluitvorming kan echter ook betekenen dat er onderbelichte perspectieven worden ingebracht door buitenstaanders. Die inbreng kan de besluitvorming verbreden en democratiseren. Bovendien voorkomt het dat er te snel besluiten worden genomen door actoren met de meeste machtsbronnen. In de praktijk leiden deze mechanismen tot relatief bescheiden correcties in het besluitvormingsproces. Grote wijzigingen zouden ook niet wenselijk zijn, omdat de kritiek van actoren in media niet veel zwaarder moet worden gewogen dan die van actoren betrokken in het onderhandelingsproces. Een afweging van de input in het governance netwerk en de gemediatiseerde input blijkt echter nog geen eenvoudige evenwichtsoefening.

*Strategische communicatie over (gedecentraliseerde) netwerken vereist centralisatie*

Media-aandacht moet tegelijkertijd niet alleen gezien worden als een externe versturende factor. Media-aandacht kan ook een instrument zijn waarmee beslissingen publiekelijk kunnen worden gelegitimeerd, wat bijdraagt aan draagvlak en vertrouwen van burgers. Om de verschillen tussen de netwerklogica en de medialogica te overbruggen is het nodig de mediacommunicatie te centraliseren. Dit is tegenovergesteld aan hoe communicatielijnen in netwerken zijn georganiseerd en kan op gespannen voet staan met de autonome posities van actoren in netwerken. Daarom is continue afstemming met de betrokken actoren nodig om tot een coherente mediastrategie te komen die zij allen ondersteunen. Met een coherente mediastrategie wordt voorkomen dat onnodig verschillen tussen visies van actoren als conflicten worden uitgelegd. Actoren in het netwerk zijn bovendien niet alleen van belang voor de afstemming van de strategie, zij zijn ook degenen die informatie aanleveren aan woordvoerders en kunnen optreden als nieuwsbron. Wordvoerders werken dus net zo goed aan hun relaties in het netwerk als aan hun relaties in media en kunnen daarom gezien worden als boundary-spanners. Door vervolgens journalisten te voeden met informatie subsidies en goede relaties met hen op te bouwen, blijken er veel mogelijkheden om positieve publiciteit te genereren.

## **DISCUSSIE VAN HET GEDANE ONDERZOEK**

Als eerste beschouw ik kort de generaliseerbaarheid van mijn bevindingen. Ik heb drie empirische onderzoeken uitgevoerd in governance netwerken rondom water, stedelijke ontwikkeling en infrastructuur. Dit zijn allemaal ruimtelijke opgaven. Mijn bevindingen kunnen niet één op één generaliseerd worden naar



andere governance contexten. Meer mediagenieke vraagstukken, zoals veiligheid, zullen naar verwachting meer aandacht krijgen van media waardoor de impact van media en hun logica hoger zal zijn. Bovendien ligt het zwaartepunt van de onderzochte besluitvormingprocessen veelal op het regionale of lokale niveau. Dat is een kracht van het onderzoek, omdat dit niveau niet veel wordt onderzocht in studies rondom mediatisering. Echter, de dynamiek in de lokale politiek en lokale media is anders, waardoor deze niet zomaar te generaliseren is naar dynamiek rondom netwerken met een zwaartepunt op nationaal niveau.

Als tweede beschouw ik kort de methoden van onderzoek. Veel van mijn onderzoek is gebaseerd op percepties; interviews en enquêtes zijn belangrijke bronnen geweest. In de eerste studie zijn interviews wel gecombineerd met kwantitatieve inhoudsanalyse van berichten en ook in de laatste studie rondom mediacommunicatie is triangulatie van bronnen toegepast. In de enquête is dat echter niet gedaan. Vervolgonderzoek zou enquêtes kunnen uitzetten onder verschillende respondenten in het netwerk. Hoewel onderzoek op basis van percepties niet ongewoon is in de sociale wetenschappen, moeten resultaten wel altijd met een zekere voorzichtigheid geïnterpreteerd worden. Bovendien zijn de metingen in interviews en enquêtes op één moment in de tijd verricht. De veronderstelde causale mechanismen kunnen diepgaander worden onderzocht in vervolgonderzoek op meer momenten in de tijd.

## MEDIALOGICA VERSUS NETWERKLOGICA

Veelal wordt besluitvorming rondom beleid door media beschreven als een politieke strijd of als een taak van de overheid. Hieruit spreekt een fundamenteel onbegrip van hoe in praktijk besluitvorming rondom beleid verloopt. Dat moet overigens niet alleen journalisten, maar ook informatieverschaffers worden aangerekend. In het nieuws worden vaak politieke autoriteiten of 'de overheid' aangesproken iets aan de gestelde problematiek te doen, zonder oog te hebben voor de afhankelijkheden en netwerkrelaties tussen publieke, private en maatschappelijke partijen. Op de korte termijn leidt dergelijke inmenging van media en hun logica tot het openbreken van netwerken ten gunste van minder invloedrijke actoren, maar ook tot een complexer proces van besluitvorming. Op de lange termijn kan het leiden tot een risico-regelreflex: het indammen van problemen en risico's onder mediadruk met regels en vergaande maatregelen vanuit het Rijk. Dan zou de medialogica echt gaan overheersen over de logica van governance netwerken. Dat zou fnuikend zijn voor het potentieel van netwerk governance om in samenwerking meer integrale oplossingen te

ontwikkelen die de diverse perspectieven, belangen en waarden van actoren in acht nemen.





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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Iris Korthagen (1986) studied Cultural Studies (BA, 2007) and Philosophy of Cultural and Historical studies (BA, 2008) at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. After a pre-master year Public Administration at the Erasmus University she gained her Master's degree in Research in Public Administration and Organizational Science (MSc, 2010) at the University of Utrecht. During her pre-master Public Administration Iris worked as a student assistant in the Department of Public Administration at the Erasmus University. Afterwards, during the two-year research master program she tutored seminars in the bachelor of Public Administration at the Erasmus University.

In September 2010 Iris started as a PhD student examining the role of media and media logic in decision-making processes around policies. Alongside her PhD research, from July 2013 onwards, she worked as an advisor at the Council for Social Development (Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling). She co-authored two advisory reports, on nudging as a policy instrument for changing citizen behavior and on the role for the government in the field of journalism.

During her PhD trajectory, Iris presented her research at several national and international conferences on public management, media and politics and mediatization. In addition, she has published her work in academic journals, served as a chair of the Public Administration PhD Platform, has been the PhD representative for Public Administration in the PhD council of the Graduate School of Social Sciences and the Humanities and has been a reviewer for several academic Public Administration journals. During her PhD trajectory she has taught several courses in Public Administration Bachelor and has coached students in writing their Bachelor and Master Thesis as well.

Since February 2015 she has been working as a researcher at the Technology Assessment department of the Rathenau Institute. She is involved in the projects 'Exploring the Future of Science Journalism' and 'Dilemmas of Digital Democracy'.

# the Daily

On the basis of my re-  
search I argue that using  
terms like "mediocracy" or a  
"democracy" to describe  
some the French democracy  
is jumping to conclusions.  
While these terms are ap-  
propriate used in social sci-  
ence about the relation be-  
tween the influence of  
today's politics  
making  
governance  
even com-  
only in  
lookin-  
de