
EXPLORING DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION

Flemish Agriculture as a Case

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION, DISCOURSES AND INSTITUTIONS IN THE AGRO-FOOD SYSTEM	1
1.1. THE ROLE OF DISCOURSES IN THE AGRO-FOOD SYSTEM: DIFFERENT PROBLEMS, DIFFERENT SOLUTIONS.....	1
1.2. DISCOURSES, INSTITUTIONS & POLITICS	6
1.3. OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	11
1.4. OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION.....	15
CHAPTER 2 - EXPLORING THE POTENTIALITIES OF DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM	19
2.1. DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY FIRST AS IDEAL THEN AS PRACTICE	19
2.1.1. DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY	19
2.1.2. DELIBERATION AS A PROBLEM SOLVING PRACTICE	23
2.2. DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION PUT IN A LARGER INSTITUTIONAL SCHEME (PUBLIC SPACE, EMPOWERED SPACE, TRANSMISSION AND ACCOUNTABILITY)	27
2.2.1. POLITICAL COMPONENTS.....	29
2.2.2. THE UNDERLYING NOTION OF POWER.....	31
2.2.3. DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION AND ITS ASSOCIATED CONCEPTS.....	34
2.2.4. PLACING RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND CASE STUDIES IN AN INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK	39
CHAPTER 3 - INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS IN THE FLEMISH AGRO-FOOD POLICY DOMAIN	47
3.1. POLITICAL CULTURE IN BELGIUM.....	48
3.2. NEO-CORPORATISM AS A MODEL FOR DECISION-MAKING	49

3.3. THE FLEMISH NEO-CORPORATIST ARRANGEMENT: STILL A GUIDELINE TO AGRICULTURAL POLICY-MAKING?	55
3.3.1. POLICY MAKING PROCEDURES IN THE FLEMISH AGRICULTURAL POLICY DOMAIN .	55
3.3.2. EMERGENCE, CONTEXT AND ROLE OF THE FLEMISH FARMER ORGANIZATIONS.....	59
THE LARGEST FARMERS UNION: BOERENBOND.....	59
ABS: THE GENERAL FARMER’S SYNDICATE ASKING QUESTIONS	68
BIOFORUM: BRINGING IN AGRO-ECOLOGY.....	71
3.4. POLICIES AND POLITICAL ARENAS.....	72
3.4.1. ACCESS TO POLITICAL ARENAS.....	72
3.4.2. KEY INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES: THE ERA OF MODERNIZATION SHAPING THE DISCURSIVE CONTEXT OF AGRICULTURAL POLICY.....	78
CHAPTER 4 - RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	89
4.1. ONTOLOGICAL, EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS.....	89
4.1.1. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS.....	89
4.1.2. DEWEYIAN PRAGMATISM AS AN ADDITIONAL SOURCE OF INSPIRATION	95
4.2. CONTEXT OF THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH.....	98
4.3. CASE STUDY DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION	100
4.4. METHODOLOGY OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS	105
CHAPTER 5 - USING POLICY DISCOURSES TO OPEN UP THE CONCEPTUAL SPACE OF FARM EDUCATION: INSPIRATION FROM A BELGIAN FARM EDUCATION NETWORK (ORIGINAL PAPER)	111
5.1. INTRODUCTION	111
5.2. BROADENING THE SCOPE OF WHAT EDUCATION CAN BE.....	115

5.3. DISCURSIVE FRAMEWORK: THE TRANSLATION OF THREE POLICY DISCOURSES TO FARM EDUCATION.....	117
5.3.1. WHY POLICY DISCOURSES IN THE CONTEXT OF FARM EDUCATION?	117
5.3.2. NEO-LIBERAL, NEO-MERCANTILIST AND STRONG MULTIFUNCTIONALITY DISCOURSE: FROM DISCOURSE TO PRACTICE	118
5.4. CASE INTRODUCTION: WEST FLEMISH NETWORK FOR FARM EDUCATION	122
5.4.1 METHODOLOGY	124
5.4.2. REVEALING THREE EDUCATIVE SETTINGS IN ONGOING FARM EDUCATION PRACTICES	126
RECREATIONAL EDUCATIVE SETTING	126
AGRICULTURIST EDUCATIVE SETTING	129
EMANCIPATORY EDUCATIVE SETTING	134
5.5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	139
CHAPTER 6 - WHY INNOVATION IS NOT ALWAYS GOOD: INNOVATION DISCOURSES AND POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY (ORIGINAL PAPER)	145
6.1. INTRODUCTION	145
6.2. CONCEPTUAL APPROACH: DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY ..	147
6.3. RELEVANT DISCOURSES ON INNOVATION.....	148
6.3.1. PIG FARMERS' DISCOURSES ON INNOVATION	150
6.4. PIG DIALOGUE DAYS	154
6.5. DISCUSSION	162
6.6. CONCLUSIONS.....	163

CHAPTER 7 - DISCURSIVE ENACTMENTS WITHIN THE INSTITUTIONAL VOID: THE RISE AND FALL OF A GOVERNANCE NETWORK ON SUSTAINABLE FOOD IN BELGIUM (ORIGINAL PAPER)	167
7.1. INTRODUCTION	167
7.2. DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION AND THE POLITICS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	171
7.2.1. SUSTAINABILITY GOVERNANCE AND THE INSTITUTIONAL VOID.....	171
7.2.2. DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION.....	173
7.3. RESEARCH DESIGN	175
7.4. A CASE OF SUSTAINABILITY GOVERNANCE: THE NEW FOOD FRONTIER	176
7.4.1. PREHISTORY.....	176
7.4.2. PHASE 1: GOVERNANCE-IN-THE-MAKING.....	178
ACTOR FORMATION	178
‘SCRIPTS’ IN THE META-GOVERNANCE GROUP	180
7.4.3. PHASE 2: ARTICULATION OF MEANING.....	182
DELIBERATIVE SESSIONS	183
A CONTESTED SYSTEM ANALYSIS	186
7.4.4. PHASE 3: FROM TRANSITION TO TRANSFORMATION	188
DISSOLUTION OF THE NFF.....	188
RECONSTRUCTION FROM A GOVERNANCE NETWORK.....	190
7.5. DISCUSSION	195
7.5.1. THE DOUBLE DYNAMIC OF THE INSTITUTIONAL VOID	195
7.5.2. A PROMISING ROLE FOR DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION?.....	199
7.6. CONCLUSIONS.....	203

CHAPTER 8 - GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	207
8.1. CASE STUDY FINDINGS IN TERMS OF DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION	207
8.1.1. CASE I FARM EDUCATION: NEED FOR DELIBERATION	208
8.1.2. CASE II FOSTERING RELATIONAL AND DISCURSIVE ACCOUNTABILITY	211
8.1.3. CASE III ENACTMENTS WITHIN THE VOID: THE DISAPPEARANCE OF TRANSITION	216
8.2. RECALLING RESEARCH OBJECTIVES.....	224
8.2.1. HOW CAN DISCOURSES THAT OPEN UP NEW CONCEPTUAL SPACES FOR AGRICULTURAL PRACTICE BE TRANSMITTED TO EMPOWERED SPACE IN THE AGRO-FOOD POLICY DOMAIN? (SRQ1)	224
8.2.2. DISCURSIVE ENACTMENTS BETWEEN POLITICAL ACTORS (SRQ2).....	228
8.2.3. HOW DOES AUTHORITY DEAL WITH CONTENDING DISCOURSES AND COMMUNICATIVE POWER IN THE POLITICAL PROCESSES OF THE AGRO-FOOD POLICY DOMAIN? (SRQ3).....	231
8.2.4. WHAT ARE THE POTENTIALITIES OF DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION IN THE AGRO-FOOD POLICY DOMAIN? (MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION)	234
8.3. SUGGESTIONS TOWARDS FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS.....	243
8.3.1. STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION	243
8.3.2. GOVERNMENT.....	245
8.3.3. FARMER, FARMER ORGANIZATIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY	249
8.3.4. RESEARCH COMMUNITY	250
8.4. AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	252
8.5. FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE : A POLITICAL SCENARIO FOR DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION IN THE FLEMISH AGRO-FOOD POLICY DOMAIN	256

REFERENCES	268
SAMENVATTING.....	294
SUMMARY	297

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>FIGURE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Figure 1.1. Outline of Thesis.....	16
Figure 2.1. The process of political representation from the perspective of the four political components	34
Figure 2.2. Cases placed in a political framework	41
Figure 5.1. Percentages of participating farmers per agricultural sector.....	122
Figure 7.1. Timeline with key events and stages.....	193
Figure 8.1. Transmission (Case I)	208
Figure 8.2. Discursive accountability (Case II)	211
Figure 8.3. Institutional void (Case III)	216
Figure 8.4. Existing system	263
Figure 8.5. Deliberative system	264
Figure 8.6. Merged system	265

LIST OF TABLES

<u>TABLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Table 3.1. Farmer organizations' access to political bodies	75-77
Table 3.2. Flemish policy measures of the 2014-2020 CAP period	84
Table 4.1. Overview of data collection case study farm education	101
Table 4.2. Overview of data collection case dialogue days	102
Table 4.3. Overview of data collection case NFF.....	103
Table 4.4. Constituent elements of discourse	107
Table 5.1. Discursive framework for farm education	121
Table 5.2. Strengths and barriers recreative setting.	129
Table 5.3 Strengths and barriers agriculturist setting	134
Table 5.4. Strengths and barriers emancipatory setting..	139
Table 6.1. Discourses of linear and participatory innovation	149
Table 6.2. Policy actions: problem framing and underlying justifications.	156-157
Table 6.3. Assessment of policy actions.....	158
Table 7.1. Sustainability discourses articulated in the image group.....	194
Table 7.2. Specifying the consecutive stages along the sub-dimensions of political scripts, actors involved, policy discourses and meaning making devices	198
Table 8.1. Cross-case perspective of the case studies	235
Table 8.2. Key differences between the neo-corporatist model and the discursive representation -deliberative democracy model	242

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, DISCOURSES AND INSTITUTIONS IN THE AGRO-FOOD SYSTEM

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION, DISCOURSES AND INSTITUTIONS IN THE AGRO-FOOD SYSTEM

1.1. THE ROLE OF DISCOURSES IN THE AGRO-FOOD SYSTEM: DIFFERENT PROBLEMS, DIFFERENT SOLUTIONS

Sustainable intensification, agro-ecology and greening. At first sight these concepts might not have to do a lot with what a farmer does on his or her field, let alone with what we eat. Moreover, one might think that all three of them are rather similar, with their emphasis on 'sustainability', 'ecological' and 'green'. But in fact, these concepts are aligned with radically different interpretations of what agriculture can and should be, different interpretations about how agriculture ought to relate to market and society, as well as the kind of solutions, procedures and policy measures that ought to be constructed to support its development.

Sustainable intensification, for instance, is casted within a productivist view that advocates the need to feed the future world population and calls for achieving higher yields on existing farmland. It implies that increasing insights from science and technology need to make resource efficiency increase, lowering environmental impact without undermining the capacity to produce more food (Garnett et al., 2014 ; Campbell et al., 2014). Actors advocating sustainable intensification often stress the continued importance of capital-intensive investments and the use of *smart solutions* from technology (Boerenbond, 2014; Vilt 2014; Tilman et al., 2011) which can be seen as a continuation of the modernization process in agriculture that started in the 1950s. The role of markets and states is crucial in bringing about the ideal conditions to foster sustainable intensification.

A contrasting viewpoint is expressed by the defenders of agro-ecology, which has been described as science, agricultural practice as well as a social movement and clearly distances itself from the effects of modern agriculture related to specialization and intensification (Wezel et al., 2009). Agro-ecology consists of new ways of farming which aim to combine the production of food with

ecological values and nature conservation. Rather than focusing on the production of technology driven research and development, participatory action research designs are often preferred (Méndez et al.; 2013) Socio-politically, agro-ecology is rooted in the ideal of food sovereignty that aims to empower farmers and advances local democratic processes as crucial in the development of a sustainable agricultural system (Holt-Giménez and Altieri, 2013).

Greening, finally, in agriculture, needs to be associated with the process of 'greening the CAP', the gradual changes endorsed by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to promote ecological sustainability in farming systems. First and foremost, the process of greening is motivated by the view of a multifunctional agriculture, which originated in the 1990s and broadens the societal relevance of agriculture, arguing that it produces other services as food production, such as eco-system services, landscape management and education (Marsden, 2003). Having said that, several studies reveal there to be a large distance between EU storylines and effects on the ground, to the extent that greening measures often affirm a traditional productivist perspective amongst farmers which strictly separates food production from nature conservation (Evans, 2001; Burton et al.; 2008;]. European Farmer organizations, such as COPA, have for instance systematically endorsed a view that equates 'ecological land' with 'economically unviable land', to influence EU policy proposals (Erjavec and Erjavec, 2015). To add even more complexity, greening has also been said to align with a market-orientated, neo-liberal view on agriculture, because greening measures have made possible a budget transfer from pillar I (direct support) to pillar II (conditional support) which is more consistent with saving measures and opening markets (Swinnen et al., 2015). All things considered, 'greening' thus appears to be a very ambiguous word that is appropriated for strategic purposes, since its content is appropriated differently by different actors and in different contexts. This already reveals a political context.

What the above illustrates is the need for some form of systematic understanding of ideas, since three seemingly similar concepts in fact conceal entirely different ideational backgrounds and identical concepts are adopted and employed strategically by groups that share radical differing worlds of meaning. Indeed, without such a systematic understanding it would seem to be unclear why and in what proportion agriculture should be productivist, multifunctional,

agro-ecological or neo-liberal to begin with. The socio-scientific concept of 'discourse – a central notion within this thesis – comes about as an apt notion to tackle this challenge. There are many different understanding of discourse in the social sciences, but in this thesis we will generally define a 'discourse' as:

“ensembles of ideas, concepts and categorizations through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena, and that is produced and reproduces in turn an identifiable set of practices” (Hajer, 2006, 67).

We will elaborate on this definition in chapter 4, but for now we wish to stress some of its core features. Discourses are here considered as shared ensembles of ideas that help to make sense of the world (Dryzek, 2005). Discourses are social constructs that consist of text and talk, enabling individuals to actively influence and structure conversations, but at the same time they coordinate practices of large numbers of individuals who never need communicate with each other directly (Stevenson and Dryzek, 2014 chapter 3). Discourses are distinguished from 'perspectives', 'opinions' or 'preferences' because they are more complex, composite and coherent entities (Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2008). As we will elaborate on in later sections, discourses are characterized by an 'ontology of entities' (Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2008, Wesselink et al., 2013; Stone, 2001), entities that ascribe meaning to causal relations (what matters), agency (who matters), their motivations (interests), underlying values (principles) and the use of symbols (storylines, metaphors). This 'logic of ideas' or 'discursive logic' is then object of socio-scientific analysis adopting methods such as discourse analysis and Q-methodology (Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2008). Furthermore, its consistency is exemplified by how actors that prominently articulate one particular discourse have been shown to adopt and consistently defend its underlying ideas, values and categorisations. For example, several detailed studies of the speeches of EU commissioners have shown how these key political actors to a large extent invoke and articulate one specific discourse (see e.g. Erjavec et al., 2009).

This does however not mean that discourses are entirely fixed and fully coherent essences. First, they are not fixed because as social constructs discourses depend on their social context, both in terms of how individuals and social groups interact with them and in terms of how existing and emerging practices

reformulate the conditions of how meaning is construed. Moreover, they are not fully coherent, because discourses can also include non-rational elements such as metaphors, storylines and symbols (Hajer, 2009; Dryzek, 2010). As a consequence, discourses change over time, can merge with other discourses or entirely new discourses can even emerge (Dryzek, 2010; Erjavec & Erjavec 2015). Indeed, new discourses are 'born', that is, a new coherent arrangement of ideas is for the first time articulated by a significant group of actors. To give an example, before the 1990s the discourse of multifunctional agriculture was quasi non-existent. Of course, its constituent elements were there, for instance, some practices already valued the combination of agriculture and nature conservation, but its full articulation in terms of interconnected elements and broader implications, was lacking.

In the context of this dissertation, we will try to understand better how discourses play a role in the political context of the agro-food system. In the last 30 years, political science and philosophy has provided ample support for the assertion that words matter in politics, and prepared the ground for an 'argumentative turn' (Fisher and Forester, 1993) which emphasized the increased relevance of argumentation, language and deliberation in policy making and democratic systems. We anchor our analysis in the theory of deliberative democracy, which, we think, provides a series of conceptual resources to understand and explore the potentialities and relevance of discourses for policy making. In this effort, we will adopt John Dryzek's concept of *Discursive Representation*, which weds the principles of deliberative democracy with the practice of political representation and the socio-scientific concept of discourse. In short, discursive representation can be considered as an innovative practice of political representation which proposes that 'interests' are represented by means of discourses. Instead of relying on more familiar political 'objects' of representation such as territorial constituencies (e.g. 'I represent the interests of the Flemish citizens ') or social groups ('I represent the retailers'), discourses become the basis for representation ('I represent the multifunctionality discourse'). The framework of discursive representation and its underlying concepts and assumptions will serve as a guideline for our study of ongoing political processes in the Flemish agro-food system. Chapter 2 will be entirely devoted to the elaboration of the basic assumptions of discursive representation, its relation with deliberative democracy, and the way in which

we tried to adopt it as a conceptual resource to understand political processes in the Flemish agro-food system.

In the remainder of chapter 1, we will relate our objectives and overall research question (1.3.) with two emerging scholarly traditions (1.2), which are considered to be essential underlying assumptions to validate the potential implications of our research findings: *discursive institutionalism* and the *performative dimension of politics*. We end by giving an outline of the thesis in (1.4.).

1.2. DISCOURSES, INSTITUTIONS & POLITICS

Recently, scholars began to take seriously the role of discourses in institutional change. In political theory, discourse was often considered to have secondary value to explain what happens within institutions. For instance, in rational choice theory, ideas are reduced to ‘cheap talk’ (Austen-Smith, 1992) used by actors to persuade others, having the main goal to influence an individual’s preference on a particular policy issue (or voting option). It’s ‘cheap’ because ‘everyone can talk’, which also makes it relatively low in importance. Ideas are one of the many strategic devices, instruments for the maximization of material interests, which ultimately guide political behavior and institutions (Schmidt, 2010).

Furthermore, political institutions were often portrayed as rather fixed entities in which either rational calculation of material interests and aggregation of preferences (=rational choice institutionalism), regularized patterns and path-dependent trajectories (=historical institutionalism) as well as the appropriation of cultural norms (=sociological institutionalism) serve to understand how ‘stability’ within institutions is reproduced (Schmidt, 2010). Institutional change is often depicted as the result of an external influence, such as e.g. the emergence of an economic or ecological crisis leading to political instability, in turn necessitating the re-configuration of a governmental structure (Schmidt, 2010; Hajer, 2009).

This PhD is anchored within an emerging research tradition that aims to address the dynamic relationship between discourses and institutional arrangements. How does the articulation of discourses lead to institutional continuity and change? If political actors advocate a new form of democratic participation to become part of the political system, for instance, a city council introducing participatory budgeting or a politician evoking the need to have a process of interactive policy making, how does its reception depend on the strategic and democratic deployment of discourses? Can new ways of looking at an existing problem and its associated solutions result in significant institutional changes? These and other questions are increasingly posed by a group of scholars that Schmidt (2010) clusters under the umbrella of *discursive institutionalism*, i.e. the study of how ideas, discourses and discursive interactions have a substantive

impact on the institutional context. Schmidt emphasizes that discursive institutionalism is not just about the representation and embodiment of discourse in a strong social constructivist way as found in discourse theory of for instance Foucault (1972) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985) but also in theories that look at interactive processes of discourse. Examples of the latter are the analysis of discourse coalitions (Hajer 1993; Metze; 2016) as well as advocacy coalitions (Sabatier, 1993) or studies on the role of political communication between institutionalized politics (empowered space) and the public sphere (Zaller, 1992; Habermas 1989; Wodak, 2009) (cf. Chapter 4).

What is more, Schmidt argues that beyond the centrality of ideas and discourses, this emerging group of scholars often share a less formalist notion of politics. As she puts it, discursive institutionalism is marked by:

“[A] commitment to go beyond ‘politics as usual’ to explain the politics of change, whether this means the role of ideas in constituting political action, the power of persuasion in political debate, the centrality of deliberation for democratic legitimation, the (re) construction of political interests and values, or the dynamics of change in history and culture.” (Schmidt, 2010, 2)

This brings us to a second key orientation in which the research questions of this thesis are anchored, namely what has been referred to as the ‘enactment of politics’ or the performative dimension of politics (Hajer, 2005; Hajer, 2009; Hendriks, 2009). Hajer argues that academic efforts often fall short in understanding the dynamic nature of politics, because they are based on the assumption of stability. Political arrangements are not only explained on the basis of the reproduction of independent rules and structures ‘out there’, but should also be understood as something which is to be performed again and again by the actors of the political process. Put differently, there is nothing ‘natural’ about our political institutional arrangements. Some notable examples are to be found in the history of liberal representative democracy. For instance, before becoming an established entity, the French parliament was the object of experimentation for the French Revolutionaries, taking many forms and exploring various procedures (Hajer, 2009). Another striking example is that of the democratic constitution of the Weimar republic where the main object of disagreement was whether the parliament ought to represent individual or

corporate interests, finally given way to a representation of individuals based on territorial communality now considered “obvious” (Urbinati and Warren, 2008). Just as important is that politics in our age is characterized by the emergence of new political and social issues (Marres 2007, Dijstelbloem; 2007), new political spaces (Brenner, 2004 ; Boudreau 2007) and new modes of governance (Bevir, 2010) that challenge the established institutional forms in various ways. In sum, political inquiry should operate from the assumption that political situations are far more open than is frequently thought (Hajer, 2009).

To this end, Hajer elaborates a conceptual resource which he considers to be important extensions of discourse analysis: the dramaturgical analysis and the institutional void. As these notions be elaborated upon in chapter 6 which addresses the discursive enactments within a governance network, we will present them only briefly here. A dramaturgical analysis adopts concepts from art theory to make sense of political processes. From a dramaturgical perspective, there is a ‘cast’ of political actors, a ‘setting’ consisting of the polity and its political arenas, there are ‘scripts’ understood as ways of understanding how politics should be done (Hajer, 2009). The point here is that politics can be understood as a sequence of staged performances, in which established as well as emerging political routines can be viewed together. In chapter 7 we will adopt the notion of script. A second key notion introduced by Hajer is the ‘institutional void’ and is used to describe what happens in a political situation where there are no clear rules and norms about how politics should be conducted. Importantly, an ‘institutional void’ is not be equated with ‘institutional emptiness’. The emergence of an institutional void does not mean that state institutions become redundant or that there is no longer any institutional logic, but rather that there is a lack of rules that bind all parties. It is a phenomenological situation in which the discourses of political participants conflict: an open situation or a ‘void of meaning’ in which the participants negotiate about substantive issues (formulating problems and their solutions) as well as procedural values (the rules of the game). If the void can be resolved, that is, if a process of re-negotiation succeeds in shaping alternative configurations, new conceptions of legitimate political intervention can come about (Hajer, 2003; Enticott and Franklin, 2009).

The enactment of politics has also been integrated in recent work of democratic theorists. In this respect, scholars are increasingly questioning the standard account of representative democracy (Urbinati and Warren, 2008). These considerations are supported by the observation that the standard account, based on territorial and electoral representation, does not suffice to explain contemporary political practice (Urbinati and Warren, 2008; Dryzek, 2010; Castiglioni and Warren, 2006; Saward, 2008).

First, the standard account of representative democracy fails to explain the role of self-authorized representatives and ‘sub-political’ organizations, and their use of representative claims in generating political legitimacy (Saward, 2010). Influential media figures or interest group representative, for instance, might not be elected, but are still able to effectively influence policy and significantly represent particular interests in political arenas. Second, the ‘fabric of issues’ coming with multiple and overlapping constituencies, exceeds what can be captured by the concept of ‘territorial constituency’ (Saward, 2006). A lot of issues have proven to be extra-territorial (e.g. identity) or need to be addressed beyond the confines of the nation-state (e.g. environmental problems) (Urbinati and Warren, 2008; Halpin, 2006).

What this entails is that a central notion such as political representation is not a static concept, but can best be considered as a ‘practice’ in which the object of representation and the grounds on which it is defended, co-determine ‘who’ and ‘what’ is considered politically legitimate and how ‘interests’ are to be represented (Castiglioni and Warren, 2006; Hendriks 2009a). Political representation becomes broadly conceptualized as an activity of interest articulation in a given political context, or, put differently, i.e. it is a relational practice substantiated by the politics of making ‘present’ and absent’ (Urbinati and Warren, 2008; Saward, 2006b; Hendriks 2009b) This fluidity of position, makes an interpretative approach most apt, as we will argue in chapter 4.

Finally, it is important to note that a performative dimension of politics does not mean that the relevance of classic-modernist (Hajer, 2003) modes of policy making are denied any relevance. The established political culture of elite deliberation and expert-based policy is not denied or even rejected and the institutions and procedures of liberal representative democracy are considered

of utmost importance. Nevertheless, the tradition of an argumentative, interpretative and performative policy approach - in which this doctoral thesis is anchored - does hold an explicitly normative orientation towards democratic values (Fischer, 2007; Dryzek; 2010). What this means is that democratic theory and practice is experiencing a resurgence of democratic models which go beyond the long dominant 'realist' and 'elitist' model of competitive democracy which has been advanced by Schumpeter and has come to determine the contemporary view of representative government (see e.g. Pateman 1976). David Held (2006), for instance, has well documented various models of democracy which have been developed from the Greeks until the twentieth century. The currently dominant model of competitive democracy, portrays democracy as a competition between elites to win the people's vote and makes a strict distinction between authorized representatives and passive citizens (Fishkin, 2009). The irrelevance of public will formation which characterizes this view, stands in stark contrast with the core claim of deliberative democracy that public participation and the inclusion of all those affected by collective decisions is vital for any democratic system.

For an analysis that departs from a performative, interpretative analysis, the goal is not to interpret reality from one normative perspective, but to scrutinize existing, emerging and potential political practices from a variety of democratic models, narratives of storylines in order to reconstruct ongoing political practices, or conceive new and better ways of establishing democratic systems (ref. Naar Held, 2006; Hendriks, 2009a; Skelcher and Smith, 2005). It does suggest a turn away from 'positivist' accounts of political inquiry- such as those pioneered by Hobbes and Schumpeter - which claim to be essentially non-normative because they are grounded in a purely 'scientific' exercise. As Held (2006) puts it: "*irrespective of the proclaimed method used in political analysis, one can find in all models of democracy an intermingling of the descriptive and the normative.*" Related to this, is the caution to adopt realist stances, which equate existing or dominant political practice with the only 'real' political practice, because they make obsolete any criticism or alternative scenario of the dominant

or established policy arrangements (Held, 2006)¹. We will return to this in chapter 4 and chapter 8.

1.3. OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS.

In this thesis, we employ a political framework that is based on Dryzek's democratic innovation of discursive representation. Discursive representation is grounded in the ideas of deliberative democracy and constitutes a promising approach to both analyze ongoing political practice as well as improve the democratic quality of policy-making procedures and processes of governance. This thesis thus wants to explore the potentialities of discursive representation as both an analytical and evaluative framework. Departing from an interpretative and performative conception of politics we explore the process and theory of the representation of discourses by adopting several cases related to the Flemish agro-food system.

In the theory of discursive representation, discourses are considered as the object of political representation. Discursive representation is a concrete approach within the democratic model of deliberative democracy and ties the socio-scientific concept of 'discourse' to the process of 'political representation'. We will elaborate on this in detail in chapter 2, but for now it suffices to say that discursive representation has both a descriptive as well as a normative dimension. Pure descriptively, discursive representation is already happening, as ideas and discourses clearly influence political practice and actors claim legitimacy (or utter representative claims) by referring to the relevance of particular discourses. But it is also a normative theory, for it introduces specific ideas on what a democracy should do, such as the need to engage civil society in political deliberation and participation. From the perspective of contemporary political practice and theory, however, the concept 'discursive representation' is

¹ It is, again, Schumpeter who held such a view: *What he did was to define democracy and the range of 'real' political possibilities in terms of a set of procedures, practices and goals that were prevalent in the West at the time of writing. In so doing, he failed to provide an adequate assessment of theories which are critiques of reality – visions of human nature and of social arrangements which explicitly reject the status quo and seek to defend a range of alternative possibilities.* (Held, 2006; 153)

largely unknown. In political practice there are - until now - no concrete political trajectories that explicitly aim to generate political legitimacy on the basis of deliberating and representing discourses.

Throughout the thesis, we will adopt several key political concepts such as “legitimacy” and “accountability”, using a discursive perspective, and utilize them to make sense of political processes in the Flemish Agro-food policy domain. Furthermore, Dryzek introduced a series of ‘systemic’ components that we will use as a guideline to explore the process of discursive representation (see chapter 2).

In the following chapters, my research objectives are:

O1: Explore how discursive representation (and its associated concepts) can be adopted as an analytical lens to make sense of ongoing political in the Flemish agro-food policy domain.

O2: Explore how discursive representation can serve as an evaluative standard to identify promising roads towards more inclusive and democratic policy making and governance in the Flemish agro-food policy domain.

In political theory, the use of discursive representation as an analytical and evaluative framework has only been adopted once, in a study on Climate politics of Stevenson and Dryzek in 2014. In their book *Democratizing Global Climate* the authors describe and finally evaluate the domain of global climate governance² by investigating various institutional sites and actors in both empowered and public space from the perspective of discursive representation. The research maps the most essential discourses on climate governance in the global public sphere and tries to identify the deliberative capacity of both central institutions in Empowered space such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as well as that of emerging governance networks. Discursive representation is identified and justified as a promising approach to

² They take a similar descriptive-normative stance when they state that their claims “are grounded in our analysis and evaluation of existing mechanisms of climate governance” (Stevenson and Dryzek, 2014, 1).

organize a transmission of discourses from public to empowered space related to global climate governance³. Furthermore, several existing and potential forms of accountability are identified in relation to ongoing political processes and existing political sites related to climate governance.

As noted above, discursive representation is a democratic innovation. Combining deliberation, political representation and the articulation of discourses is an entirely new approach which is confined to the small and closed academic circle of political scientists and which – to my knowledge – has never been consciously adopted in any political practice (in contradiction to more general deliberative democracy governance such as e.g. the G1000). As with any (democratic) innovation, skepticism inevitably arises, and its success will also depend on how the research world communicates to political practice and how political practice is open to democratic innovations.

The empirical centerpiece of this dissertation flows from these premises. I ‘test’ the theory of discursive representation on three case studies: farm education, pig farming and sustainability governance. Although it concerns three quite disparate topics, the cases have been selected to cover several aspects of the Flemish agro-food policy domain and agricultural practice (see also chapter 4).

A first case deals with an emerging practice, farm education, where farmers are actively communicating to schools and groups about their activities, motivations and passions for agriculture. In this case we take a discourse analytical approach to reveal discourses on farm education and try to gain understanding on the conditions to engage the public sphere in a broader spectrum of discourses with regard to a specific practice. More particularly, the empirical focus of this chapter involves a study of the West-Flemish network on Farm education ‘*Met de klas de boer op*’ (School-to-farm).

³ When scrutinized from the perspective of discursive legitimacy (see chapter 2) it becomes e.g. clear that not all discourses are equally represented in empowered space. In order to gain more insight how this can be made more democratic, the potentialities for discursive representation are e.g. illustrated by a case study on ALBA (the Bolivarian Alliance for people of Our America) and the way they communicate to and interact with public and empowered space.

A second case concerns one of the most economically important while at the same time most struggling sectors of the Flemish agro-food system: pig farming. Stagnating meat prices and rising energy and feed costs have culminated in persistent negative revenues, despite increasing productivity gains. This ongoing crisis has led to self-reflectivity amongst Flemish pig farmers. Traditionally they have adopted a rather productivist attitude, but persistent economic problems have led them to question their position in and the organization of the 'food system. These concerns did not go unheeded and in 2011-2012 the then minister of agriculture, Kris Peeters, decided to organize a series of dialogue days to collectively address problems and solutions in Flemish pig farming. Based on qualitative research, both pig farmers' stances as well as the outcomes of the dialogue days are discussed *vis-à-vis* two discourses on innovation.

A third case, focuses on a much broader and more politicized theme, that of the role of sustainable development to orientate the governance of the Flemish agro-food system. It concerns the analysis of a very specific and short-lived governance network, the New Food Frontier (NFF), in which several political actors tried to influence the agro-food policy domain towards a sustainability transition. In this chapter we investigate how actors discursively negotiate in a context of institutional ambiguity. To this end, we try to reconstruct how different practices of political representation were enacted and interacted throughout the governance process.

In chapter 2, we will place the case studies within the larger analytical and theoretical framework of the thesis, but here we wish to re-state the main research question of this dissertation:

RQ1

What is the relevance of discursive representation for the ongoing political processes in the Flemish agro-food policy domain?

Before turning to the conceptual framework and a refinement of the research question, the final section of chapter 1 specifies the outline of the dissertation.

1.4. OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

To give the reader insight into the logic and structure of the thesis we have made an overall diagram situating the different steps in our research and the corresponding chapters (figure 1.1.).

After the introduction, chapter 2 addresses the conceptual framework of this thesis, the approach and theory of discursive representation, a democratic innovation introduced by John Dryzek and Simon Niemeyer. We will introduce the democratic model of deliberative democracy as well as specific concepts related to the theory of discursive representation. Furthermore, we will adopt a number of ‘systemic’ political components (based on amongst other Mansbridge et al., ref) that will help to make sense of discursive representation in a larger political context. This will then allow us to refine the research questions and position the case studies within a political framework.

Chapter 3 aims to introduce some of the key issues and features of the Flemish agro-food policy domain. To this end, we address the general political culture and – in more detail – some of the core features of the neo-corporatist arrangement which is still prevalent in Flemish agricultural policy. Neo-corporatism is a specific model characterized by an exchange relationship between farmer interest groups and the state. We describe how this model influences policy making procedures and introduce the three most important farmer organizations (interest groups). Finally we address the key agricultural policies as well as their underlying discourse on how agriculture ought to be supported by the state.

Chapter 4 introduces the research design that is used in this dissertation. It situates the research as part of the interpretive research tradition with an emphasis on discourse analysis and touches upon some elementary aspects on the use of pragmatism as a philosophical framework for social science research. It then discusses the methodological approach for this current study, which includes the case study approach and methods of data collection and analysis employed.

Chapter 5 to 7 constitute the empirical body of this work. Each case addresses a different topic within the Flemish agro-food system and is analyzed from theory of discursive representation.

These empirical chapters are constituted of original papers, of which one is published and two are currently under review with minor revisions (see footnotes in chapter titles). In this respect it needs to be noted that this dissertation is based on original papers and is thus not a monograph. I have however decided to integrate both a contextual chapter (chapter 3) and a final chapter that includes a substantive discussion and conclusions.

The final chapter will reflect on the outcomes of the empirical chapters in terms of the different political components introduced and will re-address the research questions by taking a cross-case perspective. It elaborates more on how the cases relate to the larger institutional context and tries to formulate some of the challenges and opportunities of implementing discursive representation in the Flemish agro-food policy domain.

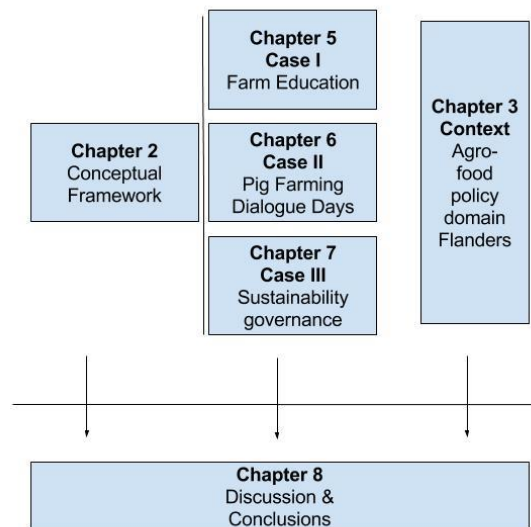


Figure 1.1. Outline of the Thesis

CHAPTER 2

EXPLORING THE POTENTIALITIES OF DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

CHAPTER 2 - EXPLORING THE POTENTIALITIES OF DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

2.1. DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY FIRST AS IDEAL THEN AS PRACTICE

2.1.1. DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

Unlike electoral democracy, deliberative democrats put communication at the heart of democracy (Chambers, 2009; Dryzek, 2010). In deliberative democratic theory, the quality of a democracy, and the quality of democratic decisions does not merely depend on the correct aggregation of individual preferences, but also on the quality of a public debate that precedes voting or the decision making process (Bohman, 1998; Pettit, 2004). What distinguishes a deliberative process from other forms of political communication - such as negotiation, bargaining, strategic communication - is the absence of coercion and the intention to induce genuine reflection between interlocutors (Dryzek, 2009; Mansbridge et al., 2010; Chambers, 2003). The theory of deliberative democracy finds its roots in an academic response to Habermas' concerns about the corruption of the public sphere. Habermas advocated a approach to reach mutual understanding amongst citizens through reasoned deliberation, in order to counteract those mechanisms which distort 'communicative action' in the public sphere (Habermas, 1989; Habermas, 1984; Dahlberg 2005).

As a theory, deliberative democracy has undergone several shifts as scholars have tried to integrate or answer to what they considered to be valid criticisms (Mansbridge et. al., 2010; Bächtiger, et. al., 2010; Bohman, 1998). Most deliberative democrats seem to have stepped away from the so-called 'classic ideal' of deliberation, where individuals engage in reasoned communication while aiming at the common good, and where "the force of the better argument" ought to bring about nothing less than a full consensus (Mansbridge, et al., 2010).

Even Habermas himself, acknowledges that the classic ideal is not realistic and “rational discourses have an improbable character and are like islands in the ocean in everyday praxis” (Habermas, 1996, 323). Consequently - and in contrast to what is often claimed (see e.g. Mouffe, 1999) - deliberative democrats do not consider purely rational deliberation as a real world phenomenon.

Even though completely rational forms of deliberation do not exist, the normative standards of deliberative democracy have served as a reference point for much empirical research on deliberation. One such operationalization is the discourse quality index (DQI) which specifies seven indicators to analyze a specific debate (a speech, a parliamentary debate) and evaluate every inter-subjective intervention along the lines of various criteria such as e.g. ‘participation’, ‘level of justification’, ‘mutual respect’ and ‘constructive politics’. (Steenbergen et al., 2003; Steiner et al. 2004). In a synthesizing paper on different models of deliberative democracy Bächtiger et al. (2010) denote this more ‘evidence-based’ approach as ‘type I deliberation’. By this, the authors refer to a research program which helps to identify “*the particular conditions under which something approaching ideal deliberation is achieved*”, as well as the “*mechanisms whereby deliberation can improve democratic practice*” (38). Niemeyer (2011) highlights how most of this ‘procedural evidence’ comes to us from deliberative mini-publics, i.e. designed citizen fora such as consensus conferences, deliberative polls and citizen’ juries. In a sense, this is not remarkable: approaching ideal deliberation is easier in initiatives that occur on a small scale and are specifically designed to promote deliberative mechanisms (Niemeyer, 2011).

However, in this thesis, a broader circumscription of deliberation is needed because we want to understand how deliberative practices relate to a wider political discourse and political practice. This is so because, we want to understand how discourses that have a relevance within the (Flemish) agro-food system are articulated within a - potentially more or less deliberative - political context. A more encompassing understanding of deliberation – what Bächtiger et al. call type II deliberation – has emerged more recently in the work of scholars such as Mark Warren, John Dryzek and Jane Mansbridge and serves as a more appropriate basis for the exploration of discursive representation. Type II deliberation focuses more on the effects of ‘deliberative outcomes’ and wants to

take into consideration the dynamics of ‘real world’ political communication. Here deliberative democracy is seen as complementary with and intrinsic to other democratic procedures. Therefore, the analytical attention is more focused on *“realistically achievable, but still normatively promising, outcomes that seek to build on established deliberative norms.. as well as reconciling deliberation with other, sometimes competing, conceptions.”* (Bächtiger, et. al.; 2010, 34).

The relevance of these types of ‘real world’ political concerns led Dryzek to state that deliberation – in addition to the Habermasian claim of authenticity comprised of non-coercive reciprocal and reflexive communication – also needs to be (1) inclusive and (2) consequential (Dryzek, 2009; Dryzek, 2010). These additional conditions will be employed in this thesis to understand how deliberative practice relate to the larger political system. We now elaborate on these points.

The criterion of inclusiveness has two components. A first component is epistemic and a response to what is considered as an overly narrow interpretation of what makes ‘good’ deliberation. This is adequately captured in Young’s famous critique of the mistaken equation between ‘public debate’ and *“polite, orderly, dispassionate, gentlemanly argument.”* (Young, 2002; p. 423). Although in some cases reasoned argument must be privileged, deliberation should be open to all kinds of communication. Dryzek (2002, 2010) argues that besides argument, also the use of rhetoric, humor, testimony, storytelling and even performances can be consistent with deliberation, provided that they make individuals reflect on their preferences. Chambers (2009) and Dryzek (2010) also convincingly show how rhetoric speech is often wrongly reduced to manipulative and mono-logic communication, and that effective use of rhetorical speech can induce reflection amongst audience members or enable communication between differently situated actors (the latter which is called bridging).

A second component of inclusiveness relates to the ‘content’ of political communication and specifies that a democratic guideline ought to ensure that all different perspectives, viewpoints or potential solutions on a specific topic should be integrated to inform decision making. This notion of inclusiveness is related to a view on the rationality of policy making, a tradition which can be found in the work of John Stuart Mill and John Dewey, who consider democracy

as an ideal setting to forge a myriad of perspectives to scrutinize and optimize the quality of decision making (Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2008). This implies that, even if (1) outcomes of deliberating publics and the content of public policy contradict, or if (2) a much larger amount of people subscribe to one standpoint above the other, this should (3) not effect that all the vantage points for criticizing policy get represented (Dryzek, 2010). It is this democratic criterion of substantive inclusion of existing viewpoints on a particular issue, which will warrant the shift from the representation of 'actors' to the representation of 'discourses' (see 2.2.).

Equally important, deliberation should be *consequential*, meaning that deliberative practices cannot be "directionless" or of a purely voluntary nature. For instance, a research project that consults a series of stakeholders, but which is not read nor acknowledged by 'those in power', is not deliberative. Dryzek specifies that deliberation '*must have an impact on collective decisions or social outcomes*' (2009, 1382). Impact can be indirect, for instance, when a deliberative group (a group in the informal public sphere, a designed forum) makes recommendations that are taken into account by policy makers. Yet, it can also be integrated in a direct manner, by the central actors and institutions of the established political system. In fact, where deliberation is to emerge is not something which is fixed in advance but can be found in many political sites, depending on the political context (Dryzek, 2009; Tamura, 2014; Bächtiger et al., 2010).

This leads Dryzek to the notion of *deliberative capacity*. A parliament, a cabinet or a neo-corporatist council, all of these instances can potentially develop a more or less deliberative capacity. Deliberative capacity is then defined as the extent to which a particular political arena or system exhibits the structure to host deliberation that is authentic, inclusive and consequential (Dryzek, 2009). One striking example of how the deliberative capacity of established political structures can change is empirically shown by McClaverty and Halpin (2008) who illustrate the occurrence of 'deliberative drift' in their case of an environmental policy process in New South Wales. Here, a local committee of stakeholders developed their own deliberative capacity and refused to give in to the neo-corporatist assumptions of the central interest group process and

“politics based on bargaining and aggregation [was] transformed (or drifted) toward deliberative practice (197).”

Consistent with the research program of type 2 deliberation, we aim to develop a more sustained theoretical overview of how deliberation complements existing political practice. To this end will adopt the “systemic” approach to deliberative democracy as an general institutional scheme to explore how the practice of discursive representation is (or can be) operationalized in the agro-food policy domain. But before turning to this, I will address the problem solving capacity of deliberation.

2.1.2. DELIBERATION AS A PROBLEM SOLVING PRACTICE

Deliberation is not only a political practice in which collective decision making processes are evaluated along democratic lines, but also an effective means to tackle complex problems and promote creative solutions. In this respect, deliberation is a powerful resource to arrive at more qualitative decision making. One of the core aspects underlying the effectiveness of deliberation is the phenomenon of distributed cognition (Wong, 2010). Complex problems are often not made fully comprehensive by the cognition of a single or limited amount of actors. A diversity of actors (e.g. experts such as engineers and social scientists, policy makers, representatives from constituencies, practitioners *and* lay citizens) are able to complement each other in the sense that they each bring in a *specific* knowledge to tackle a complex problem. Here, deliberation offers a practical framework to produce “*coherent collective responses from their partial perspectives*”(14). This is further supported by empirical research. Druckman (2004) empirically shows how framing effects are significantly reduced when actors are engaged in heterogeneous discussions (e.g. discussions with people that have different perspectives) or are confronted with counter-frames.

In this context, Bohman emphasizes the connection between the phenomenon of distributed cognition and the views on democracy as found in a democratic tradition related to J.S. Mill, the latter who advocated diversity, as a necessary corrective mechanism to arrive at a qualitative human judgment. As Bohman succinctly puts it:

“Once we achieve both a diverse public and a differentiated institutional framework for democratic inquiry, they constitute the main mechanism that promotes Mill’s property of good human judgment and deliberation: results that are revisable and open to testing from diverse perspectives, some of which are “new truths” and may not yet have become publicly known. When tested from a variety of perspectives, decisions become more robust, a goal that is also found in scientific practices when confirmation from a variety of independent techniques and theories strengthen evidential weight.” (Bohman, 2007, 350).

Bohman considers the introduction of new perspectives to be epistemic elements that are not reducible to specific opinions or interests of people but forms of social knowledge that are dispersed *across* different actors and their interests. This view is akin with the understanding of discourses as socially embedded and autonomous sets of ideas, that exist independently from the perspectives and discursive positions⁴ of individuals. In practice, this entails that when new perspectives are included this *“changes the pool of available reasons to be used as premises in reasoning about common problems”* (Bohman, 350). To give a concrete example related to the agro-food system, since the introduction and increasingly more articulated discourse of multifunctionality, the set of available reasons to consider the issue of sustainable agriculture has been significantly augmented: agriculture is now also related to producing a whole series of non-food related benefits that were previously unconsidered. In this case a new discourse broadened the set of existing interests.

Another advantage of deliberation is that it tends to prioritize collective action instead of individual strategic behavior (Stevenson and Dryzek, 2014). One reason why this is so, is because deliberation always⁵ entails public discussions, in which participants are inclined to argue in terms of collective goods and more generalizable interests. This process is related to what has been called the

⁴ I.e. individual x articulates discourse a (potentially combined with discourse b, c, d, ..) in a specific situation y (e.g. a speech, a conversation, etc).

⁵ But not exclusively see Naurin (2007).

publicity effect (Chambers, 2004). First, publicity is able to expose a politics of injustice, corruption or general dirty dealing that would have otherwise remained unnoticed. Furthermore, even the mere anticipation of such public exposure can ensure that elites are kept in line due to a fear of being exposed. Second, it is assumed that when a political actor addresses a public *before* political actions are carried out, he will need to reflect on what he/she will say when accounted for his/her action (Chambers, 2004). Put differently, publicity can force empowered actors to deliberate and formulate proposed solutions in terms of public reason. Although it has been convincingly argued that also closed deliberation is still necessary and that publicity does not always entail salutary effects (Chambers, 2004; Chambers, 2005, Naurin, 2007), without *any* deliberative democratic procedure it is unclear how the salutary and democratic effect of publicity can be attained. With regard to the agricultural policy domain, which is still largely kept behind closed doors, the salutary effects of publicity might be crucial: elite representatives who adopt bargaining strategies in secrecy (cf. *infra*, Neo-corporatism, chapter 3) would now have to justify their decisions at length to the public and deliberate in advance in terms of public reason.

Finally, deliberation has been shown to effectively induce more reflexivity. Empirical research on deliberative democracy has shown that actors often alter and widen their set of arguments to support their positions on political, social and environmental issues (Niemeyer, 2011). When actors move through various cycles of deliberation symbolic arguments - often used by representatives of contending parties (for instance NGO representatives vs. business actors in a specific environmental case) - tend to disappear from the debate and become replaced by stronger arguments (Niemeyer, 2011). Evidence from deliberative polls (Fishkin and Luskin, 2005, Fishkin, 2012) where participants need to fill in a pre-deliberation and post-deliberation survey⁶ -shows that deliberation can

⁶ In deliberative polls a statistically relevant sample of the population (in terms of age, occupation, background, political preferences, etc.) is first asked to fill in a survey on a specific (set of) topics. Subsequently the sample is invited to participate in a discussion weekend that addresses the same issues. In that weekend of deliberation, small group discussions are moderated and participants can engage in dialogue with experts and policy makers reflecting the spectrum of different positions on

cause significant shifts in individual's (citizen's) positions on political and societal issues and leads to more informed and well-argued opinions. To give one example, in a 2001 poll about the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, there was over a 20 % increase for certain sympathetic positions to indigenous Australians, including an apology for a policy that removed children from their families and placed them in institutions and non-indigenous families (Fishkin, 2005).

Taken together, the above conceptual and empirical arguments clearly indicate the strong potentialities and resources of deliberative democracy as a democratic and problem solving practice. It would however be unwise to conclude that a procedure of deliberation will *always* lead to 'fixed' or 'desired' outcomes. Therefore, deliberative democracy should not be thought of as a theory that can be fully 'proved' or 'refuted' by evidence but needs to be understood as "a project *that can be informed by theoretical thinking, practical experimentation, and evidence*" (Stevenson and Dryzek, 2014, 13). This approach is consistent with the assumptions of type II deliberation research which aims to investigate a politics which is realistically achievable yet normatively promising (see section 2.1.1.).

that topic. At the end of that weekend, participants are asked to fill in the survey again (see Fishkin, 2005 for a detailed description and examples).

2.2. DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION PUT IN A LARGER INSTITUTIONAL SCHEME (PUBLIC SPACE, EMPOWERED SPACE, TRANSMISSION AND ACCOUNTABILITY)

In this thesis we will position the theory of discursive representation (and its accompanying concepts) within a general institutional scheme. As mentioned above, a series of scholars have advanced the importance to broaden the conceptual barriers of deliberative democracy to make it both complementary and intrinsic to the established political structures of representative democracy. Deliberation cannot be restricted a-priori to one specific political site or political dynamic but needs to be considered in a particular political culture and context.

To answer to these issues, a “systemic” approach has gained prominence in deliberative democratic theory (see Tamura 2014). The initial idea was advanced by Mansbridge (1999) and further worked about by scholars such as Parkinson (2006), Hendriks (2006), Goodin (2008) and Mansbridge et al. (2012). Without the need to elaborate at length about the assumptions of this approach, we can point out two distinctive features a systemic thinking, which we consider of relevance to position the role discursive representation.

First, a systemic approach enables to grasp the relational or substantive dimension of democracy and allows to understand deliberative democracy in terms of connectedness, from the “everyday talk of family members” (or e.g. farmers) to debates in courts and other governmental institutions. (Tamura, 2014; 1). It is useful to consider the political potential of all these ‘components’ of the political system, because it is consistent with the substantive view of democracy at the heart of deliberative democracy. Second, a systems perspective transcends the idea of a static reproduction of separate, institutional elements, but considers interactions of its components. As Tamura (2014) puts it in referring to Mansbridge:

“A system requires not only a division of labor but also some relational interdependence, so that a change in one component will bring about changes in some others” (Mansbridge et al., 2012, as cited by Tamura, 2014, 65).

When thinking in terms of deliberative democracy, this means that the dynamics between deliberative and non-deliberative institutions and practices can be scrutinized. For instance, we can now try to understand how individually non-deliberative forms of action such as protest, pressure, expert statements or media performances might induce the emergence deliberation in other parts of the political system (Tamura, 2014; Mansbridge et al. 2012; Dryzek; 2010). To give a hypothetical example, in the context of the food system, for instance, farm protests, could lead to a deliberative interaction within the parliament.

As mentioned above, Dryzek speaks of the deliberative capacity “*as the extent to which a political system possesses structures to host deliberation that is authentic, inclusive, and consequential.*” Although this criterion is definitely important to evaluate contemporary political systems, this doctoral thesis does not claim to systematically evaluate the Flemish agro-food system in terms of its deliberative capacity⁷. Rather, it wants to explore how and where deliberative practices might be incorporated and how the concept of discursive representation can be deployed to think about contemporary political practice. To do this, we will employ Dryzek’s general description of a ‘political system’.⁸ He develops a series of political components which are to a large extent re-formulations of established concepts in democratic theory but which are, at the same time, general enough to allow thinking to free up from an attachment to “*the institutional details of developed liberal democracies*”.

The general scheme we want to introduce with Dryzek, features four components: ‘public space’, ‘empowered space’, ‘transmission’ and accountability’. After describing each of them in turn, we present their relevance for the democratic innovation of discursive representation and show how they helped us in structuring the research questions and case studies of the dissertation.

⁷ This would be, in fact, an immense work.

⁸ Because we aim to take a more explorative stance, we do not adopt the notion of a ‘deliberative system’ as coined by Mansbridge and worked out by Dryzek, but prefer to speak of a political system in which deliberative and non-deliberative mechanisms interact.

2.2.1. POLITICAL COMPONENTS

Most innovative, perhaps, is the introduction of **empowered space** which Dryzek introduces as a more general term than 'institutionalized politics', and is defined as all those instances which have the capacity and authority to co-produce collective decisions. This concept allows to include political spaces and actors which are often excluded in the standard account of representative democracy (Urbinati and Warren, 2008) and takes into account the so-called sub-political sphere (Beck, 1997). Empowered space thus includes those instances which exert political authority - say a scientific committee or an influential expert - but are not (formally) acknowledged as a state actor. It also involves both traditional sub-political actors such as interest groups or large corporations or newly emerging institutional forms such as governance networks (see box 2.1.) Significant in the context of this thesis is that also a governance network is considered to belong to empowered space. Thus, a governance network, defined as a self-regulative network of autonomous yet interdependent actors in which societal issues are deliberated and negotiated within a relatively institutionalized setting (Sørensen & Torfing, 2005), can and does produce legitimate political and social outcomes, which should be taken into account.

A second component is **public space** which is defined as:

“a deliberative space (or spaces) with few restrictions on who can participate and with few legal restrictions on what participants can say, thereby featuring a diversity of viewpoints.” (Dryzek, 2009; 1385)

This interpretation is strongly linked to Habermas' notion of the public sphere which he developed in his 1962 book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. In the context of the agro-food policy domain, which often refers to economic and top-down political forces as being crucial to understand how farming practices are shaped, it is illuminating to re-state the precise meaning of a 'public sphere'. In her famous paper on the public sphere Nancy Fraser identifies it as follows:

“It designates a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, hence, an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction. This arena is conceptually distinct from the state; it is a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state. The public sphere in Habermas’s sense is also conceptually distinct from the official economy; it is not an arena of market relations but rather one of discursive relations, a theater for debating and deliberating rather than for buying and selling. Thus, this concept of the public sphere permits us to keep in view the distinctions between state apparatuses, economic markets, and democratic associations, distinctions that are essential to democratic theory.” (Fraser 1990, 110-111)

A public sphere is thus essentially about political participation, yet outside the boundaries of the state and distinct from the market.⁹

This leads to the third political component, **transmission** which is defined as ‘some means by which public space can influence empowered space’ (Dryzek, 2009; 1385). The modalities of expression to ‘transmit’ substantive issues from public to empowered space are numerous (see box 2.1.). Fraser specifies that the public sphere can be critical of the state, as is for instance captured in the notion of ‘a negative power of the people’ (Urbinati, 2006), but Dryzek adds to this that transmission might also be in the form of advocacy, questioning or support (Dryzek 2010).

A fourth component is **accountability** which is here again what is described here again in a very general manner “as some means whereby empowered space is accountable to public space.” In liberal democracies, accountability is often related to election campaigns where empowered politicians have to justify their positions to a broader public, but accountability mechanisms can take many

⁹ As Elster (1986) notes: “The task of politics is not only to eliminate inefficiency [as in markets], but also to create justice--a goal to which the aggregation of political preferences is a quite incongruous means” (111).

forms (see box 2.1.) and essentially concern the generation of a broad (discursive) legitimacy for collective outcomes.

<p>Public space the media, social movements, societal associations, physical locations where people can gather and talk (cafés, classrooms, bars, public squares), the Internet, public hearings, designed citizen-based forums, public events</p>
<p>Empowered space a legislature, a corporatist council, sectoral committees in a corporatist council, a cabinet, a constitutional court, an empowered stakeholder dialogue or governance network, an international organisation, a set of international negotiations</p>
<p>Transmission activist campaigns, use of rhetorics and other performances to attract publicity for a cause, political conference, memorandi, the giving of arguments, new ideas and advancing new paradigms often articulated by NGOs, contact between actors of public and empowered space</p>
<p>Accountability election campaigns, public hearings (although often asymmetrical), policy papers, media performances, any form in which some-one from empowered space is being required to give an account justifying decisions and actions</p>

Box 2.1. Instances and procedures of the general components of the political system.

2.2.2. THE UNDERLYING NOTION OF POWER

It is important to note that this scheme can impossibly capture the entire complexity of the political system, but that it is meant to explore how discursive interactions can be understood from a political perspective. But here the question arises: how to understand the articulation of discourses as a political phenomenon of power, if deliberation seems to precisely stress the absence of any form of coercion? If we understand power in the Dahlian way as: *'A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do'* (Dahl, 1957; p202-203), this would indeed not make much sense. But, in this context, we would like to refer to the Habermasian notion of 'communicative power' because it enables us to better understand the political role of discourses.

Habermas distinguishes between 'communicative power', 'administrative power' and 'structural violence' (Geenens, 2008). Communicative power is a 'force' that comes into being when deliberation between people leads to a shared

understanding and orientates itself to empowered space (i.e. administrative power). Structural violence, then, are all those mechanism which distort the coming about of authentic deliberation within the public sphere. Importantly, Habermas borrows the notion of power from Hannah Arendt's essay *On Violence*, where she makes her famous distinction between 'power', 'authority' and violence'. For Arendt, 'power' refers to the human capacity to act together, and comes into being when a group of people come together and share a common conviction. 'Power' is something intrinsically social, never belongs to the individual and can for instance be witnessed in an activist group peacefully advocating for a common cause or a group of employees voicing an innovative idea. A group of people with shared ideas is thus considered to be at the heart of political life. Furthermore, Arendt distinguishes 'power' from 'authority'. Authority can be situated at the level of individual relationships (such as parent-child, master-teacher, boss-employee) but can also reside in institutions and cultural and religious traditions. What is also different is that authority involves a form of recognition that are neither based on shared beliefs, nor on coercion. One of the most important conditions for consent is respect, respect for a teacher a parent or the Catholic church (Geenens, 2008). The category of 'violence', finally, is characterized by its instrumental nature: violence or physical coercion needs to be situated in a means-end thinking. One of the perceived dangers of means-ends thinking is the conflation between means and ends that might lead that all means are permissible, provided that they are efficient (Arendt, 2013/1958).

Habermas adopts the notions of 'power' and 'violence' to further specify his social philosophy which is based on the crucial distinction between communicative power based on a *herrschaftsfreie* dialogue and structural violence based on strategic action. More important for the purpose of this thesis is that the notion of 'communicative power' offers a new way of thinking about the role of discourses in a political context. We can see a marked similarity between Hannah Arendt's notion power and the discourse-analytical approach at the heart of this thesis. Communicative power is a social phenomenon which originates when groups share common convictions, or indeed, discourses. Discourses are shared meanings of interpreting the world, social constructs whose deployment is largely dependent on which social groups ascribe to them. When more people ascribe to a particular discourse, it logically becomes more

powerful. Discursive representation needs thus not to be seen as an idealistic and power-free mechanism, but as a more systematic way of looking at the political power of ideas.

More than Arendt, Habermas acknowledges that communication cannot reside within the public sphere indefinitely but that we need to take into account the state with its policy making and rule-making procedures. He distinguishes between communicative power and administrative power. Communicative power is built up through several cycles of debate and deliberation and this is picked up by empowered actors who, when its relevance cannot be ignored any longer, make use of administrative power to consolidate communicative power within the state apparatus We will elaborate on this further in chapter 4.

Figure 2.1. below, then, aims to highlight the dynamics of the process of political representation based on the four political components introduced by Dryzek. We will refer to this schematization several times throughout the thesis.

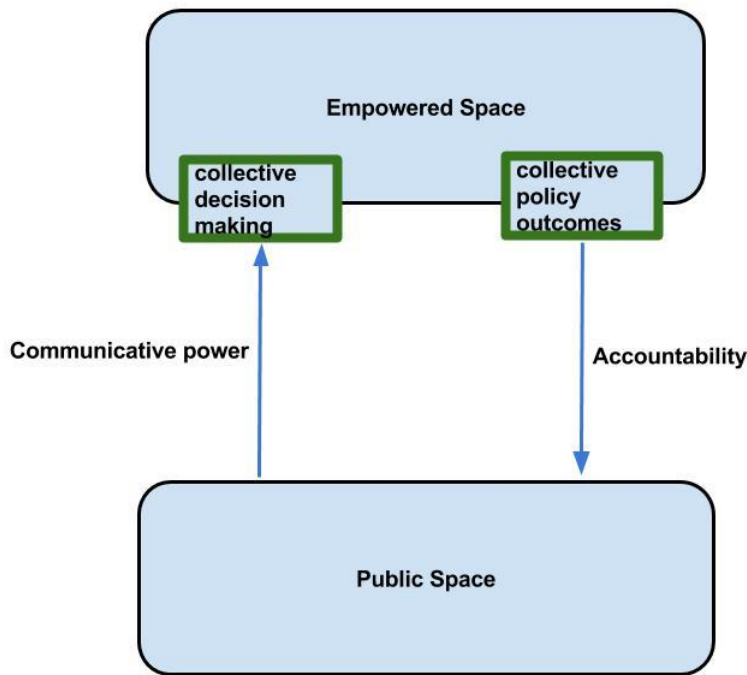


Figure 2.1. The process of political representation from the perspective of the four political components

2.2.3. DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION AND ITS ASSOCIATED CONCEPTS

In line with the assumptions on discursive institutionalism and the notion of communicative power which understand the political role of words as an essentially social phenomena with the power to influence politics, we can now proceed to an understanding of the political system in terms of discursive representation¹⁰.

¹⁰ Political representation is an elusive term, but is here referred to as the political practice by which interests are articulated in a political system.

Discursive representation can be considered as an innovative practice of political representation which proposes that ‘interests’ are represented by means of discourses. Instead of relying on more familiar political ‘objects’ of representation such as territorial constituencies (‘I represent the interests of UK agriculture’) or social groups (‘I represent all farmers’), discourses become the basis for representation (‘I represent the multifunctionality discourse’).

Dryzek and Niemeyer (2008) specify that a (democratically) legitimate procedure of discursive representation must ensure that *“all relevant discourses get represented, regardless of how many people subscribe to each”*. The criterion to include ‘all relevant discourses’ is consistent with one of the core claims of (deliberative) democratic theory which conceives democracy as *“any set of arrangements that instantiates the principle that all affected by collective decisions should have an opportunity to influence the outcome¹¹.”* (Urbinati and Warren, 2008; See also Habermas 1996 ; Held 2006; Mansbridge et al., 2012; Dryzek 2010). In fact, discursive representation provides a promising approach to address the practical challenges related to this affectedness principle. This is so because discursive representation enables the creation of democratic legitimacy without actually needing to include all affected actors in actual deliberative interactions, yet creating a political setting in which all relevant discourses are articulated and accessible by the public sphere or relevant constituencies (Drzyek, 2010).

In this respect, discursive representation distances itself from proportional representation because policy making rationality is approached from a substantive perspective where the intrinsic value of policy proposals will be considered more important than the amount of people who endorse a particular solution. (This does not mean that aggregative procedures such as voting

¹¹ Or as Dryzek formulates this principle of affectedness *“that legitimacy depends on the right, opportunity and capacity of those subject to a decision (or their representatives) to participate in consequential deliberation about the content of the decision.”* (Dryzek 2010, p 162). See also Held (2006)

become obsolete). However, it is important to note that discursive representation is not primarily a mechanism to make decisions, but rather a procedure to ensure that any proposal or policy outcome gets “*scrutinized in light of the variety of discourses that can be brought to bear*” (Dryzek and Stevenson, 2014:197-198).

A central aspect to be taken into account is any process of discursive representation is captured in the concept of discursive legitimacy. Dryzek and Niemeyer (2008) define discursive legitimacy as:

“the extent to which a collective decision is consistent with the constellation of discourses present in the public sphere, in the degree to which this constellation is subject to the reflective control of competent actors” (484).

Discursive legitimacy is a democratic principle which assumes that when an authority produces a collective decision or outcome, this decision ought to resonate with as many relevant discourses as possible. It concerns the transmission of a provisional outcome of the contestation of discourses in the public sphere to empowered space. A specific political outcome is then more or less discursively legitimate to the extent it takes into account more or less relevant discourses to inform its decision making. The condition that these discourses ‘are subject to reflective control of competent actors’ refers to the need to carefully map the discourses that are ‘out there’ as well as the competence of involved actors in articulating reasonable and robust discourses. Here lays a task for discourse analysis as well as for a careful consideration of public opinion and the positions of social movements, associations and other societal groups or actors that are politically and discursively engaged in a specific topic (cf. Chapter 4 and 8).

In practice, political outcomes will vary in their degree to which they resonate with the constellation of discourses in the public sphere, but more resonance will entail more discursive legitimacy¹². Moreover, policy outcomes are often

¹² Note here the analytical value of discursive legitimacy, i.e. as a concept to denote which and how many relevant discourses are being employed to inform decision making. Note that also discursive representation has both a descriptive and normative component. Discursive representation is about

comprised of sets of policy measures and actions which makes it possible to integrate the rationale of a range of discourses. The CAP which is a policy program comprised of an integrated set of policy measures is a typical example of a collective outcome which is amenable to the scrutiny of a variety of different discourses (see also Erjavec and Erjavec, 2015).

Discursive accountability, then, refers to any kind of mechanism¹³ in which empowered space can ensure - and be held accountable for - discursive legitimacy for collective outcomes. It concerns the extent to which actors make sense of collective outcomes in terms of how they are justified in terms of different discourses (descriptive) as well as an ideal to ensure that collective outcomes are justified in as many relevant discourses as possible. As Dryzek notes, discursive accountability will try to ensure that a political space is "*is not dominated by a single discourse whose terms are accepted uncritically by all involved actors in a way that marginalizes other discourses that could claim relevance*" (Dryzek, 2010, 50).

Dryzek admits that it is practically impossible "*for any decision to fully meet the claims of all discourses*" (Dryzek, 2010, 35), but this does not diminish the salutary effect of considering collective decision making from as many relevant discourses as possible. In relation to the problem solving aims of deliberation discussed in 2.1.2., discursive representation adds the practical relevance of using discourses to the resources of deliberative democracy. When actors are confronted with discourses - in a context of a sufficiently open and authentic dialogue - they will be able to re-consider their arguments and positions with the support of those discourses. Discourses can bring in various new elements such

the general process of how discourses shape collective decisions and get (or do not get) represented at different political spaces (descriptive) but at the same time specifies the goal to include all relevant discourses and give equal weight to each discourse as a potential resource in improving the quality of particular decisions (normative).

¹³ Note that discursive accountability is a particular *mechanism* and thus more specific than the principle of discursive legitimacy. Discursive accountability is encompassed by discursive legitimacy: When empowered space communicates about its outcomes in terms of several discourses, somewhere along the process some-one in empowered space was informed by several important discourses. Vice versa, discursive legitimacy is not encompassed by discursive accountability: a collective decision can be discursively legitimate but needs not be embedded within a mechanism of accountability.

as the application of alternative values, responsibility of previously unacknowledged agency, alternative causal relations or assumptions about human behavior, all of which can lead to new solutions and strategies (see also Crivits et al., 2010 on strategies for sustainable development).

When discourses will be enacted in a political context, the increased awareness of previously unknown discourses will, given the strategic nature of politics, not always lead to changed behavior or preferences. In this context, Dryzek conceptualizes to broad types of reactions. When increased awareness of discourses evokes new combinations of existing and alternative understandings we can speak of 'reflexive modernization'¹⁴. When awareness of previously unknown discourses leads to a conscious rejection of alternatives and a "*and retreat in to the familiar by people who now understand the nature of the threat to them*" (Stevenson and Dryzek, 2014, 39) the term 'reflexive traditionalization' can be used.

Although discursive representation aims to represent 'discourses' rather than 'individuals', this does not mean that agency is rendered obsolete in the process of political representation. Dryzek introduces the notion of a 'discursive representative', someone appointed with the responsibility to articulate, defend and deliberate a specific discourse. A discursive representative needs to ensure that some specific discourse is taken into account to inform decision making¹⁵. In Dryzek and Niemeyer (2008) the socio-scientific method of Q-methodology is mentioned as a means to identify which persons load heavily on which discourses, but also other methodologies – such as discourse analysis – can be employed to identify the right discursive representatives. A discursive representative is not entirely 'free' but needs to ensure some form of allegiance to that discourse. Stevenson and Dryzek argue that discursive representatives should be held up against at least three standards:

¹⁴ Note: Dryzek adopts Beck's concept and gives it a more specific meaning.

¹⁵ This is especially important for new discourses that are not well known or articulated politically. Compare with contemporary evolutions towards the representation of previously unrepresented interests such as 'future generations' or 'the natural world'.

- (1) Is the rhetoric/communication used appropriate to the task of representing discourses?
- (2) Are representatives making themselves accountable to identifiable agents they represent?
- (3) How legitimate is the representative's claim from the perspective of others articulating that discourse?

Dryzek and Niemeyer (2008), Dryzek (2010) and Stevenson and Dryzek (2014) provide a series of additional propositions to tackle the challenge of operationalizing discursive representation, such as a 'chamber of discourses' where decisions are scrutinized by different discursive representatives. These will be discussed (more) extensively in the three original studies which can be considered as the empirical body of the thesis. The remainder of this section is concerned with positioning the cases in the analytical framework of discursive representation.

2.2.4. PLACING RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND CASE STUDIES IN AN INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

We are now in the position to place the three empirical studies in the institutional framework proposed above and depicted in figure 2.1.

A first case concerns the political component of transmission. The starting point is the observation that competing policy discourses on the development of agriculture not only have relevance within empowered space, but also have a direct impact on the daily practices of farmers (Tilzey and Potter, 2005 ; Hajer, 2003). To this end, we investigated how the emerging practice of farm education can be scrutinized from the discursive plurality of existing policy discourses (neo-liberalism, productivism, multifunctionality) and explore how the constitutive elements of these key discourses give meaning to the goals, motivations and underlying values of farm education. Based on a qualitative analysis of ongoing educative practices in Flanders we demonstrate how farmers recognize and endorse the implications of the three discourses (what we have termed as educative settings), thereby initiating a first step towards a structuration of a debate towards the future development of farm education and

a process of transmission from public to empowered space. The original publication in chapter 5 sets the ground to reflect on the political component of transmission and the role the public sphere might play in the articulation of policy proposals that support emerging practices.

A second case concerns the process of discursive accountability. Here, we aimed to investigate how a discursive perspective on accountability to farming interests can be developed. To this end, we substantiate two competing discourses on innovation, which we term the participatory innovation discourse and the linear innovation discourse. Subsequently we try to understand how these discourses are articulated in the public sphere, by drawing data from qualitative research and deskbased research. Finally, we analyze the outcomes of a process called 'pig dialogue days'. These were initiated by the chamber of agriculture to empower stakeholders to debate themes relevant to overcoming the perceived stalemate in pig farming. The dialogue resulted in the articulation of 22 policy measures. We analyse these from the perspective of discursive accountability by examining their discursive balance vis-à-vis the two discourses of innovation

The final case is located in the realm of empowered space. Because we wanted to gain insight in the discursive enactments that influence shifts within existing institutional arrangements, we investigated the emergence and evolution of the *New Food Frontier* (NFF). NFF was an initiative of sustainability governance, which took place between 2010 and 2012, and brought together NGOs, policy makers, academics and interest group representatives in an attempt to set up a transition process for the Flemish agro-food system. The core activity of the governance initiative was to engage a series of influential practitioners to create future images. Although the entire project was framed within the theory and methodology of transition management, the attempt to adopt substantive conceptions of how the food system should be developed as political vehicles can, also, be understood as a process of discursive representation. More particularly, we aim to understand how different conceptions of political representation and the articulation of discourses on sustainable development are re-negotiated and enacted in a context of institutional ambiguity. We adopt the notion of the institutional void (Hajer, 2003) to scrutinize the interaction between the substantive and rule-making dimensions within empowered space.

The discussion in chapter seven will center on the potential significance of these findings in terms of how discursive representation might be complementary with the established policy arrangements in the Flemish agro-food policy domain.

Figure 2.2. gives an updated visual representation of the institutional scheme in 2.1. taking into account the concepts of discursive representation introduced above. In addition, the three case studies are placed within this institutional framework.

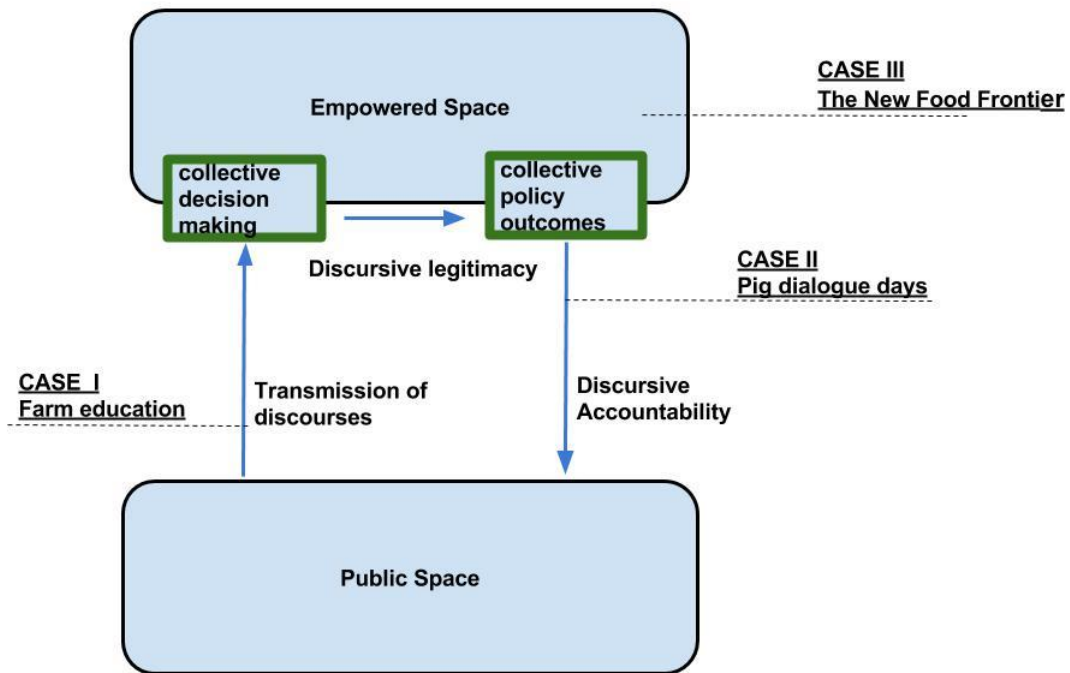


Figure 2.2. Cases placed in a larger institutional

As mentioned in chapter 1, we now want to refine our overarching research question with three sub-questions. These are:

SRQ1: How can discourses that open up new conceptual spaces for agricultural practice be transmitted to empowered space in the agro-food policy domain?

SRQ2: How do (political) actors discursively interact within a context of institutional ambiguity in the agro-food policy domain?

SRQ3: How does authority deal with contending discourses and communicative power in the political processes of the agro-food policy domain?

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INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS IN THE
FLEMISH AGRO-FOOD POLICY DOMAIN

CHAPTER 3 - INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS IN THE FLEMISH AGRO-FOOD POLICY DOMAIN

Chapter 3 aims to introduce some of the fundamental aspects of the political context of the Flemish agro-food system. In Flanders, the agricultural policy domain is still dominated by a neo-corporatist form of policy making characterized by an exchange relationship between farmer interest groups and the state. Section 3.1. addresses the general political culture in Belgium which helps to understand the roots of the neo-corporatist consult. Largely based on Frouws (1994), a subsequent section then concentrates on the resources and rules of a typical neo-corporatist arrangement. Section 3.3. goes on to indicate how the neo-corporatist arrangement is structured in the Flemish case (3.3.1) and introduces a short historical introduction of the three prominent farmer organizations (3.3.2). The description of their context will help to clarify their discursive positions on topics such as agriculture, economy and the environment. We conclude the chapter by highlighting some key institutional policies and its underlying discourse(s) to set the background against which the cases in chapter 5, 6 and 7 can be understood (3.3.)

3.1. POLITICAL CULTURE IN BELGIUM

On the level of political culture, Belgium has often been often termed a power-sharing or *consociational* democracy (Lijphart, 1981; Deschouwer, 2009). This is so because, its government succeeded in holding together different language communities and guaranteed stability in the presence of deeply divided religious, cultural and economic divisions (Deschouwer, 2009). A consociationalist model has proved to be compatible with segmented or pillarized societies, of which Belgium is a prominent example. Deschouwer (2009) explains:

“This segmentation refers to the existence of a dense network of organizations belonging to the same subculture and almost fully encapsulating its members. Membership of organizations belonging to the same network are thus overlapping. The ‘segments’ or pillars of society (reference omitted) provide their members with a variety of services, from the cradle to the grave.”(5)

From a historical perspective, Deschouwer (2009) locates the birth of the Belgian consociationalism in 1918, with the Pact of Loppem, when the Belgian king Albert the first, invited the Catholics, Socialists and Liberals to think about the question on how to deal with a country in deep division. The resulting agreement was that when important decisions would have to be taken, the political leaders of the major societal movements (and political ‘families’) would try to find a common agreement. This led to a mix of (1) subtle compromise on common policies and (2) granting autonomy to the segments for policies and services. After the second world war, the development of the welfare state and its social security system strengthened the legitimacy of the pillars and in the 1950s the devastating effects of a majoritarian strategy (cf. the royal question in 1950, Second School War in 1950-1958) convinced the political elite to permanently change the rules of the game: ‘a politics of accommodation’ was a necessary strategy to avoid conflict. It thus became a rule that a political consensus need not be comprehensive or integrative but rather includes the minimum commitments to maintain the (political) system (Lijphart, 1998; Lijphart 1981b; Deschouwer, 2009).

The process of ‘polarization’ eroded significantly in most domains of society since the 1990s, but in agricultural policy making, the practice of power-sharing between political elites and large autonomy to cultural and corporatist segments, is still very relevant. As we will see, consociationalist features provide the conditions for a neo-corporatist arrangement in which cooperation between the largest Flemish Farmers organization Boerenbond, its socio-cultural network of associations and the Flemish Christian party are still a driving force of the cooperation between the government and organized interest groups. We now turn to the dominant policy arrangement in the Flemish agricultural policy domain.

3.2. NEO-CORPORATISM AS A MODEL FOR DECISION-MAKING

The Belgian agricultural policy domain is understood to be part of a neo-corporatist arrangement, where decision making is based on an exchange relationship between ‘functional’ interest groups and the state (Dezeure, 2004; Frouws; 1994; Fraussen and Wauter; 2015). As a theory of interest group activity, neo-corporatism is often contrasted with pluralism (Held, 2006; Devos, 2006). In a pluralist system it is assumed that a diverse group of interest organizations compete to influence ‘a neutral’ government in a fragmented organizational landscape (Jordan, 1990). In the pluralist model, there are principally an unlimited amount of interest articulating actors, operating both voluntarily and in competition with each other and without any official recognition of the state. For neo-corporatism the converse holds. There are but a limited number of ‘official’ interest groups which get privileged access to decision-making sites and are engaged in a long-term relationship with the state (Schmitter, 1974). In Belgium, corporatist arrangements are not limited to economic affairs but can be found in several sectors such as education, health care and agriculture. There is thus quite a diversity of privileged interest groups (Fraussen and Wauter; 2015).

In order to more precisely define neo-corporatism we base ourselves on the seminal work of Jaap Frouws (1994). Frouws performed one of the few yet most in depth analyses of agrarian neo-corporatism. His study examines Dutch manure policy between 1970 and the beginning of the 1990s, and empirically

explored how neo-corporatist features are enacted.¹⁶ More recently, Dezeure (2004) successfully applied Frouw's framework, confirming some of the political routines in the context of the Boerenbond.

Based on extensive literature study and empirical research, Frouws (1994) synthesizes agrarian neo-corporatism as follows:

"[A] socio-political structure of interest articulation and policy formation, in which functional interest organizations (farmers' unions) possess a representative monopoly, cooperating between each other and with the state on the basis of a political-economic consensus at the top. The participating organizations are granted privileged influence on policy-making in exchange for disciplining their constituency (the farmers) and restraining their demands."

We would now like to unpack this definition step by step for it will allow us to spell out the features of the neo-corporatist arrangement and furnish an important reference point to re-address in chapter 8. A reading provides at least six important points to be observed.

A first aspect relates to the process of interest representation. In his definition, Frouws deliberately chose the word 'articulation' over 'advocacy' or 'defending', in order to more genuinely reflect the social constructivist dimension of interest representation (Frouws; 1994). In line with the epistemological assumptions of this thesis (see chapter 4), Frouws assumes that 'interests' are not simply a 'reflection' of a fixed social reality to be advocated 'objectively'. Instead, interest articulation is part of a socio-technically constructed process where political communication occurs at different levels, where documents and budgets are prepared, drafted and translated along different political fora and where the agency of those involved co-determine how particular interests are (reasonably)

¹⁶ Until the mid-nineties, the Netherlands and Belgium were characterized by similar forms of agrarian policy making, until the Dutch neo-corporatist arrangement significantly eroded, breaking up the close relationship between the farmer organizations and the ministry of agriculture (Wisserhof, 2000).

equated with general interests. Freeman and Maybin, 2011 ; Wildavsky, 1964; Frouws 1994).

A second point is about the scope of policy making and specifies that the privileged participants of a neo-corporatist consult co-determine the process of policy formation. More particularly, policy formation entails a dual focus of the neo-corporatist consult, that is, the involved interest groups (farmer organizations) having an impact on both (1) administrative-executive issues (i.e. which particular policy measures are 'effective', 'feasible', 'possible') as well as (2) political issues (i.e. which general policy lines, frames and strategies are 'desirable').

The notion of *functional* interest groups, then, refers to the dominant rationale of political representation in a neo-corporatist arrangement. In neo-corporatism, groups are involved in the policy-making process because they represent socio-economic sectors and actors whose interests a government cannot disregard. In the practice of functional representation, therefore, hierarchically structured and member-based groups such as interest groups, umbrella organizations and trade unions are considered as the most legitimate representation of a vocational constituency. Although strictly speaking functional representation does not relate constituencies to a geographical area, in practice, it is often combined with territorial representation (see 3.2.2. on the legitimacy criteria for entering political arenas in Flanders). Recently the realm of more traditional 'functional' actors has been expanded to include NGOs and social movements (Fobé et al., 2010). How weight is given to each type of actor is, however, dependent on the political context.

A key aspect of neo-corporatist policy making is that the participating interest groups acquire a so-called representative monopoly. This concept carries two meanings (Frouws, 1994 ; Dezeure 2004). First and foremost, it refers to the fact that a particular interest group is granted a privilege in representing the interests of a specific group or sub-set of society (e.g. farmers, retailers, feed industry, etc.). As we will see, in Flanders four farmer organizations have acquired a representative monopoly, of which we will address the three in the next section (3.3.2). A second meaning of a representative monopoly refers to a rule within a societal segment, that is, a rule applied to the socio-political 'realm' of a structured interest group, such as, for instance, the Boerenbond. The rule

holds that for each relevant 'issue' or 'interest' related to the sub-segment, only one organization can be made responsible. For instance, just one organization to represent 'farmer women', 'young farmers', 'care farming', 'organic farming', 'innovation support for farmers', etc. This also entails that particular interests – in this case any interest related to the rich and broad field of agriculture related topics – cannot be represented by members outside the organizational boundaries of the interest group. 'Wild' representation is not tolerated (Frouws, 1994). Furthermore, established interest groups often adopt a strategy of co-optation, that is, when a group of actors starts to organize its interests (e.g. organic agriculture), they will try to convince them to become part of their structure (Halpin, 2006)

Fifth, the phrase '*on the basis of a political-economic consensus at the top*', refers to the importance of a shared consensus between the government and the interest groups. Without a shared discourse, power-sharing and consensus building becomes difficult. Indeed, Wisserhof (2000) has shown that a divergence in discursive positions (especially on the environment) between the government and the farmer organizations, gave way to the erosion of the Dutch neo-corporatist arrangement. In Flanders, such a consensus is as yet still strong (see 3.2.3).

Finally, we can synthesize the second part of the definition by pointing at the exchange perspective (Salisbury, 1969; Berkhout, 2013). This is a political framework in which interest groups are viewed from their capacity to both build as well as maintain exchange relationships with key actors such as policy makers, constituents and the media (Berkhout, 2013). To understand a neo-corporatist arrangement, we primarily need to focus on two types of exchange relationships: (A) interest group – government (cabinet and administration) and (B) interest group – members (or constituency). With regard to (A), it can be specified that in exchange for 'timely information about political issues', 'agenda setting possibilities' and 'access to a series of political arenas' as provided by the state, the interest groups need to 'provide feedback from the farming constituency' and 'guarantee the disciplining of their members'. The latter entails that elite representatives of the interest group ensure that members - and often by consequence non-members- comply with policy measures agreed on. Disciplining means that, when a new policy measure is issued in, the

organization will, for instance, communicate about their importance via internal media or information days as well as facilitate implementation through their consulting services. With regard to (B), the resources demanded from interest group organization are policy compliance of members and member's public action in, while the resources (theoretically) demanded from members are the member's control over leaders and ensuring public visibility and political representation (Berkhout, 2013).

Although clear in Frouws' definition and implicit in the notion of 'exchange' it is still important to emphasize that a neo-corporatist arrangement is not simply an interest group strategy, but the consequence of an active act of government consent, that is, the state's priority in favor of a small group of political actors (cf. elite deliberation). There are several arguments of why a government should do such a thing which are worth considering in more detail. A first set of reasons are related to effectiveness: a government can acquire specific knowledge of a certain policy domain; can better assess and anticipate the reactions of its target policy group and receive active support with the implementation of new policies. Furthermore, a government expects there to be a simplification in the consultation and decision-making process because a wide variety of specific interests are aggregated in single standpoints (Frouws, 1994; Berkhout, 2013). As we will see, this expectation often spells out the rule to bring a maximum amount of single standpoints to the table, which has an effect on how deliberation is enacted.

The additional rules of depoliticization/technocracy and insulation

In order to fully understand the rules of neo-corporatism vis-à-vis the practice of discursive representation (see chapter 8), it is important to specify two more crucial rules that are not included in our analysis of Frouws' definition, but are nevertheless typical for a neo-corporatist arrangement (also based on Frouws, 1994)

An important discursive dynamic is driven by the rule of technocracy that refers to the practice of equating political predicaments with purely technical problems (Frouws, 1994; Wissershof; 2000). The decision making taking place is represented as a technical and scientific process of problem solving rather than being the object of a (party)political discussion (such as in e.g. the parliament or

public space). When political contradictions do emerge, these are to be discussed behind doors in such a way that all parties should be able to benefit (cf. a non-zero sum game). The outcomes of the decision making process should always be communicated in terms of the general interest. Related to this way in which political issues are depoliticized, is the act of tabooing, which means that certain topics are considered to be unspeakable and 'out of the question'. Frouws gives the example of how, in the context of the environmental effects of agriculture, the topic of livestock reduction was for a long time an absolute impossibility, which immediately justified as series of technical solutions to reduce the emissions of a growth orientated livestock industry (Frouws, 1993, p. 206-207).

A second rule concerns insulation of policy-making, which implies that groups external to the neo-corporatist consult, have no or limited access to the policy-making procedures and groups internal to the consult need to guarantee absolute discretion (Frouws, 1993; Wisserhof, 2000). Insulation can be associated with shielding knowledge from going to other parties (interest groups, societal groups) in the early stages of policy making. But the rule of insulation also applies to the structure of the government itself, for instance when certain topics are strictly regarded as the responsibility of the department of agriculture.

In his thesis on manure policy, Frouws clearly illustrates the dynamics of both above rules. First, when the issue of manure surplus was initiated by the Dutch department of environmental policy in the 1970s, it was ignored and later on categorized as a non-problem by the department of agriculture (depoliticization), which was, at that time, still largely dominated by a neo-corporatist arrangement. When the problem did become recognized at the beginning of the 1980s it was considered as a topic to be handled by the agricultural policy domain (insulation) and solutions were largely understood as comprised of technological solutions (technocracy).

3.3. THE FLEMISH NEO-CORPORATIST ARRANGEMENT: STILL A GUIDELINE TO AGRICULTURAL POLICY-MAKING?

Having given a more precise meaning to the neo-corporatist arrangement, we are now in the position to better understand the different participants and procedures that guide agricultural policy-making in Flanders. As this chapter aims to introduce the general political context we will not systematically assess the neo-corporatist features described above but touch upon them when possible. In chapter 7, however, the neo-corporatist model will be adopted as a conceptual lens to make sense of the governance trajectory of the New Food Frontier. Our main aim here is to introduce some fundamental issues that characterize the general context of the PHD. We will first describe the policy making procedures in agricultural policy, and then continue with a short introduction of the most important farmer organizations and their relative dominance.

3.3.1. POLICY MAKING PROCEDURES IN THE FLEMISH AGRICULTURAL POLICY DOMAIN

The central policy-making body in the Flemish agricultural policy domain is constituted by a constant interaction between the Cabinet of the Minister of agriculture (executive power), Administration of Agriculture and the farmer organizations. This constitutes the neo-corporatist consult. Although the consult is sometimes referred to merely in terms of the facilitation of technical aspects and feasibility of policy measures, it is known that also political issues and policy frames are co-determined here (interview, 2014) (cf. supra, the dual focus of neo-corporatism).

There are two key political aspects which form the core object of the neo-corporatist consult. First, a political orientation is laid down in the coalition agreement of the Flemish government which is an important part of the negotiation process at the beginning of each legislature and *contains a long list of general policy principles, and a long detailed list of concrete actions that will be*

undertaken by the government (Deschouwer, 2009; p159).¹⁷ Second, several interviews confirm that the absolute majority of decisions made at the neo-corporatist consult are related to the implementation and translation of European agricultural policy. It is important, however, to mention that member states still have a substantial freedom to determine the modalities and priorities of European policy measures (hence the term ‘translation’) (see section 3.2.3).

But how does the decision-making process work? In the most ‘formal’ sense the decision making process ought to proceed in a sequence of steps. The administration is formally authorized to follow up the European policy decisions and prepare its implementation at the regional level. In order to evaluate and support the process of policy implementation there is a structural consultation of the farmer organizations. In the normal procedure, the administration will only present a proposal, when this has been discussed with the cabinet. At a meeting, both the farmer organizations and the administration will prepare and present a list of potential policy inputs such as e.g. a specific policy measure, a choice to activate a specific option or budget in the European ‘menu’, a specific argumentation about how a policy measure ought to be implemented, etc. Both the farmer organizations and the administration make an estimate about which policy inputs are practically feasible and which ones are not. The farmer organizations make use of their study department or scientific contacts and the policy officers of the administration make use of their study department in order to investigate, quantify or anticipate the effects of different policy actions.¹⁸

When a series of discussions on a specific topic have come to a first closure, a draft decision of the Flemish Government is established. At this moment, the farmer organizations have the possibility to react and review the draft, if fundamental contestations would still be the case. Subsequently, the draft goes

¹⁷ Each cabinet also publishes a policy note at the beginning of the legislature which entails a set of principles, objectives and measures that will be focused on. This note is the result of the consultation of the farmer organizations, the administration and other actors of the agricultural system (such as e.g. ILVO). Each year, the minister needs to hand in a policy letter specifying progress made on each theme. We will elaborate on this in section 3.2.3. which is concerned with the substantive focus of agricultural policies. In this section, however, we focus on the procedures of policy making.

¹⁸ Some European policy measures do remain largely unquestioned.

to the Strategic Advisory Board for Agriculture and Fisheries (the SALV) where it is again evaluated. In the SALV, the same actors from the consult are accompanied by actors from 'civil society'. In the SALV there are representatives from a 'social' and an 'environmental' NGO, several business associations (food industry, feed industry, agricultural equipment, self-employed), a consumer organization and the agricultural research community. Farmer organizations are here again represented in the majority¹⁹. All the remarks and suggestions from the SALV are handled by the administration and need to be either adopted or put aside by a legitimate motivation. When this step is finalized, the cabinet of agriculture brings the final decision to the government. When a set of policy decisions are approved, this becomes a ministerial decision, which mandates the administration to translate the decisions to legally binding policy measures.

Although this procedure is generally followed, variations often occur. It can be said that there is a continuous interaction between the triangle of administration, cabinet and the farmer organizations: *"Sometimes the administration sits together with the farmer organization first, and then goes to the cabinet. Sometimes the cabinet contacts us with the telephone with a specific question and there is no need so sit together. All depends, on how politically sensitive things are"* (Interview, 2015). For politically precarious issues the farmer organization and the cabinet also sit together. Furthermore, in rare cases, such as an emergency situation, the SALV is not considered.

It is crucial to mention that although the government principally aims to attain consensus at the top-level, ultimate authority does reside with the cabinet. In essence, a dossier does not require a consensus decision, if the minister can convince its partners in government that a certain option is valid. Even in the case of a negative SALV advice, the minister can set up an inter-cabinet working group in which the issue at stake can be reasonably resolved. The only 'official'

¹⁹ There are twenty seats: nine seats go to the farmer organizations BB, (5), ABS (2), Bioforum (1), VAC (1). The remaining seats are: agri-business (5), NGOs (2), Agricultural research (2) Consumer organizations (1) and Fisheries (1). Remarkable is that BB gets 2 of its seats through Groene Kring (young farmers) and KVLV-Agra (women farmers).

requirement for a cabinet is its need to follow up and account for the policy goals and frames in the policy agreement that has been approved at the beginning of a legislature (interview, 2015). (cf. section 3.2.3)

Equally important is the seemingly limited role of the parliament in the whole process of policy making. The bulk of the decision making is being done in the neo-corporatist consult between interest groups and the executive and administrative powers. Moreover, even though the parliament is in principle responsible to actively deliberate about decisions to be made, in most cases the parliament only critically addresses decisions that have already been taken by government (Devos, 2013, Deschouwer, 2009)²⁰. The parliament does exert influence in the issuance of decrees, but, in the agricultural policy domain, only few decrees are being issued and they rather involve broad institutional decisions (e.g. de-centralization, the institutional rules of strategic advisory board) than concrete policy measures.

Finally, we need to address the fact that not all decisions related to agriculture are authorized by the cabinet of agriculture. Agricultural issues that are related to the environment (e.g. manure policy, nature development) or spatial planning (e.g. land development policy) are executed in other policy domains. In the decision-making sites related to these domains, administrations sit together with farmer organizations as well as other interest groups or experts (environmental ngo's, etc.). Often ad hoc single issue working groups are established as is the case for the development of the Manure Action Plans (MAP) or the Implementation of the Natura 2000 special areas of conservation.

²⁰ This needs to be understood in relation to the fact that Belgium is a participatory. As Deschouwer explains: "*Whether matters are dealt with at the federal level or at the substate level does however not make much of a difference if one looks at the way in which policies are prepared, decided and implemented. At all levels a classic pattern is and remains visible: the political parties sit at the steering wheel (references omitted). Government formation is fully controlled by political parties and the coalition agreements fix the policies for years to come. The parliamentary groups are not supposed to question these agreements.*" (Deschouwer, 2009, 190)

The above illustrates the key importance of farmer organizations in agricultural policy making. In this respect, it is important to contextualize the most important farmer organizations in Flanders, which we do in the subsequent section.

3.3.2. EMERGENCE, CONTEXT AND ROLE OF THE FLEMISH FARMER ORGANIZATIONS

An understanding of how agricultural policy making in Flanders work, would be decidedly incomplete, if one does not take into account the specific role and position of the Flemish farmer organizations. For a long time, the largest farmer organization *Boerenbond* (BB) was the only Flemish representative of farmer interests in the agrarian neo-corporatist arrangement. During the nineties three more farmer organizations obtained a representative monopoly: ABS, VAC and Bioforum. Because VAC seems to have increasingly withdrawn itself from the policy making process (interview, 2015), this section will focus on the three most important farmer organizations: BB, ABS and Bioforum.

THE LARGEST FARMERS UNION: BOERENBOND

The Boerenbond (BB) originated at the end of the nineteenth century, when agriculture was facing a serious socio-economic crisis. Belgium was still a rural community, with a 36 % employment rate in agriculture and a majority of the population residing in small municipalities (Van Molle, 1990). When the domestic market collapsed due to a rapidly increasing dependence on import to meet food consumption, a lot of farmers were pushed out of business. The Catholic church feared farmer would flee to the cities, and fall in the hands of the upcoming socialist party, leading to electoral losses given the traditional interweaving of the rural community, the Christian party and the Church (Van Molle, 1990). It is in this context that we need to understand the rationale of the BB initiators Joris Helleputte, Franz Schollart and Jacob-Ferdinand Mellaerts. Helleputte was a member of parliament for the Catholic party and a fierce defender of the German interpretation of corporatism (cf. Rhineland capitalism) (Van Molle, 1990). In this societal model, the church together with large landowners are considered to constitute a leading elite in the social and political deployment of a hierarchically structured society, where ‘corporations’ of different societal groups (such as agricultural workers, tenant farmers, farmer-owners and large landowners) cooperate in a spirit of Christian solidarity. In

addition to a clear ideology, the founding fathers of the BB also showed a remarkable diligence in recruiting members. It was the cleric Mellaerts who personally addressed thousands of, mostly small scale, farmers approaching them with a message that 'unity empowers' and convincing them of the need to form a large farmers bond. After a period of about 12 years of recruitment- when he left the organization in 1902 - he had played a prominent role in the successful establishment of numerous farmer guilds and the membership of approximately 21.000 farmers (Van Molle, 1990).

This sets the stage for a series of historical developments leading to an organization which has a membership of about 17.000 active farmers²¹. These developments can be impossibly covered within the setting of this thesis. However, more in line with the overall aim of this dissertation we would like to address three politically relevant characteristics of the BB as organization: the deployment of its economic activities, its internal hierarchical structure and its interrelation with the Flemish Catholic Party.

a. Economic activities of the BB

The BB has made a notable journey on the development of its economic activity. This can be clearly illustrated by referring to its prominent role in two economic branches: the banking system and agribusiness. While both branches became increasingly independent over the years (i.e. in a divergence between the 'professional' and the 'economic' pillar of the organization BB), both originated within and are still linked to the farmer organization.

Although the current banking group KBC is now an autonomous structure, its roots can be traced back to locally established saving and loaning guilds for BB members at the beginning of the 20th century. These were the so-called *Raiffeissen* banks, originally meant to provide loan credit, over time evolving to a financial bank and the large banking group CERA and later on KBC (Van der Wee

²¹ In Flanders there are about 25.000 active farmers left.

et al.; 2002)²². A key event in the history of the bank was the liquidation of the *Middenkredietkas* in 1934, when a lot of farmers lost their money due to the speculative behavior of the BB top.

Where the banking system became increasingly independent, the BB's agri-business related activities are much more closely linked to BB as organization. The group AVEVE originated in a purchase cooperative to support farmers in 1891 and went through a large series of incremental but in the end radical transformations. Schematically the transformations from purchase cooperative are depicted in diagram 3.1.

²² We specify the historical trajectory in somewhat more detail: The saving and loaning guilds were based on the cooperative ideology of the German banker Friedrich-Wilhelm Raiffeissen who lived in the nineteenth century and aimed to reconcile poverty reduction with decreasing dependency (based on his philosophy of self-help, self-governance and self-responsibility, Wikipedia). After a difficult start, increased agricultural prices in the first world war allowed for a steady growth of the local banks and the additional money was transferred to a newly created central organ (the *Middenkredietkas*) which had the task to coordinate the money flow between the local saving banks. The *Middenkredietkas* started to act as a financial bank and invested in a multitude of industrial companies. This speculative attitude had fatal consequences as the organization went bankrupt in 1934 and drew along the local saving banks. Farmers lost a substantial part of their savings (due to unjust re-arrangement in bonds) and it took 28 years before the repayment procedure was finalized. In 1935, the Boerenbond established a new bank, which again focused on being a savings bank for farmers. The second world war allowed for a new period of growth. After the second world war it became clear that agriculture became increasingly less important in the economy as a whole. Combined with pressures from competing banks also moving to rural areas this led to an increased independence from the farmer organization. Finally, the Central Raiffeissenkas (which had become CERA in 1970) fused with *Insurance ABB* (also part of the Boerenbond group) and *Kredietbank*. The current group KBC – which had a rough time in the 2008 financial crisis – is still one of the largest financial institutions in Flanders

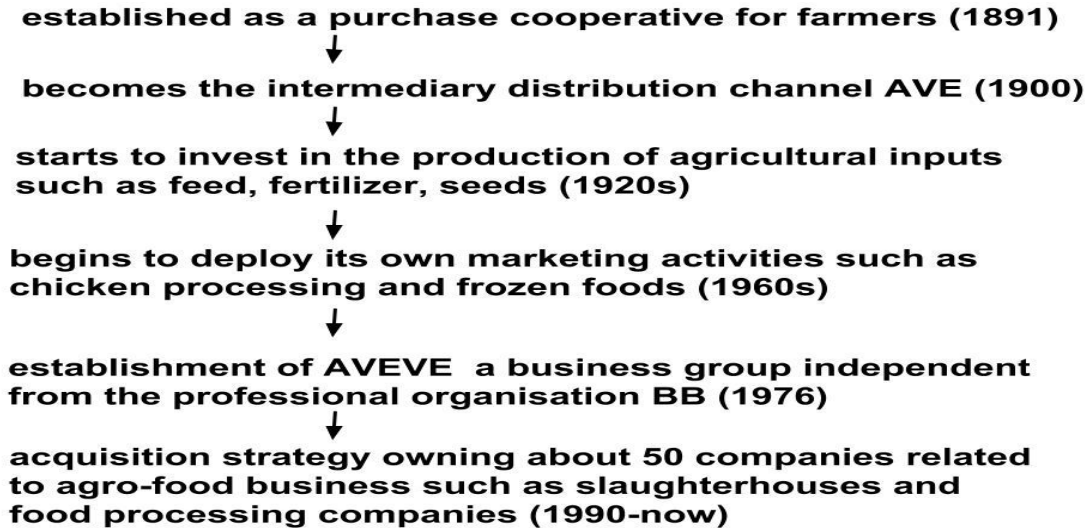


Diagram 3.1. Key transformations of AVEVE group (source: website AVEVE)

These key developments illustrate how BB has been able to successfully deploy a series of economic activities related to agriculture. Its economic activities also allows for the support of the professional organization and enables to employ a number of professional employees that can perform political work but also support research and development, information supply services and other activities (such as communication) in the interest of the farming constituency.

Diagram 3.2. gives a schematic representation of the network of economic activities - also called *Group Boerenbond* - with a central coordinating role for the financial holding MRBB (In Dutch: Maatschappij voor Roerend Bezit van de Boerenbond) which has an equity capital of 2 billion euros. Important participations are AVEVE (100 percent), SBB (accountancy, 48 percent), KBC (bank, 11.5 percent) and Agri investement fund (investment fund in agribusiness, 100 percent) (De Standaard, 2015)

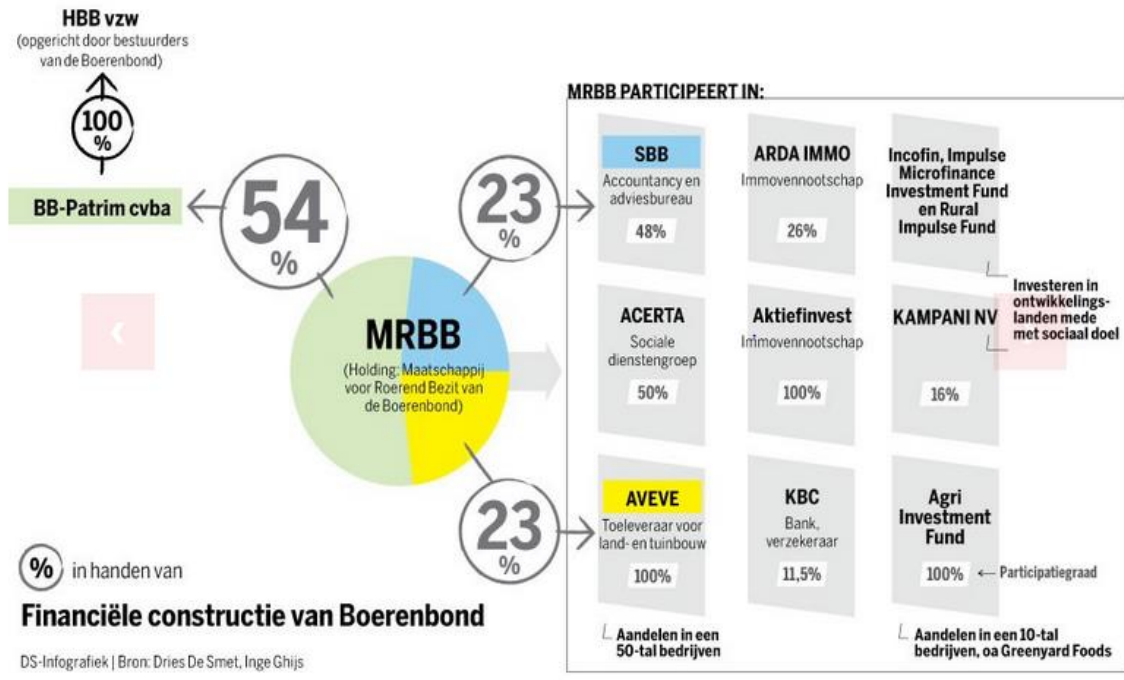


Diagram 3.2. Financial construction of the BB (source: De standaard, 2015)

Although the companies of the group BB are legally autonomous structures, a connection between the economic and professional branch of the organization is maintained. One indication pointing towards this interrelation is that one or more CEOs of the AVEVE group reside in the head office of the professional organization, and that key actors from the economic organizations (such as AVEVE, Agri-Investment fund, or boards of member from the KBC and SBB) receive key political responsibilities within the professional organization (e.g. leading opinion makers, leading negotiators, key actors in political bodies).

b. Internal structure of the BB

The internal structure of the professional body of the BB, bears similarities to an organizational model that we find in many agriculture-related interest groups in Western countries (see for instance Halpin, 2006). It concerns a ‘membership’ style interest group which claims to speak for an economic and sectional constituency and can represent them because the interest group representative can effectively affiliate and communicate with those they defend (which is for instance possible for an interest group that is defending interests related to nature conservation). Evidence about the internal democracy of interest groups

is usually of an organizational nature, that is, that it has a structure that creates the possibility of responsiveness between representatives and the represented.

The BB has a structure which makes it possible to ensure accountability and authorization between the group's leaders and members. The organization consists of a hierarchically and geographically branched network of related units in which members gradually acquire a greater involvement in influencing the political agenda.

The structure of the BB has been re-currently adjusted, the last reform dating back to 2009 (Boerenbond & Landelijke Gilden, 2012). In 1971, due to a marked reduction of the agricultural community, BB brought about an organizational distinction between the professional organization for farmers and the rural organization for the country side. To date, BB has about 70.000 members, of which about 17.000 are professional farmers (Annual report BB, 2010) and the remaining part are sympathizers of the countryside. We now describe the most essential features, without dwelling to long on the institutional details.

Basically, there are three lines of hierarchic structuration: socio-cultural geographically and sector-based (Boerenbond & Landelijke Gilden, 2012). Each of these lines start at the bottom with a series of local bodies in which (a percentage of the member) farmers participate and ends with the Head Office, the most influential body of the organization, which sets out the political lines and takes final decisions in situations of disagreement.

The socio-cultural branch consists of a network of socio-cultural associations called the rural guilds [In Dutch: *Landelijke Gilden*], which focus on a rural experience and tourism. In these associations farmers and non-farmers often meet. In terms of political work, the central office of the rural guilds interacts with the Head Office.

Along the geographically organized line, the base of the organization comprises over 200 local *business guilds* that occasionally meet to discuss several local issues. One level above, we find 20 regional councils which focus on regional dossiers. The latter are a pool of recruitment for the provincial councils. It are these provincial councils (5) which each provide one member for the head office (Ibidem.)

The sector-based line is organized around 8 agricultural sectors (arable farming, dairy farming, meat farming, horticultural farming, vegetables, fruit, pig farming, poultry and small livestock). At the basis there are about 95 business circles which are clustered according to sector, but these are cut loose from the decision making procedures. Just one level above, there are 8 sector groups which each provide one member of the head office (Ibedem.)

Between the head office and the sectorial and provincial councils, there is another structure called the *bondsraad*, which has the task to evaluate and legitimize the decisions that are being made by the head office, comparable to some type of parliamentary function. The *bondsraad* is comprised of all the members of the head office and all members of the provincial councils. It can be noted here that – from the perspective of the principle of the separation of powers – this is a peculiar composition, since the evaluators are to an important extent the same that ought to be evaluated.

The key political body is the head office which is divided in a group of experts – non-farmers taking in the position of president, vice-presidents and normal members - and a group of active farmers, coming from the provincial (6) and sector-based (8) councils. Furthermore, three particular organizations are represented in the head office: AVEVE, KVLV (women Farmers) and *Groene Kring* (young farmers). Every five years the head office is re-elected by the members of the head office and the *bondsraad*. Key political negotiations and representation in key political bodies are carried out by members of the head office and other negotiations are carried out by BB personnel as well as farmers (in Chambers of agriculture for instance) (Dezeure, 2004). The head office is also responsible to take final decisions on the political lines to be taken and to settle conflicts when they occur (for instance conflicts between different sectoral interests) (Dezeure, 2004).²³

²³ This thesis does not focus on the internal structures of accountability of the BB. It would take a separate study to do this. We can mention here that recently BB has established an increased form of accountability via the member magazine in which parts of minutes of the Sectoral or Head office meetings are sometimes published. Recently, in 2006 and 2014, there have been internal visioning exercises in which members could signalize their opinion and influence their organizations position

c. Relationship with the Flemish Catholic Party

When we want to describe the FOs access to and role in political bodies of the Flemish agro-food policy domain, we cannot but address the traditional relationship between the Flemish Catholic party (CVP until 2001, then CD & V). This doctoral dissertation does not focus on party politics. However, in the context of the agro-food policy domain we cannot disregard the role of party-politics. Here, we restrict ourselves to a description of some introductory and fundamental issues.

Although in the beginning days of the BB, its founding fathers were politicians that understood the catholic 'pillar' as something directly connecting party-political, ideological and socio-cultural spheres, today, the interrelationship is between the catholic party and the BB is less direct. However, BB acknowledges that it still has got an *ideological affinity* with the Catholic party and that it strongly influences the party political agenda on agriculture and rural development (Vilt, 2008) In fact, within the BB structure has always existed a political committee, where key representatives of the BB and key members of the political party meet on a regular basis to set a common agenda (Dezeure, 2004; Vilt, 2008). Delreux (2002) even holds that when the catholic party is asked for their position on an agricultural topic, they systematically refer to the study department of the BB. This does not mean that policy agendas are entirely dominated by the BB, since a government needs to establish a more general basis for balancing interest and take into account policy areas outside agriculture and interests of other actors (cf. supra).

Politically, the Catholic party has long been omnipresent. Between 1884 and 2014, the Catholic party was continuously in office, with the exception of two significant legislatures in 1954-1958 and 1999-2003²⁴. The minister for agriculture was also always assigned to the Flemish Catholic party, with the

on sustainable development. One of the overall outcomes of these processes is the shift from a defensive position towards a more integrative position in the positioning of agriculture vis-à-vis society and societal concerns related to animal welfare, environmental issues, etc.

²⁴ In the post-war period 1945-1947 the Catholic party stepped out of the coalition due to issues on the Royal question. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Question#CITEREFMabille2003

exception of three periods, when it was assigned to the Walloon Catholic party (1950-1954; 1960-1972; 1977-1979). What is noticeable is that in both periods when the Catholics were not in power, the BB took a more militant position. In the government of Achilles Van Acker (1954-1958) the BB, traditionally not in favor of protest and militant actions, orchestrated a series of national manifestations to denounce faltering economic negotiations over agriculture (Coppein, 2005). The second time the dominant position of the political party was broken was in the 1999-2003 Flemish legislation, when a Green minister took the position of Minister of agriculture. A more militant attitude of the BB culminated in a massive protest march in 2003 by farmers, hunters and fishermen and members of the (incumbent) liberal and catholic party and aggressively renouncing the environmental policy of the green Minister Vera Dua using remarkably disrespectful rhetoric. Furthermore, at the beginning of the 1999-2003 legislature, BB clearly signaled that this was a politically unusual situation necessitating a change of game because agricultural policy would no longer be “a copy of the vision of the BB” (Van Bossuyt, 1999). These observations support the thesis that there is an intricate cooperation and common agenda setting between the organization BB and the Catholic party.

In terms of the nomination of political candidates the organization BB can also be considered as a pool for recruitment opportunities. In the statutes of the BB it states that members are in principle free to stand for election in any party, except for the extreme right party the ‘Vlaams Belang’. De facto, however, it has almost never happens that a member of the organization, who are always nominated and proposed via the socio-cultural branch *Landelijke Gilden*, has not declared her/his candidacy through the Catholic party (Dezeure, 2004). Top representatives of the BB are not likely to stand in elections or become active in the party political structure (Dezeure, 2004). Shifts between the top of the BB and the political realm do however occur for instance when a key expert of the BB is appointed to a ministerial cabinet of the CD & V (e.g. in 2009 a BB expert was invited by the then minister of environment to work on environmental dossiers such as manure policy) or when a previous policy maker becomes a key representative of the BB (e.g. the previous president of the BB had been working at the administration and cabinet for agriculture for years).

ABS: THE GENERAL FARMER'S SYNDICATE ASKING QUESTIONS

Interest articulation in the public sphere

The farmer organization ABS - which stands for General Farmer's Syndicate [in Dutch: *Algemeen Boerensyndicaat*] – grew out of a reaction against the postwar modernization of agriculture 1950s-1970s²⁵ (see also section 3.2.3). Until the sixties, farmers had - unlike the workers - no tradition of direct syndicate action. The non-activist position was confirmed by the leading farmer organization BB who was adverse to direct action, and would only resort to it when all other forms of political action had failed (Coppein, 2005). When a large part of the farmer constituency experienced a crisis due to the effects of agricultural modernization, a significant group of farmers took a more militant position. Inspired by the success of the labor movement and triggered by protest waves of French farmers in June 1961, the Walloon Farmer organization UPA decided to duplicate the French *trident* actions. Even when the then minister of Agriculture Héger reacted to these protests by re-stating engagements and inviting all the representatives of the farmer organizations, the protest did not end. The head office of the UPA realized that they had lost control over the waves of protest. In fact, it were not the representatives of the UPA, but UPA members and BB

²⁵ In Flanders, the so-called product-price treadmill (Levins and Cochrane, 1996) had its effect. Between 1950 and 1959 agricultural output increased fourfold (Van Hecke et al., 2004). However, because increasing supply did not meet any increase in demand, low price elasticity resulted in significantly lower prices. A logical reaction for farmers to cope with decreasing prices was to increase production, yet this had a negative effect on the coming about of overproduction (this constitutes the treadmill). The Belgian government took protectionist measures, farmers receiving deficiency payments if market prices decline below certain target prices. But because these target prices were coupled to the index, they couldn't rise sufficiently in order for farmers to cover their production costs. This implied that agriculture became a regulated market, but farmers needed to purchase agricultural inputs (seeds, fertilizers, machines,..) on a free market, where products did reflect production costs (Coppein, 2002). Farmers were thus both confronted with an increased dependency on external input as well as a dependency on the state.

members that farmed in the Walloon region that - with great reluctance from their representatives - helped to transmit the waves of protest from farmer district to farmer district. It is thus remarkable that the protests as they emerged in the second half of 1962 in Flanders, did not originate from within a farmer organization but from within the public sphere. The several action committees that had spontaneously emerged in each Flemish province, realized that they had to organize their interests and their concerted efforts led to the foundation of ABS, which was officially founded on the 11th of November 1962 (Coppein, 2005).

As a source of inspiration, the statutes and organized structure of the BB were partly emulated. But the founding members of ABS also wanted to mark clear differences with the most established farmer organization. A first aim was to strive for political neutrality, more specifically with regard to political parties, captured in the word 'general'. Second, ABS would be an organization 'of' and 'by' farmers, resulting in the rule that non-farmers could not reside in the head office. This also implied that non-farming activities (marketing, distribution, banks) would not be deployed which had an effect on the (much more limited) financial resources of the professional organization ABS. Finally the word 'Syndicate' referred to the relevance of 'protest' and 'mobilisation' in attaining a political goal.

These points of divergence reflect a deep dissatisfaction with the position, role and operations of the BB at that time. Although the relationship between ABS and BB is much less tense today and can even be called cooperative, it is still relevant to review the key points of criticism, because they can serve to explain the difference in discursive positions. Based on a series of interviews with ABS members and the consultation of various historical sources, Coppein (2002), identified at least five reasons, which we list here:

- (1) A lot of farmers were still exasperated by the affaire of the *Middenkredietkas*, a central bank of the BB which was liquidated in 1934 and had cost a lot of money to farmers due to the low returns of the obligations that were paid back at nominal value in 1963.
- (2) A critique was that BB is an organization dominated by economic concerns that conflicted with farmer interests. The deployment of its economic

sections (AVE, Banks,..) had led to an inevitable conflict of interest between the professional body and the economic activities of the BB.²⁶

- (3) There was criticism towards the traditionally close relationship between the BB and the Christian party CVP. It was argued that the intimate bond between the cabinet and the farmer organization, resulted in a less critical attitude to the government and a tendency to denounce any actions outside the consultative model.²⁷
- (4) ABS denounced the 'divide between top and base.' Essential points of critique were the oligarchic structure of the head office of the BB, the epistemic divide between BB experts and farmers and the lack of renewal of the board of directors.
- (5) There were conflicts related to the lack for dissenting voices at local meeting.

Again, the relationship between BB and ABS has significantly bettered. Since ABS has become a recognized actor of the neo-corporatist consult in 1997, both farmer organizations have met each other numerous times at the negotiation table and on topics related to spatial planning and the environment both interest groups often take a single standpoint (VILT, 2012). This is exemplified by a quote from the current ABS president when he says that “[I]n the case of dossiers related to spatial planning or environmental issues we often discuss in advance and try to defend a common position. Experience learns us that this often results in better outcomes than when we come to the table with diverging positions.” (VILT, 2012). But what hasn't changed, are their different views on economic agricultural policy. Often ABS takes a more critical stance towards power issues between

²⁶ Coppein gives a typical example of that time, which has a rationale that is still often heard today: “as the professional body for instance advised to use more fertilizers and animal feed via its extension services, this came out in favor of AVV. Advice for business modernization resulted in loans from the CKL. (Coppein, 2002)” BB articulated two distinct counterarguments. First, they argued their economic activities to have contributed significantly to the modernization of agriculture, something beneficial for all farmers. Second, they stated that a large part of their economic returns were handed over to the workings of the organization in order to organize services for farmers.

²⁷ The irritation about the lack of counterforce became very specific when BB was reluctant towards the many protests in 1962. As the former president of ABS remembers: “That BB was wandering in its membership magazine why there was a need to protest at all, that only meant fuel to the fire” (Vilt, 2012).

farmers and other actors in the supply chain (e.g. slaughterhouse, retailers, auction markets, etc.). A recent example is the disagreement about the relevance of an adjudicator for the Flemish food chain, that is, an executive body which ensures fair and legal relationships between supermarkets, suppliers and farmers. While ABS is a fierce promoter, BB's official position is clearly against such an adjudicator, as they rather advocate a voluntary engagement of all chain members (see also chapter 5 and chapter 8).

BIOFORUM: BRINGING IN AGRO-ECOLOGY

While the origination of ABS can be understood as a protest against the lack of economic equity within the agro-food system, the origination of Bioforum is to be related to the introduction of a type of agriculture that wants to address an environmental dimension: organic agriculture.

Bioforum found its roots in a group of Flemish organic farmers in the beginning of the 1980s who decided to set up a professional organization largely dedicated to the harmonization of a specification-manual. Together with a Walloon partner organization this led to establishment of the first organic label 'Biogarantie' as well as an group of organizations that engaged themselves as an interest group and a point of contact for the government. After a period of time, it was found that the combination of various tasks (interest articulation, promotion, quality control) were an obstacle, which led to the foundation of Bioforum in 1999, which became a separate organization specialized in the interest articulation of organic farming in Belgium. When the agricultural policy domain was regionalized in 2002, Bioforum was divided into a Flemish and Walloon organization. Bioforum does not only aim to represent organic farmers but also wishes to advocate the interests of processors, distributors, wholesale distribution, retail and food services in the organic agricultural sector.

In terms of discourse, Bioforum specifically brings in another standpoint on the relationship between agriculture and nature (De Cock, forthcoming). Their articulation of the agro-ecology discourse becomes clear in a recent round-table' discussion with the Minister of agriculture (at the beginning of the 2014-2019 legislature). In relation to a heated policy debate on the implementation of the

Natura 2000 Special Protection Areas, they argue to complement spatial and technical solutions now emphasized (by government, ABS, BB), with agro-ecological solutions. As their president puts it: *“In addition to the replacement of farms and technological solutions for the problem of ammoniac (e.g. an air washer for agricultural stables) it needs to be possible to investigate on a firm-to-firm basis how a business strategy can be adapted so as to connect nature and agriculture”* (Vilt, 2015) Although *Bioforum* is a smaller farmer organization and organic farming does remain rather stagnant, as an organization it has altered and introduced several discourses (see DeCock, Forthcoming).²⁸

3.4. POLICIES AND POLITICAL ARENAS

In this final section we first address to which political arenas the Farmer organizations get access on the basis of their representative monopoly. We then finalize this chapter with a brief overview of the key institutional policies and its underling discourse.

3.4.1. ACCESS TO POLITICAL ARENAS

For a long time BB was the only Flemish farmer representative which had access to the political bodies of the Belgian state. With regard to the core political center of decision making - i.e. the neo-corporatist consult described above- BB was the only Flemish representative throughout the near entirety of the twentieth

²⁸ The discourses of agroecology is not only articulated by the farmer organization Bioforum, but also by organizations such as Wervel, VELT and Landwijzer. Wervel and VELT also advocate a discourse of de-commodification (see chapter 7). Some NGOs such as Vredeseilanden have a more market-orientated discourse. The discourse of sufficiency (see chapter 7) is advocated by e.g. EVA. Also the nature NGO Natuurpunt plays a crucial role. Just as the traditional farmer organizations BB and ABS, the latter takes a segregative position on the relationship between nature development and food production. It would lead us too far to address all these issues in detail.

century, until the second largest farmer organization ABS acquired a representative monopoly as late as 1997²⁹ (Vilt, 2012).

An important institutional shift to note here is the fifth state reform or the so-called 'Lambermont Accord' which resulted in the devolution of all agriculture powers to the Flemish and Walloon regions (agricultural policy, agricultural development policy, research and development, economic control policy). This resulted in more autonomy for the regions to negotiate with other member states in the EU, but also significantly increased the power of the farmer organizations in co-determining policy for the Flemish region.

In Dezeure (2004) research revealed that the official criteria for the state to recognize a farmer organization as a legitimate *social partner* and thus grant it access to a series of political arenas were told to be threefold: (1) a member base in each Flemish province (2) members that are involved in all agricultural sectors (3) the farmer organization's acceptance by the provincial chambers (Dezeure, 45-46) What is peculiar here is that ABS already fulfilled all of these criteria since the 1960s. We can thus be assumed that these criteria were specified *ex post facto*. What is more, Bioforum, who since the beginning of the 2000s also obtained access to a series of political bodies, does not satisfy these criteria: they are for instance not represented in the provincial chambers. These observations point to the more plausible explanation that political legitimacy of farmer interest groups, is based on political tradition rather than on an official procedure of authorization. This is further re-enforced by the fact that there is not to be found any legal basis for the authorization of the BB as a social partner (Dezeure, 2004). In this sense, it is remarkable that the legitimacy basis of the agrarian neo-corporatist arrangement has never been subject of research for the Belgian Court of audit or any other institution of democratic control, even despite some critical voices in the 1990s such as e.g. Verhofstadt (1991).

²⁹ Camiel Adriaens: "It lasted until 1997 before ABS was acknowledged as interlocutor of the Cabinet of the then minister of agriculture Karel Pinxten." [http://www.vilt.be/Hendrik Vandamme en Camiel Adriaens ABS Zonder onafhankelijke landbouw organisatie zag de Vlaamse landbouw er niet hetzelfde uit](http://www.vilt.be/Hendrik_Vandamme_en_Camiel_Adriaens_ABS_Zonder_onafhankelijke_landbouw_organisatie_zag_de_Vlaamse_landbouw_er_niet_hetzelfde_uit)

When looking at table 3.1., which shows the access farmer organizations have to political bodies, it is notable that BB is dominantly represented. ABS seems to come second in rank, VAC and Bioforum never receive more than one seat. Also notable is that the BB has access to a number of key political decision-making forums that do not have a direct link with agricultural policy. Examples are their mandates in key bodies related to the social dialogue on the federal level (CRB, NAR and Group of 10) and the Central Bank of Belgium. On the one hand, their presence in these types of sites can be explained on the basis of historical grounds, because these institutions in fact originate from a time when the agricultural constituency still formed a much larger part of the total population. On the other hand, it must also be related to the positional power of the BB as organization. The latter point is also substantiated by BB's recent accession in the board of directors of the VDAB, the Flemish Agency for Job Placement. What has also been claimed is that BBs role in non-agricultural political sites is not reduced to defending the interests of the agriculture but those of the entire agro-food supply chain, thus increasing their legitimacy.

Finally, we need to mention that new political sites are sometimes established by the economic actors themselves. One such recent example is the establishment of the *supply chain initiative*, where representatives of the different agro-food actors meet to discuss topics at an inter-professional level. The initiative was initiated by the BB and constitutes a political forum which addresses issues related to the agro-food chain (such e.g. crisis in agriculture or equity along the supply chain) and communicates with relevant policy domains about common and diverging positions. In this forum, problems are often understood as to be solved by taking a national and cooperative position (cf. insulation).

<i>Name</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Seats for FOs</i>	<i>Total seats</i>
<i>CRB (central business council)</i>	Federal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • non-binding advice socio-economic policy • facilitation of social dialogue 	BB (1) BF(1) FWA (2)	56
<i>NAR (national labor council)</i>	Federal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • binding advice • social dialogue between business and labor representatives 	BB/FWA (1)	26
<i>G10 (group of ten)</i>	Federal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social dialogue • core negotiation collective labor agreements 	BB (1)	11
<i>NBB (national bank)</i>	Federal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • general issues bank • house rules • annual accounts 	BB (1)	10
<i>FAVV (Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain)</i>	Federal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • executive body responsible for laying down, implementing and enforcing measures related to food safety, animal health and plant protection. 	BB (1)ABS (1) FWA (2)BioF(1)	37
<i>SERV (socio-economic council)</i>	Flemish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • position socio-economic legislation • Dialogue function • Socio-technical innovation for improvement of work 	BB (1)	20

<i>SALV (strategic advisory council for agriculture and fisheries)</i>	Flemish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advice prior to implementation of agricultural policy 	BB (5) ABS (2) VAC (1) BioF (1)	20
<i>MINA (strategic advisory Council for nature and environment)</i>	Flemish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advice on agricultural policy of provinces Advice prior to implementation of environmental policy 	BB (1)	24
<i>Chambers of Agriculture</i>	Provincial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agenda setting and project development 	BB ABS ABS and BB have majority in each chamber)	Variable according province
<i>POM (Provincial Economic development Agencies)</i>	Provincial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitation with economic development 		variable
<i>GECORO(Spatial planning policy councils)</i>	Municipality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy advice for municipality 	BB (1)	variable
<i>VDAB (Flemish Agency for Job Placement)</i>	Flemish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordination job placement Administration and support 	BB (1)	20

<p><i>VLAM(Flemish agency for the promotion of agricultural products</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic and International promotion of all agricultural sectors 	<p>BB (2) ABS (1)</p>	<p>18</p>
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Table 3.1.. Farmer organizations' Access to Political bodies

BB= Boerenbond; BF= Boerenfront; BioF= Bioforum; ABS= Algemeen Boeren Syndicaat; VAC= Vlaams Agrarisch Centrum; FWA Fédération Wallonne de l'Agriculture ;

3.4.2. KEY INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES: THE ERA OF MODERNIZATION SHAPING THE DISCURSIVE CONTEXT OF AGRICULTURAL POLICY

In the remainder of chapter 3 we will address the orientation of agricultural policy. In order to understand the key focus of the Flemish agricultural policy domain it is wise to dwell in some greater detail on the process of agricultural modernization that shaped the discursive context of agricultural policy in Europe.

Just as in a number of European countries, the Belgian agricultural system underwent several pervasive changes in the postwar era due to the effects of the process of modernization. The process of agricultural modernization built on the productivist discourse which can be defined as “*a commitment to an intensive, industrially driven and expansionist agriculture with state support based primarily on output and increased productivity.*” (Lowe et al. 1993; 221). The discourse of productivism has been articulated for the first time at the European level in 1957 in the Treaty of Rome, in which art.39 stipulated that agriculture must significantly increase its production, provide farmers a stable income, while at the same time guaranteeing that consumer prices remain reasonable and stable.

Modernization refers to the rapid deployment of mechanization, bio-chemical innovations and organizational shifts in the agricultural system. Indeed, in a few decennia after the second world war, Belgian agriculture underwent a fundamental change from a system based on extensive small scale and mixed farming practices to specialized and intensified modes of production. While the massive substitution of the draft horse by the tractor was most visible, virtually every farm activity found its machine component (combine harvesters, potato harvesters, etc.) (Blomme, 1993).³⁰ Biological and chemical innovations resulted in a massive increase of the use of mineral fertilizer, pesticides and compound animal feed (Van Molle 1986 in: Coppein 2005, Grin, 2010). To modernize

³⁰ Since smaller farms could not effort these machines, the first companies that provide hired waged work emerged (Coppein, 2005).

livestock farming, breeding and selection has been used in a systematic way to optimize cultivation and breeding material. More particularly in Flanders the breeds 'Piétrain' (pigs) and 'Blue-white' (cows) were introduced. From an organizational perspective, this led to a shift in the structure of the farming practice. Traditionally Belgium (and especially Flanders with a much larger amount of small farms than the Walloon region), was characterized by small scale mixed farms, which combined animal husbandry with arable farming, in order to provide animal feed. Farmers gradually became specialized in one branch of production. Due to land scarcity, Flanders pre-dominantly switched to horticulture as well intensive husbandry such as poultry and pig farming. The implementation of new technology also led to an increased dependence on the supply and processing industry. This is exemplified by the emergence of integration in the second half of the 1950s, initiated by feed companies in pig, poultry and calves production. Farmers engaged themselves in a contract to purchase a fixed amount of feed and received a fee per animal reared. Although this decreased risk, it also reduced the autonomy of the farmer and made it impossible to sell to other channels of sale when prices were high (Coppein, 2002). These processes of modernization have significantly structured Belgian agriculture and serve to understand the current agricultural system.³¹

The role of the state was crucial in the promotion of modernization (Grin, 2012; Hardeman and Jochemsem 2012) and led to a series of policy measures and objectives many of which are still prevalent today. In most Western European countries, agricultural research systems were established in order to promote innovation in agriculture. In this model of linear innovation, scientists are considered as a key source of knowledge production, resulting in innovations that can be further transmitted via information services and innovation promoters, and be adopted by farmers (Darnhofer et al., 2013; Leewis and Van

³¹ To give an example, the issue of integration is still a pervasive theme. In the pig dialogue days discussed in chapter six, for instance, the issue of hidden integration was discussed in an apparently unsatisfactory way, because feed industry did not want to disclose numbers on the amount of farms known to be integrated (Interview, 2013).

Ban, 2004)³². Structural policies were implemented such as investment support for tangible assets (e.g. machines and stable systems) and land consolidation policies which allowed for scale enlargement (Grin, 2010). Market and price policies were enacted, such as, most notably, product subsidies which enabled farmers to combine increased production with a guaranteed price.

Also in Belgium, a research system had been established since the 1930s and grew significantly in the 1950s with the establishment of a number agricultural test stations, specialized research centers and information services, still prevalent today. Up to date, the Flemish government employs over 500 people at the Institute for Agriculture and Fisheries research (ILVO) which centralized a number smaller research centers in 2006. At the provincial level, test stations provide experimental research on region specific crops (for instance strawberry, paprika and tomato in Antwerp due to historical investments in greenhouse cultivation.). The Flemish administration also organizes information supply services mostly in the form of group extension methods. Finally, also administrations have research departments such as the Administration of Agriculture (AMS) and the Flemish Land Agency (VLM).

A key (Belgian and later) Flemish agricultural policy was and still is the Agricultural Investment Fund [In Dutch: (*Vlaams*) *landbouwinvesteringsfonds* or (V)LIF)], which was established in February 1961 just before the Common agricultural policy (CAP) was introduced in 1962. In fact, the investment fund (V)LIF was established as a reaction towards the anticipated effects of the CAP objectives which were already formulated in the Treaty of Rome. At that time, the government feared that the profitability of Belgian farms, mostly small scale

³² As Leeuwis and Van Ban (2004) put it: *Innovations studied in this research tradition were usually those proposed by agricultural researchers. It was basically assumed that innovations originate from scientists, are transferred by communication workers and their intermediaries, and are applied by agricultural practitioners. This mode of thinking is called 'the linear model of innovation' (reference omitted) as it draws a straight and one-directional line between science and practice. The model is further characterized by a clear task division between various actors: some actors are supposed to specialize in the generation of innovations, others concentrate on their transfer, while the farmers' role is merely to apply innovations.* (Leeuwis and Van Ban, 2004). Also see chapter 6.

and labor-intensive, was too low, and acknowledged, to be able to compete with other European countries, the need to promote capital-intensive innovation (Roobrouck and Segers, 2008). Throughout time the investment fund increasingly harmonized with the European subsidies of the CAP and to date forms a substantial part of the Flemish and European policy focus (see table 3.2. below). Since its conception, the (V)LIF has worked with a closed list of mostly durable capital goods.³³

In terms of market and price policies, the impact of European policy is considerable. While it is impossible to address here the long and complex history of the CAP, we wish to briefly consider some fundamental aspects which also affect the Flemish agro-food policy domain.

First, a series of CAP reforms have re-shaped the productivist paradigm, increasingly introducing more market-orientated and less protectionist policies as well as a focus on enhancing the relationship between agriculture and climate change and the environment (Swinnen, 2015) (see also chapter 5). The MacSharry Reform (1992) and the Agenda 2000 reform resulted in the shift from market price support to coupled direct payments. In the CAP Mid-Term Review (2003) subsidies were decoupled from production and the ‘multifunctional’ dimension of agriculture became enacted in policy (e.g. cross-compliance). Both ecologists as well as economists argued the need to link the CAP payments, simultaneously defending the use of targeted payments to ‘public goods’ and ‘environmental’ objectives as well as deregulation (Anania et al., 2010; Swinnen, 2015; Erjavec et al., 2015). In relation to the innovation policy – which will be of relevance in chapter six - it is noteworthy that the European Union has recently endorsed a cautious implementation of more participatory forms of innovation in the form of the so-called European Innovation Partnerships (EIPs) which are meant to close the divide between agricultural research and practice and to be undertaken ‘*only in areas [...] in which government intervention is clearly justified*’ and where demand-side measures are more effective (European Commission, 2015).

³³ Only very recently the government has also started to consider the importance of supporting farmers in the period before innovations become part of the closed list.

As mentioned above, the national implementation of the CAP constitutes the bulk of the measures that are addressed within the Flemish agro-food policy domain. From a substantive point of view, the set of European policy measures can be broken down in three separate policy 'streams': direct income support and common organization of markets (CMO) categorized under CAP pillar I, and rural development policy categorized under CAP pillar II. In the context of this chapter, which aims to set the background against which the Flemish agricultural policy domain operates, it is crucial to re-emphasize that member states still have considerable freedom to set their own priorities about which and how policy measures are activated (Anania & Pupo d'Andrea, 2015). For instance, Flanders is still allowed to decide:

- Which of the voluntary direct payments to activate.
- The distribution of the overall amount of financial resources across the different policy measures (with the exception that some measures require a minimal allocation of budget such as measures devoted to the green payment) related to one pillar.
- Which policy options to activate within pillar 2 and flexibility in how these policy measures are implemented.
- The extent and the modalities of the redistribution of support between the farms within the country (as a result of their decisions regarding 'internal convergence', 'degressivity and capping' and the redistributive payment)

Table 3.2. lists the policy measures of the 2014-2020 CAP period along the lines of several sub-dimensions: performance of policy measure, authorized actor (who is responsible for executing the possible measure), expected relevance of farmer and 2014-2020 budget. The comparison clearly reveals a lasting dominant focus on supporting protectionist measures (direct income support from Europe to stabilize farmer's income), capital intensive investments and (linear) research and innovation focused on increasing productivity, that is, an agricultural policy still consistent with the productivist discourse. Also elements of multifunctional agriculture, projects for rural development and a focus on entrepreneurship are clearly articulated in the policy measures, yet still comprise a less dominant part of the set of policies.

The underlying assumptions of the key agricultural policies are also reflected by the policy orientation of the Flemish Cabinet of Agriculture which advocates a

focus on a continuing export-orientated growth of the agricultural system combined with a focus on innovation and development in resource-efficient technology as well as new business models and differentiation strategies for farmers (Policy note Agriculture and Fisheries, 2014-2019). A new focus that has only been introduced in the current legislature is that of an Agro-food valley, in which the interests and challenges of the entire agro-food supply chain are included as being part of a common growth and sustainability strategy (see also Policy Accord Flemish Government, 2014-2019). Other aspects are also emphasized within the policy note of the Minister, such as the importance of multifunctional agriculture, the role of the EIPs, Community Supported agriculture (CSA) and agro-ecology. However, in terms of budget and priority (see also table 3.2.), these are more marginal topics, also referred to as niche markets or consumer trends that might have positive effects in terms of sustainable development.

It can thus be said that the Flemish agricultural policy discourse is largely consistent with the European policy stance which combines elements of the program of free trade with continued commitment to state assistance and productivism in various forms (Potter and Tilzey, 2005). Environmental and sustainability issues tackling agriculture are largely addressed by referring to a discourse of ecological modernization in which sustainability is understood as a problem that needs to be solved through the development of resource-efficient technology and adaptations (e.g. monitoring, labeling) within the existing economic system (i.e the vertical agro-food supply chain) (Hajer, 1995). We will elaborate on these observations in the chapter 8, when we will try contrast the existing (dominant) policy domain with some of the findings of the empirical cases in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

	performance of policy measure	authorized actor(s)	expected relevance for farmer	EU budget (+ Budget Flanders)
Pillar I Direct Payments				
various direct payments	stabilize farmer income	EU		3.700.000.000
Pilar II Rural Development				
information supply services	research subsidies for education	government, research centers, educational centers	receiving information, tools, education	15.082.653
farm advisory services	consultancy	external consultants	receiving information, learning, tailored advice	7.876.004
investment fund (VLIF) ³⁴	subsidies for material investments (closed list)	market, neo-corporatist consult	improving efficiency of production	206.288.063 (+420.000.000)
support farm takeover support for small farms	receiving financial support	EU	financial support	31.533.607
nature conversation infrastructure projects rural country	Subsidies for ecological management in nature conservation zone and infrastructural interventions	privat person, local governments, local organizations, etc.	contributing to nature conservation	15.591.194
reforestation	subsidies for reforestation	local governments, etc.	contributing to nature conservation, agro-forestry	3.934.462
support for producer organizations	providing information on setting up cooperatives	farmer	gaining more positional power	500.000
agri-environmental measures	subsidies for agri-environmental practices	administration	contributing to environment	69.562.536

³⁴ The Flemish government annually spends about 70 million euros. In 2016 (comparable with other years), about 65 million goes to the investment of durable capital goods, 600.000 euro goes to the agro-food industry. Since the 2014-2020 CAP round, three new investment measures have been introduced: non-productive investments (e.g. landscape management, 200.000 euro), project support for innovation (1.920.000 euro) and development for small farms (125.000).

area payments for organic agriculture	subsidies for conversion and conservation of organic agriculture crops	administration		
cooperation (1) European Innovation Partnerships (EIP)	projects (5) to bring together researchers, experts and farmers to coordinate an innovation	administration (expert comitee)	Setting up operational groups	150.000
cooperation (2) rural development projects			rural development	4.273.976
risk management				3.142.949
LEADER local Action Groups local development strategies cooperative projects	Rural development projects and networks	provincial policy	rural development	19.189.945
Institute for Agriculture and Fisheries (ILVO)	fundamental and applied research	receiving information, innovation	research outputs	115.000.000
subsidies for various organizations (promotion,	promotion, extension, ..		Various	20.000.000

Table 3.2.. Flemish policy measures of the 2014-2020 CAP period

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN

CHAPTER 4 - RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter introduces the research design that is used in this dissertation. It situates the research as part of the interpretive research tradition with an emphasis on discourse analysis (4.1.) and touches upon some elementary aspects on the use of pragmatism (4.1.2) as a philosophical framework for social science research. It then discusses the methodological approach for this current study, which includes the context of the research (4.2), case study approach and methods of data collection and analysis employed (4.3., 4.4).

4.1. ONTOLOGICAL, EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS.

4.1.1. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

When I embarked on this research project, I found myself having a hard time to precisely understand what a discourse is. My journey would have been easier if I knew that when a researcher engages in discourse analysis, she/he needs to accept certain ontological and epistemological premises regarding the role of language in the social construction of the world, and that the theory and method of discourse analysis are intertwined (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002).

In ontological terms, most discourse analytical approaches depart from the general constructivist premise that knowledge is not just a reflection of existing reality, but a social practice of meaning making and interpretation. Underlying 'discourse' is the general idea that language as well as other symbolic systems are structured according to different patterns people can adopt to make sense of the world and the social practices they engage in. Epistemologically, this means that the interactions between different knowledge claims can be understood and empirically explored as interactions between different discourses, the latter

which represent different ways of apprehending the world as well as constructing different identities for particular subjects (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002; Drzyek, 2008).

This makes discourse analytical approaches strongly akin to the interpretive research tradition. Here, it is equally emphasized that the way we understand and structure the world is always the product of historical and cultural processes which leads to the understanding that it is impossible to produce a value-free social science. Methodologically, discourse analysis is often considered as one (albeit crucial) step of an interpretive research design (Yanow, 2000). But discourse analysis is also a full theory by itself (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). Most discourse analytical approaches are inter-disciplinary and thus support the combination of discourse analysis with other types of data gathering; Furthermore, discourse analytical approaches are characterized by a rich diversity of epistemological and ontological perspectives as is exemplified, for instance, by the continuum of positions on how strongly ideology or discourse impact the social world (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002) Furthermore, we want to leave open the possibility to connect discourse analytical approaches with Deweyian pragmatism which we will touch upon later.

Discourse analytical approaches depart from differing philosophical positions and the use of discourse analysis is far from uniform. There are several 'traditions' of discourse analysis some of the most prominent including discourse analysis based on Michel Foucault encompassing both an earlier 'archaeological' and a later 'genealogical' phase (Koopman, 2008), critical discourse analysis as pioneered by Norman Fairclough, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's discourse theory and discursive psychology which partly draws on the Ludwig Wittgenstein's later philosophy (Edwards, 1996; Potter, 2001). In this research, I am indebted to the discourse analytical approaches of John Dryzek and Maarten Hajer who combine elements from different discourse analytical traditions, but also leave their own mark on the field of discourse analysis, especially in the field of political discourse analysis. In the remainder of this section, my aim is not to dwell at length on the theoretical nuances of the different discourse analytical approaches, but to point out how the approach employed in this thesis, is different or similar to some of these approaches.

A theoretical distinction can be made with the linguistics-based approach as developed in Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA). What our approach shares with CDA is that both pre-suppose a dialectical relationship between discourse and practice (see e.g. Fairclough, 2005; Hajer; 2006). This is succinctly captured in the second part of Hajer's definition which delineates that discourse is a set of ideas *that is produced and reproduces in turn an identifiable set of practices*' (Hajer, 2006, 67). What distinguishes CDA from the approach taken in this research is that the concept of discourse is reserved for language-in-use and that the resulting discursive mechanisms are kept distinct from other dimensions of social practice (Fairclough, 2005). Methodologically, this means that a focus is given to the analysis of talk, text and other semiological systems (e.g. gestures) (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). The notion of 'discourse' employed in this thesis follows a more integrated or macro-social view which holds that the way we use language and meaning-making procedures is influenced by and influences wider society. This sets a larger context for the analysis of discourse as entities giving meaning to "*social and physical phenomena*" and justifies a methodological approach which aims to obtain information about specific cultural and historical context in which discourses are articulated (Hajer, 2006). Discourse analysis necessitates an investigation of how societal or political problems are understood within a specific domain and therefore it *'does not only focus on what is said, but also who is saying something, where, in which context, and what practices and expectations structure these utterances'* (Späth, 2012)³⁵.

In the development of discourse analysis the work of Michel Foucault is an important source of scholarly inspiration. In his 'archaeological' phase as found in his earlier work such as 'madness and civilization, 'the birth of the clinic' and 'the order of things' he develops a notion of discourse. For Foucault, a discourse is a group of statements that are accepted as meaningful and true in a particular historical epoch (Foucault, 1972). Foucault shares the constructivist (and post-structuralist) notion that truth is a discursive construction and in his archaeological approach he sets himself the task to investigate the structure of

³⁵Note that this does not entail that CDA does not take into account the relationship between language and political practice, which it does. The difference mostly methodological and relates to a different understanding of the concept of 'discourse'.

knowledge regimes, that is, the patterns and rules that determine what is true and false or what is meaningful and not in a specific domain. In his earlier work, Foucault holds that discourses are all-pervasive and entirely constitute the social world according to a dominant knowledge regime in each historical period. This also led Foucault to believe that a discourse results in the production of 'subject positions' that structure the way people act and think. Discourses designate positions for people to occupy and subjects take up pre-configured roles such as, for instance, the subject position of the 'doctor' and the 'patient' or the 'expert' and the 'layman', each of them accompanied by specific sets of values, expectations and appropriate behaviors. (Hall and du Gay, 1996). Consequently, once subject positions are taken, individuals are unable to resist against the ideological messages that are presented to the subject (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002; Hall and du Gay, 1996)

In line with a majority of discourse analytical approaches, both Dryzek and Hajer follow Foucault's conception of "*relatively rule-bound sets of statements which impose limits on what gives meaning*" (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 13). Indeed, discourses are relatively stable and consistent '*ensembles of ideas, concepts and categorizations through which meaning is given*' and as social constructs they delineate what is acceptable or not acceptable, common sense or simply inconceivable. On the other hand a lot of scholars have come to reject any form of discursive determinism and rather defend a pluralistic model in which different competing discourses are operating at the same time. Consistent with the theory of discursive psychology, which is inspired by the philosopher Wittgenstein, Dryzek locates the self at the intersections of a number of language games (Wittgenstein, Dryzek). In this view, a subject participates in many discourses and builds up a complex subjectivity by combining those discourses. The same individual can even ascribe to contradictory discourses and specific situations can determine to which discourses people are 'drawn to' (Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2008; Dryzek, 2010). It is important to note that Dryzek uses the argument that people ascribe to a multitude of discourses to justify discourses as an object of political representation. As he states: "*if an individual is to be represented in anything like his or her entirety, all the discourses to which he or she ascribes generally merit representation in the forum.*" (Dryzek, 2010, 324)

Because this dissertation focuses on how discourses are deployed politically, I cannot but mention the notion of hegemony which is introduced into the realm of discourse analysis by the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. I will be far from able to address the complex arguments and structure of their 1985 book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, but would like to touch upon their introduction of the element of discursive struggle (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory has its starting point in the post-structuralist idea that discourse constructs the social world, and that, owing to the fundamental instability of language, meaning can never be permanently fixed. It is precisely this impermanence of meaning which opens up the way for a constant struggle for meaning, a struggle for the interpretation of identities. This is consistent with the pluralist model underpinning Hajer and Dryzek's discourse analytical approach. Hajer conceptualizes discursive struggle by referring to discourse coalitions, that is, a group of people that share a particular discourse and form a coalition in order to actively legitimate specific practices, institutions and decisions over others (Hajer, 1993). Gramsci's notion of hegemony – which is a major source of inspiration for Laclau and Mouffe – adds a relational dimension to the understanding of how discourses are articulated politically.

The concept of hegemony was introduced by Gramsci as a reaction to the critique on the Marxist theory of historical materialism, which pre-supposed that the political realm (in the superstructure) could be entirely understood as an effect of economic conditions (in the base). Gramsci used hegemony to denote the effects of a meaning-making process in the political sphere, and deliberately challenged a simplistic opposition between domination and subordination or resistance (Jones, 2007). A hegemony is not simply a form of ideological domination by one group over the other, but a dynamic process of transaction, negotiation and compromise that takes place between ruling and subaltern groups. Hegemony is not primarily achieved through coercion or violence but through *engaging the hearts and minds* of subaltern groups and the process of actively engaging their concerns and views in the dominant ideology. Put differently, hegemony can be understood as the organization of consent (Barrett, 1991). When hegemony is achieved, power relations often become naturalized to such an extent that they become part of the common sense and cannot become questioned. It is particularly interesting that Gramsci situates the function of hegemony at the interface between civil society (public space) and political

society (empowered space) and delineates the success of hegemonic formation as being dependent on the active re-affirmation of a conception of civil society “*in which the individual can govern himself without his self-government entering into conflict with political society.*” (Gramsci,1971; 268)

Gramsci’s thoughts on hegemony add at least two valuable insights to the notion of discursive struggle and discourse coalitions. First, subjects can ascribe to discourses or discourse coalitions without realizing the full intent of these discourses. Second, when an actor in the public sphere considers politics and the political as something happening outside his sphere of influence or interest this generally contributes to the continuance of a dominant political model which re-enforces a ‘non-political’ citizen (such as in Schumpeterian democracy). Both insights seem to call for the need to organize a deliberative process, whether it is to more reflectively engage individuals in the particular discourses in a specific domain or whether it is to represent alternative democratic models in which a citizen is depicted as an active participant in political life, rather than a completely autonomous individual. Also discourse coalitions can be understood from a hegemonic perspective.³⁶

This brings us to the emancipatory dimension of discourse analysis. In what sense can interaction with previously unknown or not fully understood discourses lead to emancipation? (When) does an actor change his/her behavior on the basis interacting with new discourses? In this respect, the epistemological assumptions from which I depart are completely in line with John Dryzek’s believe that discourses, when clearly identified and named, have an emancipatory potential. In fact, most contemporary discourse analytical approaches are essentially *critical* forms of inquiry, focusing on “*the aim to*

³⁶ In this context, Dryzek adopts Beck’s concept of ‘reflexive modernization’ and contrasts it with ‘reflexive traditionalization’. When deliberative processes are “*accompanied by reflection, openness to alternative understandings, and critical questionings*” one can speak of reflexive modernization but when they “*are accompanied by angry reaction of alternatives and retreat in to the familiar by people who now understand the nature of the threat to them*”, we can speak of reflexive traditionalization (Dryzek and Stevenson, 2014, 39).

investigate and analyse power relations in society and to formulate normative perspectives from which a critique of such relations can be made with an eye on the possibilities for social change” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 3).

It is precisely this *critical* and emancipatory endeavor that has led me to believe that there are affinities between the discourse analytical approach taken in this research and the use of Deweyian pragmatism as a framework for social science, to which I turn in the subsequent section.

4.1.2. DEWEYIAN PRAGMATISM AS AN ADDITIONAL SOURCE OF INSPIRATION

It would be absolutely impossible to undertake a review of the vast field of Deweyian pragmatism here. Rather, the introduction of his thought was primarily meant to arrive at a more encompassing understanding of what education can be, in the case of farm education as described in chapter 5. Nevertheless I will try point to some shared areas of interest between discourse analytical approaches and some of the basic assumptions of pragmatism, that are relevant in the context of this thesis.

Although Deweyian pragmatism is rarely associated with discourse analysis, what Dewey seems to share with some discourse analytical approaches -notably those of Dryzek and Hajer - is a belief that the task of social inquiry is to capture the intention and meaning that motivates and informs social action. Dewey sees philosophy as a critical instrument to improve the conditions for social change, that is, it should lead to “conclusions which, when they are referred back to ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments, render them more significant, more luminous to us, and make our dealings with them more fruitful.” (Dewey 2008/1925, 18). What pragmatism seems to share with the interpretive research tradition is the aim to step away from the sometimes narrowing effect of the immediate and the conflictual nature of practice. According to Dewey a philosophy should:

“instead of taking one side or the other, indicate a plan of operation proceeding from a level deeper and more inclusive than is represented by the practices and ideas of the contending parties.” (Dewey, 1910, preface).

This shows a shared concern between discourse analysis and pragmatism in social inquiry as a means to arrive at new combinations between discourse and practice.

Ontologically, however, a crucial difference between the discourse analytical approaches of Hajer and Dryzek and the pragmatist approach of Dewey is that the former adhere to a mild (social) constructivism. This position considers there to be a separate bio-physical reality out there, but still believes that reality is only accessible through social constructions (López-i-Gelats and Tabara, 2010). Dryzek, for instance, seems to adhere to Wittgenstein's idea that there is no fully autonomous meta-subject standing above the self which is constituted by its participation in a number of language ideas (Dryzek, 2010). Hajer's discourse analytical approach departs from the idea that all political problems are socially constructed.³⁷

The point of divergence between Deweyian pragmatism and discourse analytical approaches, lies in Dewey's central notion of experience, which he takes to be the central aspect of interaction (or transaction) between the human being and the world. Dewey believed that a learning experience is never an isolated and individual affair, but is something to be approached holistically as an interaction between communicative, historic and cultural moments (Hohr, 2013). An individual learns or 'grows' when freedom is given to direct its experiences - not to prepare him/her for a distant future - but to be able to connect activities to his/her life, both in the present and in the future. It is the philosopher's (or analyst's) task to reconstruct the meaning of our concepts and notions to make them experimentally more adequate for solving problematic situations (Logister, 2004). Dewey believed that concepts partly emerged as a reaction to the concrete problems of a particular time, and that they needed to be reconsidered, when concept no longer incorporates the problems of the here and now (Logister, 2004). F

³⁷ "It is almost a commonplace to state that political problems are socially constructed. Whether or not a situation is perceived as a political problem depends on the narrative in which it is discussed. To be sure, large groups of dead trees as such are not a social construct; the point is how one makes sense of dead trees." (Hajer, 1993; 44)

This marks a difference between pragmatism and most interpretive research, as here the researcher need not only aim for interpretation and understanding of existing meaning systems but also aims for intervention and change on the basis of a cooperative reflection on experience (Goldkuhl, 2012 ; Gunnarsson et al., 2015). Indeed, epistemologically and methodologically, the question may be asked whether it suffices to communicate about the several ways in which a problem can be addressed or given meaning to or that we need to engage in practice in order to fully understand the interaction between the human being and the world.

This thesis does not at all pretend to answer these questions, but to conclude this section I would like to refer to Dewey's understanding of democracy because I think it can help to explain somewhat better the difference between a (macro-social) discourse analytical and a pragmatist approach. In 1910 Dewey writes:

“A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and nation l territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity.” (87).

When looking at this passage, at least two points seem to help us understand the difference between most interpretive research and a pragmatist approach. First, democracy is not merely a shared set of political values or meanings to be analyzed but a ‘conjoint communicated experience’, a mode of associated living which needs to be experienced. From an interpretive perspective it would suffice to communicate about the values, norms and expectations the underlie a particular democratic model, in a pragmatist approach the democratic norms would need to be reproduced in practice in order to understand its full intent. This leads to the second point, which is epistemological, that is, that an democratic way of living will only be achieved when an interest is thus defined that an individual takes into account the actions of others to give direction to his own. Such a goal can never be achieved by interpretation alone, and requires at least the will to engage or come in contact in different social practices and groups as a means to re-orientate society to a democratic place. We will return to these issues in chapter 5 and 8.

4.2. Context of the empirical research

Although this doctoral dissertation officially started in march 2012, I had already developed an interest in the Flemish agro-food system in some previous research experiences. In the federal research program for Sustainable Development (SSD, Belspo), I had the honor to participate in the Consensus project. Here scenario analysis and transition theory was adopted to explore transition paths for sustainable consumption and the Belgian agro-food system was taken as a case. Here I became familiar with different visions, strategies or, indeed, discourses on sustainable development and what these implied for the organization of the Belgian food system. In the first phase we developed a series of sustainability scenarios based on three sustainability discourses with a group of stakeholders (Eco-efficiency, De-commodification, Sufficiency, see Crivits et al., 2010). In the second phase of the project, we studied a series of local food systems in Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels.

When I had the chance to start a PhD at the ILVO it became immediately clear that I was to focus on the Flemish agricultural system. Since the regionalization of the agricultural policy domain in 2002, the geographical and cultural distinctions between the North and South of Belgium were stripped from any comparative framework as the research agendas (and hence the epistemic communities) were to focus on the agricultural developments of their 'own' region. Fact remains that I had the opportunity to explore several of the key sectors in the Flemish agricultural system such as the pig farming and horticulture when I joined the IWT³⁸ project 'Networks as a Catalyst for innovation'. This research project had the aim to identify how farmers make use of existing networks for innovation and where improvements for innovation networks might be found and drew on a series of qualitative research methodologies. In cooperation with the university of Ghent, several case studies

³⁸ The IWT was the government agency for Innovation by Science and Technology which existed between 1991 and 2015 and is now merged with the agency for entrepreneurship.

were examined using a range of qualitative research methodologies. Three case studies were to provide the empirical basis of my doctoral dissertation: pig farming, multifunctional agriculture and (a meta-case of) transition governance.

After a while, I realized that different visions on what agriculture ought to be were being articulated and that this had an effect on how the agro-food system was organized, but that this diversity was often not clearly identified or that polarized positions were taken. One striking example are innovation-indexes. A study in Ireland (Leeuwis, 1989) showed how a large group of farmers were considered as 'laggards' because they had established *different* innovations than those that were adopted in the 'official' list of reference, a list which included particular innovations and was put together by a series of agricultural 'experts' and 'representatives'. When I interviewed farmers about their innovation behavior it became clear that some of the innovations they considered to be valuable were not actively supported by the state subsidy program or that a lot of farmers resisted a mere growth-orientated strategy. My interest in discourses and political philosophy led to the potentialities of deliberative democracy, and the concept of discursive representation seemed as an interesting approach to combine theoretical assumptions with practical potentialities.

Since I wanted to understand how different discourses are articulated in a political context, it seemed logical to focus on those instances where deliberation³⁹ on politically relevant issues takes place. So I decided to focus on the pig dialogue days, initiated by the then minister of agriculture, where key stakeholders from the pig farming sector were to discuss on the problems in the sector and formulate a series of solutions. A second case was the New Food Frontier, an attempt to address sustainability governance in the Flemish agro-food system, which clearly focused on deliberation as a way to address sustainability issues. A final case, multifunctional agriculture, and the emerging practice of farm education, was significantly less politicized and thus less likely for deliberation to be found. Nevertheless, I decided to focus on how farm education was conceptualized within the public sphere and try to explore how

³⁹ Preferably as authentic, consequential and inclusive as possible.

other discourses would ‘re-construct’ the potentialities of the practice of farm education.

As mentioned above, the macro-social approach towards discourse, which sets itself the task of unraveling and interpreting the specific cultural and historical context in which discourses are articulated justifies a methodological approach which draws on qualitative research methodologies and case study research (Hajer, 2005).⁴⁰ For a detailed description on how we used those methodologies we refer to the original papers constituting the empirical chapters, but for now we would like to stress some fundamental issues as well as specify the questions that guided me in identifying discourses.

4.3. CASE STUDY DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

As Yin (2009) notes, when a context is intended to be part of the design, there will always be an ‘overflow’ of variables for any singular observation made. When this is the situation, a case study design is highly appropriate for it can allow to combine multiple sources of evidence to look at a particular phenomenon, that is, perform data triangulation. Triangulation allows for “*multiple measures of the same phenomenon*” (Yin, 2009: 117), for instance by making use of several analytical tools or methods (e.g. interviews, focus groups, participant observation, document analysis) for one case study. In this dissertation, each of the case studies are based on at least three sources of evidence, adding to research credibility and “*the development of converging lines of inquiry*” (Yin, 115). Tables 4.1., 4.2. and 4.3. indicate which research methodologies have been utilized for each case and specifies anonymized characteristics of the interviewees as well as other relevant data that has been consulted and analyzed. All of the interviews and focus groups have been recorded. Most of these have been transcribed completely, some partially. All documents have been archived.

⁴⁰ It needs to be noted here that, for the purpose of discourse analysis, also mixed methods have been developed such as Q methodology (ref.).

Case study	Document analysis	Focus groups	Interviews	Participant observation
<u>Farm education</u>	Brochures, leaflets, policy documents	Feedback workshop (8 farmers and 2 coordinators of farm education)	Coordinator network (May 2013) Dairy farmer I (May, 2013) Dairy farmer II (May, 2013) Pig Farmer I (May, 2013) Strawberry farmer (May, 2013) Dairy farmer III (June, 2013) Beef farmer (June, 2013) Deer farmer (June, 2013)	Participation in study tour for farmers on farm education Observation of school visit at farm of Dairy Farmer I

Table 4.1 Overview of data collection Case study farm education

Case study	Document analysis	Focus groups	Interviews	Participant observation
<u>Pig Dialogue days</u>	Transcript of dialogue days ⁴¹ , grey literature, policy documents, website administration agriculture	Two Focus groups with pig farmers (may, 2012)	Pig Farmer I (Nov 2011) Pig Farmer II (Nov 2011) Pig Farmer III (Nov 2011) Pig Farmer IV (Nov 2011) Pig Farmer V (Feb, 2012) Pig Farmer VI (Feb, 2012) Pig farmer VII (Feb, 2012) Pig Farmer VIII (March, 2012) Pig farmer IX (May, 2013) (participant DD, representative ABS) Pig farmer X (Feb, 2014) (participant DD, representative BB) Farm consultant (Feb, 2014) (participant DD) Personal communication, researcher, DD par (Feb, 2014)	/

Table 4.2 Overview of data collection case study Dialogue Days

⁴¹ Accessible on-line here:http://www.varkensloket.be/Portals/63/Documents/2011_actieplan_varkenshouderij.pdf

Case study	Document analysis	Focus groups	Interviews	Participant observation
<u>New Food Frontier (NFF)</u>	E-mails, documents for internal communication, grey literature on NFF and transformation project, policy documents	/	Interview academic I and II (March, 2012) Interview Academic II (May, 2014) Interview NGO representative I (June, 2014) Interview NGO representative II (June, 2014) Interview with policy maker I (May, 2014) Interview with consultant (June, 2014) Interview with representative food industry federation (July, 2014) Interview with representative of a farmer organization (September, 2014) Interview with policy maker II (May, 2015)	Participation in fifth deliberative session (may, 2012)

Table 4.3 Overview of data collection case study NFF

We opted for a multiple case study, in order to allow for a procedure of theoretical replication, i.e. a logic of replication aimed at producing contrasting results but for predictable reasons, Zucker, 2009). In fact, the case studies have been selected in order to shed light on different aspects of discursive representation. The case of farm education has been selected to obtain information about which and how many discourses are being employed to inform decision making and about how subjects in the public sphere might engage in a process of transmission. By selecting the case on the trajectory in the NFF we hoped to gain insight in how ongoing shifts towards governance and discursive interactions within empowered space operate and how they are or are not consistent with alternative models of democracy. The case of the pig dialogue days was selected in order to develop understanding on discursive accountability, i.e. how collective outcomes are conceived or justified in terms of their resonance with relevant discourses in the public sphere. In this respect, we hope to reveal the potentialities of discursive representation as an analytical lens as well as gain insights to what extent the practice of discursive representation can or cannot provide democratic resources for ongoing political practice. In Chapter 2 we have positioned the three case studies in the theoretical framework, but in chapter 8 we will discuss to which extent the findings of all cases are informative for the theory of discursive representation as a whole.

Furthermore, we opted to select cases that span a quite wide range of existing and emerging practices in the agro-food sector: farm education as an emerging broadening practice, the pig farming sector as a conventional and key agricultural practice in Flanders and sustainability governance which entails the participation of all sectors and actors in the Food system as a whole. Finally we aimed at selecting cases in which some form of deliberation is taking place. In the agricultural domain, concrete examples of deliberative governance are scarce. Nevertheless, we had the ability to investigate two recent examples in Flanders (NFF, Dialogue days). Consistent with the rationale of type II deliberation research (see 2.1.1), these examples are characterized by what has been called 'good enough deliberation' (e.g. Fraser, 2007), i.e. political activities that harbor some deliberative and democratic virtues and, when institutionalized, are stepping stones for further approximation to the democratic ideals of inclusion and equality.

4.4. METHODOLOGY OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

One thing I learned by practice is that there is no consensus on how a discourse analysis ought to be performed, and that there are but a limited amount of resources available that provide the researcher with a concrete set of techniques to do a discourse analysis. However, in this research, I am greatly indebted to the work of John Dryzek, Maarten Hajer and Deborah Stone, which has provided me with a set of questions to ask about discourses and steps to take in confronting data from a discourse-analytical perspective. Put differently, as a discourse is not singular or stand-alone entity such as a perspective or an opinion, but a coherent ensemble of ideas we need to scrutinize its constituent elements. Once we have found the way in which these constituent elements inter-connect and observe that they are used consistently by a group of actors we can identify something a 'a discourse'.

Based on Dryzek (2005), Dryzek (2010), Hajer (2009), Stone (2001) and Wesselink et al. (2013). For purposes of clarity, I will outline these constituent elements here. Table 4.1. summarizes the questions to ask about discourses as well as additional questions to be asked about political and epistemological aspects.

A crucial constituent element of any discourse is what Dryzek (2005) calls its 'ontology', that is, what are the key entities of a discourse whose existence is recognized or denied. Some discourses, for instance, will give a very prominent place to the existence of 'the market' while others will pre-suppose everything beginning with 'the natural environment'. In their discourse theory, Laclau and Mouffe, refer to this as 'nodal points', that is, *a privileged sign around which the other signs are ordered*. From a political perspective, this element is often represented in the role of *facts* and *numbers* and how these might take centre stage in policy debates or give access to negotiations of political legitimacy (Stone 2001 ; Wessenlinck et al., 2013).

A second element concerns the question about agents and their motives (Dryzek, 2005). Which types of agency are emphasized and which ones are not? Are actors considered as collectivities or individuals? What drives those actors, what do they find important what are their needs and motivations? Politically, this

dimension concerns the construction of 'interests' and is about 'which' interests are claimed to be advocated, defended or represented. (Stone, 2001) Here it becomes relevant to scrutinize how a political model or discourse employs interests as the object of political representation or whose interests should be included and how.

Another constitutive element of discourse can be revealed by asking the question 'how do things relate'? What are the assumptions about natural relationships (Dryzek, 2005)? For instance how are human and non-human actors related to each other? Here, aspects of social philosophy are often addressed: what coordinative mechanisms (cooperation, competition, fate, the market, democracy etc.) constitute human nature or social behavior? In political situations, Stone (2001) speaks of 'causal stories': 'how are a problem's cause linked to an effect, and by implication whose responsibility is it to solve it'? As Grinn (2010) explains, when actors are able to link specific solutions to political problems, this might result in the unlocking of important resources.

A final element clusters a series of 'symbolic devices' which are used to convince listeners, readers or observers by putting something in a particular light (Dryzek, 2005). Examples are metaphors, rhetorical tools, techniques of visual persuasion. Furthermore we need to mention the role of 'storylines', these are condensed ways to re-inforce a particular discourse, which make use of rhetorical figures (e.g. a metaphor, a synecdoche, a personification) and which are by people as 'short hand' in discussions. When analyzing political events (discussions, manifestations, public speeches) the storylines used might reveal which discourses actors try to articulate and deploy politically. When political culture becomes pervasive with the strategic use of arguments that invoke particular symbols to manipulate outcomes in the public sphere, one can speak of symbolic politics (Niemeyer, 2011).

Table 4.4. Constituent elements of discourse

<i>General</i>	<i>Political aspects</i>	<i>Epistemological aspects</i>
I. 'What' matters		
the 'ontology' of a discourse; basic entities whose existence is recognized; basic entities that might be omitted; what is taken for granted?	which 'facts' are politically employed; which facts, numbers and data take center stage in policy debates, give access to negotiations or political fora?	what are the underlying scientific assumptions on which core knowledge claims are based?
II. The way 'things' relate		
what are the assumptions about natural relationships; what guides human behavior, how are human and non-human actors	which causal stories are articulated; how are a problem's cause linked to an effect, and by implication whose responsibility is it to 'solve' it; who links particular solutions to particular problems, in order to unlock resources?	which assumptions are being held about human nature; what is the underlying social philosophy?
III. Agency and its motivation		
what are the actors and their motives; which types of agency are emphasized and which ones are no, are actors collectivities or individuals?	which political interests are out there ; which interests are claimed to be advocated, defended, represented?	which political model is employed to define the object and practice of political representation; how are needs, wants, interests, etc. measured?
IV. The rhetoric devices that are used		
which rhetoric figures are used (metaphor, synecdoche, personification, etc.), which arguments are highlighted, which pictures, slogans and storylines?	what are potential intentions and effects of rhetoric; bridging, bonding, manipulation, inducing reflection?	

V.

CHAPTER 5

USING POLICY DISCOURSES TO OPEN UP THE CONCEPTUAL SPACE OF FARM EDUCATION: INSPIRATION FROM A BELGIAN FARM EDUCATION NETWORK

CHAPTER 5 - Using policy discourses to open up the conceptual space of farm education: inspiration from a Belgian farm education network (original paper)⁴²

5.1. INTRODUCTION

In Flanders (the northern part of Belgium), the public has an increasingly positive image of agriculture (Vilt, 2012). However, socio-political tensions between farming and environmental sustainability concerns remain. This was recently once again illustrated by a protest led by the largest Flemish farmer's union against the implementation of the Natura 2000 program. The widely dispersed campaign poster shows a drawing of a giant 'frenzied' tree that demolishes farms. Geographically, this tension is connected to Flanders being a densely populated area in which there is much pressure to convert farmland into other types of land use (Kerselaers et al., 2015). At the same time, a politics of accommodation (Lijphart, 1981a; Frouws, 1993; Deschouwer, 2009) complicates a change towards a more sustainable agriculture as contending parties tend to restate their long-standing positions without the intention to reconcile the economic interests of modern agriculture with environmental interests.

Although Flemish farmers are often influenced by neo-corporatist tendencies e.g. in their defensive stance towards environmental issues (Vandenabeele and Wildemeersch, 2012), resistance is often related to the inability to harmonize sustainability efforts with farming practice. First, ongoing efforts have failed to

⁴² Crivits, M., de Krom, M.P.M.M., Dessen, J. and Block, T. (forthcoming). "Using policy discourses to open up the conceptual space of farm education: inspiration from a Belgian farm education network." Issue of Environmental Education Research (EER) to be published in Special issue: "Environmental and sustainability education in the BENELUX region

integrate sustainability concerns in farmer's daily routines. Burton et al. (2008) show that greening measures are often not accepted by farmers because these measures' segregative logic of dividing food production and nature conservation hampers environmental concerns to become part of their cultural capital. Similarly De Krom (2015) reveals that European top-down animal welfare measures failed to anticipate their effects on on-farm human-animal relations, leading to undesired side-effects. In this sense, sustainability concerns have often been perceived by farmers as extrinsic to their farming practices. Second, in Flanders a substantial amount of farmers operates in international markets and vertically integrated food chains, making them dependent on other food supply chain actors for (1) the financial retribution for implementing sustainability standards and (2) their communication with consumers and society (Mondelaers, 2010). This enhances the likelihood that farmers miss out in terms of both symbolic and financial recognition of sustainability efforts (Crivits et al., 2014).

In this respect, Darnhofer et al. (2010) argue that the integration of environmental concerns into agriculture need to be dealt with by transformations from within agriculture. Before anything else, internal changes need to ensure long term economic and social sustainability for farms. Here, promising prospects are innovative diversifying activities such as agro-tourism, energy provision, green care and farm education (Darnhofer, et al.; 2010). In Flanders, farmers have increasingly taken up these 'broadening' activities that have been put forward as ways to both widen farmer income and renew agriculture-society relations (De Krom & Dessein, 2013; Van der Ploeg & Roep, 2003). In this research, we focus on farm education in which farmers themselves organize an educative process directed to students and groups of citizens. We wish to explore how we can understand this practice as a relational activity in the farmer's social environment and as a means to ensure different forms of sustainability.

In order to do this we will adopt a discursive framework and use it to structure an empirical exploration of a Flemish farm education network. Recent academic literature shows that farming practices are largely influenced by their discursive environment (Tilzey & Potter, 2005; López-i-Gelats & Tàbara, 2009; Erjavec & Erjavec, 2009; Pyysiäinen, 2011; De Krom & Dessein, 2013; Swinnen et al.; 2015). We follow this line of analysis and focus on three dominant policy discourses (neo-liberal, neo-mercantilist, multifunctionality) that currently structure the public and political debate on what agriculture is and ought to be. From a discourse-analytical perspective these policy discourses are not mere ideas floating in abstraction but are rather 'interpretative frames' (Hajer, 2003) that have concrete implications for

practices in the agro-food domain. Our approach is consistent with Hajer's and Dryzek's conception of discourses as anchored in a 'mild social constructivism' (López-i-Gelats and Tàbara, 2009), delineating discourses as *'ensembles of ideas, concepts and categorizations through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena, and that is produced and reproduces in turn an identifiable set of practices'* (Hajer, 2006, 67).

Based on the three dominant agricultural policy discourses, we delineate three related educative settings⁴³ for the practice of farm education as a starting point to structure our data. We highlight how each setting gives meaning to farm education and articulate how underlying ideas and categorizations can be linked to ongoing educative practices. Based on our qualitative analysis, we assess how these settings are enabled and hampered in their current organization and how they conceptualize the process of achieving sustainability through farm education. By doing this we hope to depict a more nuanced interpretation of what farm education can be. Indeed, all too often farm education is considered as (1) merely one option in a whole series of diversification strategies and (2) suited for a very particular group of farmers interested in new business opportunities (Boerenbond, 2014; Hauben and Van Goolen, 2012). This understanding tends to lead to a division of farm education along a commercial/ideal dichotomy: either farm education is about embarking upon a new business model, or it is a matter of free time just as one would, say, go see friends in a bar. This polarized position seems to underplay both the inclusive potential of farm education and the intrinsic values underlying education.

In order to scrutinize the interrelatedness of education and sustainability transformations in agricultural practice, we will inform our theoretical assumptions on education by Dewey's pragmatist and democratic conception of education. In order to widen our perspective on what education can be, we will adopt Dewey's democratic notion of education that builds on the idea that the articulation of interests in terms of how they affect mutual actions, is co-constitutive for the experience of learning (Dewey, 1916). Thus, we broaden our understanding of what an educational practice can be, which enables us to draw three qualitatively different educative settings for farm education.

⁴³ A setting can here be considered as the discursive and material-functional structure of a practice, which guides routinized behavior within that practice. Agency (individual motivations, personal experiences) as a dimension of what constitutes a practice is here not considered. For a more detailed account on the relation between structure and agency in practices see Crivits and Paredis (2013)

The paper proceeds as follows. First, we introduce the Deweyian perspective on education. Subsequently, we develop a discursive framework to revealing the three educative settings along the lines of three currently dominant policy discourses. We then proceed to an analysis of a West Flemish farm education network, structuring data in accordance with the logic of the three educative settings. For each setting we present identified strengths and barriers. In our discussion we reflect on how each educative setting relates to sustainable agriculture and how a discursive framework could serve as a device of reflection for practice, potentially increasing farmer's capacity to articulate their interests and more clearly understand the role farm education might play in enhancing sustainability.

5.2. BROADENING THE SCOPE OF WHAT EDUCATION CAN BE

John Dewey, whose theoretical insights continue to influence contemporary education theory, starts from a pragmatist definition of the educational process. In *Democracy and Education* (1916) he considers the process of education not as the ability to ‘reproduce’ isolated mental ‘qualities’ but as part of an experiential and experimental process of interaction between human and world. The act of ‘thinking’ is here not an autonomous abstraction but an important instrument in the anticipation of concrete practical situations and the solving of concrete problems.⁴⁴ Dewey emphasizes the importance of learning-through-experience and hereby asserts that education only happens when the overall quality of thinking (of the mental process) increases through engagements in action. In the field of environmental and sustainability education (ESE) many authors draw inspiration from Dewey’s pragmatist theory to emphasize that critical inquiry cannot be confined to simply choosing among pre-existing realities but needs to be anchored in the idea of progressive growth (e.g. Rudsberg and Öhman 2010; Östman 2010; Lundegård and Wickman 2012; Quay and Seaman, 2013; Caiman and Lundegård, 2014)

It is interesting to note that contemporary empirical findings in agricultural research seem to confirm these insights. It has been shown that farmers are not in need for academically constructed learning instruments which consider scientific inquiry as integral to problem solving, but rather express a need for experiential knowledge in which new knowledge is presented in connection with familiar routines (Leeuwis and Van den Ban, 2004; Triste et al., 2014).

In addition to ‘experience’, also the notion of ‘interest’ plays an important role in Dewey’s democratic conception of education. He argues that a learning process will only really make a difference to the mere exchange of information or following of instructions, if all parties or social groups consider the effects of their own actions in relation to the key activities of others. The educational process consists of a process

⁴⁴ As Dewey puts it in *Democracy and Education* (p136): “*Mind appears in experience as ability to respond to present stimuli on the basis of anticipation of future possible consequences, and with a view to controlling the kind of consequences that are to take place. The things, the subject matter known, consist of whatever is recognized as having a bearing upon the anticipated course of events, whether assisting or retarding it.*”

of *mutual interest articulation*, i.e. an attempt to better understand and act on behalf of each other's interests⁴⁵ (Dewey, 1916).

For Dewey, interest cannot be reduced to its meaning acquired in liberal democracy, i.e. something that substitutes the people's authority by the professional and secluded process of political interest articulation. This reasoning would be to reduce the relation between democracy and education to educating those who govern (Dewey, 1916). Rather, democracy is primarily found in a '*conjoint communicated experience*' in '*a mode of associated living*' (Dewey, 1916, p 91). Only through contact with those engaged in different social practices and groups can new conditions to action become liberated. Again, experience is to be considered as an open endeavor which allows *the reflection that sets us free from the limiting influence of sense, appetite and tradition* (Dewey, 1910, 156). Education forges an emancipatory effect even to the extent that *the business of education might be defined as such emancipation and enlargement of experience* (Dewey, 1910, 156).

As an example, we refer to the relationship between agriculture and research to illustrate the potential role of this emancipatory experience via interest articulation. Consider, say, a project meeting with farmers and researchers on the prevention of a specific disease. Interests will be distinctively different. For the farmer it is important that he finds a relatively quick solution to remediate the damage, that he/she gets access to practical tools that allow him to eliminate the disease or compensate the economic costs. For the researcher, it is important that he can repeat experimental tests to achieve scientifically conclusive results and that he can find the time to write out and publish his results. From a Deweyian perspective, the educational process will then consist in giving direction to each other's interests. How can the researcher consider the 'direct need' of the farmer in terms of a 'research component'? How can the farmer gain a better understanding in the complex process of science? What novel courses of action become possible?

This type of common interest articulation could be related to all key actors in the agro-food system, i.e. supply chain actors (processing, retail, input suppliers), government (extension, policy makers, politicians), research (public and private) and civil society actors (social movements, citizens). In what follows we will adopt

⁴⁵ This does not mean that Dewey believed that there would always be a possibility to find unity and consensus. Dewey clearly emphasized that crises are a constant feature of social life (see Caspary, 2000, p 23-24). Nevertheless he believed that the attempt to come to a conflict resolution would not be able without some form of communicative interaction (Caspary, 2000).

Dewey's conception of mutual interest articulation and take it as a starting point for one possible setting for farm education, hence broadening our total understanding of what farm education can entail.

5.3. DISCURSIVE FRAMEWORK: THE TRANSLATION OF THREE POLICY DISCOURSES TO FARM EDUCATION.

In this section we elaborate a discursive framework by interpreting and thinking through implications of three currently dominant agricultural policy discourses as identified in the academic literature. By comparing how the constitutive elements⁴⁶ of these discourses are coherently linked to specific social practices - what Dryzek calls '*a critical comparative scrutiny of competing discourses*' (Dryzek, 2005, p20) - we will demonstrate how the specific discourses can potentially structure the future development of farm education.

5.3.1. WHY POLICY DISCOURSES IN THE CONTEXT OF FARM EDUCATION?

In daily farming practice, the assumptions and goals that underlie existing policy discourses play an indirect yet crucial role. As enabling and constraining structures, discourses determine perspectives on the future of agriculture, which 'natural' relationships are to play a decisive role and how agency ought to be guided by particular motivations. Although actors construct their identity by reflecting on past actions, they also require externally constructed discourse to make sense of what they are doing (Dryzek, 2010; Schmidt, 2010; Pyysiäinen, 2011)

In their analysis of the agricultural policy domain Tilzey and Potter (2005) discern a neo-liberal, neo-mercantilist and strong multifunctionality discourse. The authors show how these discourses structure the selection and operationalization of policy measures, interests and institutional components within the European agro-food policy domain. The discourses do not merely linger within the political and public sphere but also inform how farmers organize farming practices and how farmers are represented and influenced through their contact with (other relevant) social groups

⁴⁶ Based on Hajer (2009), Dryzek (2005), Wesselink et al. (2013) and Stone (2001) we can refer to the following constitutive elements of discourse: basic entities (facts, notions that are taken for granted); assumptions about natural relationships (causal stories); agents and their motives (interests); metaphors, storylines and other rhetorical devices (symbols). See chapter 4.

(Pyysäinen, 2011). A descriptive exploration of how different, partly conflicting discourses externalize in concrete initiatives, projects and regulations is considered a lacuna in agricultural research (Marsden and Sonnino, 2008; Fleming and Van Clay; 2009; De Krom and Dessen, 2013). Comparative discourse analysis might be considered akin to Dewey's conception on what a philosophy of education should try to do, i.e. step away from the sometimes narrowing effect of the immediate and the conflictual nature of practice and "*instead of taking one side or the other, indicate a plan of operation proceeding from a level deeper and more inclusive than is represented by the practices and ideas of the contending parties.*" (Dewey, 1910, preface).

5.3.2. NEO-LIBERAL, NEO-MERCANTILIST AND STRONG MULTIFUNCTIONALITY DISCOURSE: FROM DISCOURSE TO PRACTICE

We first address the *neo-liberal discourse* that evaluates agricultural practice along the standards of the globalized competitive market economy with a focus on economic growth, differentiation, value capture, efficiency and the pursuit of new opportunities in markets. In this discourse, the farmer is identified with entrepreneurial ideals such as autonomy and initiative, creativity and perseverance in his search for new opportunities, markets and customer relationships (Pyysäinen, 2011).

In the context of farm education (Table 5.1) this discourse translates into a 'revenue model' anchored in rural tourism, in which the farmer-entrepreneur works out a set of services related to the 'consumption of the rural' (Woods, 2005). Farm education is linked to other diversification activities such as farm tourism, farm sales and local tourism in which customized arrangements revolve around '*the creation and subsequent projection of enticing rural imagery*' (Eugenio-Vela & Barniol-Carcasona; 2015, 109). The elaboration of this discourse in the context of farm education results in (the construction of) a *recreational educative setting* in which learning about farm life is connected to pleasurable leisure. The farmer finds him/herself in a position in which he/she can measure the quality of his/her education depends on the individual experiences of the customers and the arrangements of competing farmers and non-farmers (petting farms, playgrounds, etc.)

The second, *neo-mercantilist discourse* is more hybrid in nature because it associates agricultural development both with a connotation of protectionism deriving from neo-mercantilist policies as well as a socio-economic solidarity acknowledging agriculture as a distinctive economic 'constituency' (cf. economic exceptionalism;

Skogstad, 1998; Potter and Tilzey, 2005). It partly concerns a change of attitude farmers have to deal with due to changes in the (income) support practices (cf. the 1992 MacSharry reform of the EU Common Agricultural Policy) and therefore with the emancipation of a 'paternalistic' pattern. But it equally aims to justify – especially in the European context - 'state support' (Skogstad, 1998) for farmers that meet societal expectations by delivering public goods and services related to e.g. food security, environmental care and landscape management (Renting et al., 2009; López-i-Gelats and Tàbara, 2009).

With regard to farm education, the supportive role of the state depends on the public services that farm education can provide (Table 1). Literature provides several arguments that point to the public value of farm education. A farm can be an authentic and versatile learning environment to support learners who differ in learning preferences (Smeds et al., 2015); farm education can be part of an outdoor education program fostering new connections between curricular knowledge, personal-social education and environmental literacy (Risku-Norja and Korpela, 2008; Higgins and Nicole; 2002) or it can be focused at tackling low levels of understanding about food, farming and sustainability issues which persists in students throughout Europe (Dilon, et al. 2005) This entails a government's role to recognize and meet the farmer's role as expert and 'teacher'. The elaboration of this discourse in the context of farm education results in what we term an *agriculturist educative setting* where learning about a locally embedded farming practice and the many topics linked to it (water, energy, soil, landscape, food, health, waste, technology, growth process, economy, social relations, ...) is embedded in a public learning and schooling environment. The quality of farm education is here to an important extent measured along the pedagogical quality of the educative process but also links to a public appreciation of activities related to agriculture.

The third *discourse of multifunctionality* is considered in its more strong interpretation (see Tilzey, 2006) where a multifunctional agriculture relates to an emerging model of rural sustainable development (Tovey, 2008). In this discourse, food production is framed within a nexus of social and ecological processes and agriculture becomes a key factor in maintaining and integrating different social and ecological functions in an economically viable agricultural sector (Marsden and Sonnino, 2008; IAASTD, 2009; Renting et al., 2009). Notably, there are clear similarities between the neo-mercantilist discourse and the discourse of multifunctionality in how they treat agriculture as imbued with economic exceptionalism. But a crucial difference between neo-mercantilism and the strong interpretation of multifunctionality is that the first presupposes no intrusive change

within existing power relationships and economic policy, while the latter argues for an intrusive rebalancing on the basis of social and ecological concerns and an increased role of civil society (Tilzey, 2006).

We assert that this integrative approach has strong affinities with the 'nested' sustainability concept (Daly and Cobb, 1994) which understands economic progress as part of a more encompassing social and ecological system. In this model, human wellbeing is placed central thereby considering economic development as part of broader social aims. Moreover, society is considered within its ecological boundaries (Waas et al.; 2011). It is along this line of thinking that Wilson (2008) acknowledges that "*high environmental sustainability plays a key role in strongly multifunctional systems*" and social reconfigurations are key in establishing "*different forms of cooperation between stakeholder groups in the food supply chain*" (Wilson, 2008, 4). We argue that the endeavor to rebalance social, economic and ecological interest through cooperation between different stakeholder groups in the food supply chain closely resembles Dewey's political notion of mutual interest articulation between different social groups.

Following the discourse of multifunctionality, farm education becomes an *emancipatory educative setting* that may initiate a process of social interest articulation in reconsidering ongoing practices (Table 1). The quality of the educative process is assessed in terms of the extent to which the process of mutual interest articulation spurs the influencing of each other's actions and a re-orientation of the agro-food system into a more sustainable direction.

The emancipatory setting can be an important instrument for farmers to achieve more sustainability because in contemporary political practice strong multifunctionality is often defined in terms of political struggle. Proponents often take an oppositional posture to all forms of capitalist accumulation whether neo-mercantilist, neo-liberal or other globally orientated modes of production (Tilzey, 2006). They thus take a radical political position renouncing the exchange of food commodities in a globalized context per se, implicitly precluding a large part of conventional farming practices. This often leaves the farmer (and his practice) tangled up in an idea-political struggle in which his own role vis-à-vis other actors in the agro-food chain (policy makers, interest groups, researchers, supply chain actors, members of civil society, intellectuals, green movement ..) is not explicated in a clear way (Wilson, 2008). Farm education, as a practice that departs from the lifeworld of farmers, could initiate a more grounded process of democratic interaction. We now turn to the analysis of the data along the lines of the three proposed educative settings.

POLICY DISCOURSES			
Constituent elements of the discourse	Neo-liberal discourse	Neo-mercantilist discourse	Strong Multifunctionality
Essential notions	Competitiveness, free trade	National interests, food security, public goods	Sustainable development, rural development
Role of farmer (agency and their motivation)	Entrepreneur, manager	Producer, policy taker	Mediator between different societal concerns
Assumptions about natural relationships (causal stories)	Individuals in the market, demand and supply	Economic exceptionalism, agriculture is dependent on state-support	Farmers and their (social and ecological) environment, different societal concerns and groups
Measures	Deregulation	Intervention	Social Innovation
Storylines	<i>“The increasing exit of farmers is a natural consequence of how supply and demand interact”</i>	<i>“They are not subsidies, after all, but payment for services which Europe’s farmers have so far provided free of charge”</i>	<i>“Food democracy must start from the bottom-up, at the level of villages, regions, cities, and municipalities”</i>
Discourse coalitions	WTO, USDA, MN corp., Mariann Fischer Boel	COPA, state administrations, Franz Fischler	Via Campesina, Ruaf, Olivier De Schutter
FARM EDUCATION PRACTICE			
Educative setting	Recreational	Agriculturist	Emancipatory
Goal farm education	Provide a rural ‘experience’, services in market	Public learning about agriculture and its environment, public service	Emancipate through mutual interest articulation, strong resolution
Natural relationships	Farmer – Consumer	Teacher – Student	Different social groups
Governing mechanism	Market	Government (schooling institution)	Interest and actions
Evaluative mechanism	Price	Quality indicators	Engagement in Sustainable development (nested), creating understanding across actions

Table 5.1. Discursive framework for farm education

5.4. CASE INTRODUCTION: WEST FLEMISH NETWORK FOR FARM EDUCATION

INAGRO is a regional research and extension institute which considers farm education as one of its core tasks. It coordinates a farm education network that centers around two programmes: *Met de klas de boer* (school-to-farm) and *Samen de boer op* (group-to-farm), that support a specific group of regional farmers in organizing farm education. In 2014, 54 farmers were participating in the network. Most of them are dairy and mixed farms and only a minority are related to other farming sectors (see figure 1).

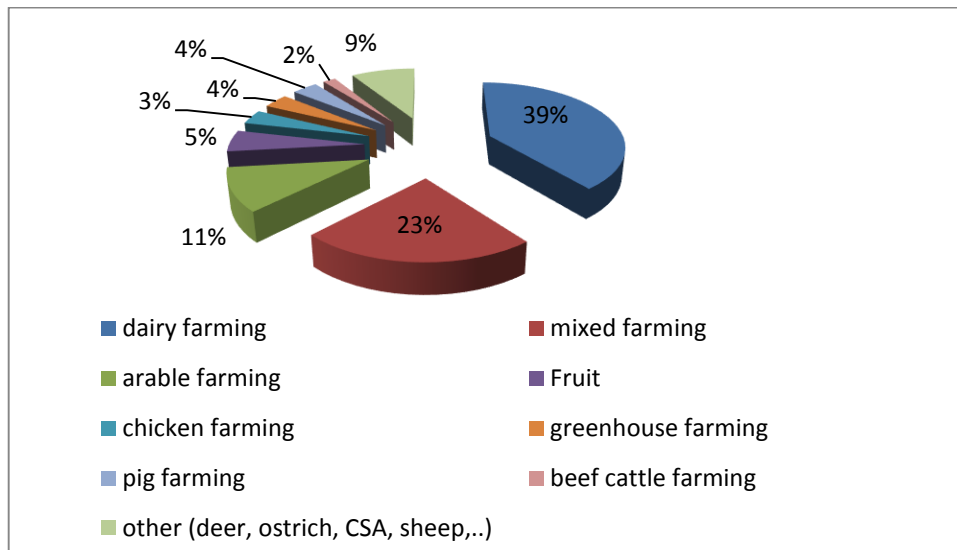


Figure 5.2. Percentages of participating farmers per agricultural sector.

After being formed in 2002 by local governmental agents and farmers, the network was scaled up through its integration in an INTTERREG IIIA project in cooperation with Northern France (Nord Pas-de-Calais).

In the period of 2002-2006, the network developed teaching materials, promotional channels for groups and schools, sessions on the practical aspects of organizing farm visits as well as the evaluation of farm visits. The network actively recruited farmers; 70 farmers joined the networks in this period of time.

In the period 2007- 2013 a second phase was initiated. The shifts in emphasis within the INTERREG program led to another strategic focus within the network. The conditions for European subsidies were no longer linked to basic activities aimed at supporting farmers at the beginning of their farm education activities. The renewed focus is on more innovative actions for agricultural education such as e.g. use of GPS routes for farm exploration or a language exchange project between Wallonia and Flanders (*Bonjour Boer*). This more specific focus led the network to target to a smaller group of committed farmers. Next quote indicates the impact of this shift in content:

"We are losing some of those people, because they have not been waiting for this. People engage in farm education for various reasons. Some people as a real hobby, out of idealism, because they consider it important that the people in the neighborhood can see that they work. That's what they want to do and they do it well. But you cannot ask them to go very far in this, so you have a lot of people that we cannot engage in the actions that we are now including in project proposals." (network coordinator)

To remain a member of the network one must follow at least one organized activity linked to farm education every year. This minimum commitment ensures that farmers stay in touch with developments in the network and farm education. Many farmers consider the annual reception an interesting network moment, both to understand the evolution of the network and to meet colleagues with similar interests. Most of the time, this reception is being organized on a farm. This moment is considered to have added value, as the coordinator puts it: *"they meet here in a context of farm education, which is different to seeing each other in the rural guilds or farmer organization."* Interviews confirmed the importance of focus, since the more traditional channels where farmers gather usually do not consider farm education as a separate topic of interest.

5.4.1 METHODOLOGY

Our findings are based on a data collection via triangulation of various qualitative sources. First, we conducted eight in-depth interviews (farmers, 7; coordinator; 1). Criteria to select interviewees were diversity in farming styles⁴⁷, diversity in how actively farmers participated in the network, and diversity in how farmers approach education. These criteria were discussed and co-assessed with the network coordinator who has been actively engaged in setting up the network and has visited all participating farms at least once.

Second, we did participant observation in a study tour on farm education. Here the main author engaged in dialogue on the role of farm education with several of the participating farmers. Furthermore, extensive notes were taken during presentations by two Dutch farmers and the organizer of a farm education program the following discussion. Third, we conducted a document analysis and desktop research. We studied several brochures, leaflets, websites and documents directly related to the organization and continuation of the West-Flemish farm education network. To further understand the context of farm education in Flanders we conducted a literature study and analyzed all available Flemish legislative texts and studies on farm education and grey literature.

The interview transcripts were coded via the use of descriptive codes summarizing the content of the paragraph. Subsequently, a limited set of interpretative codes were used referring to the constituent elements of discourses (agency and their motivation, assumptions about natural relationships, central notions, metaphors) and the enablers and barriers of organizing specific types of farm education in practice. The other two data sources (document analysis and participant observation) were used to triangulate our interview data and to better understand the contextualization of ongoing farm education activities in the basic concepts of the discursive frameworks.

⁴⁷ Three dairy farmers, one beef cattle farmer, one deer farmer, one pig farmer and one strawberry grower were interviewed

Fourth, a feedback workshop was conducted with eight farmers⁴⁸. This workshop proceeded in three steps. First, farmers were asked to openly discuss what they find important in their educational efforts, and what they think works well and what makes it difficult to organize their farm education activities. Second, the three educative settings were presented as ‘solution paths’. The presenter connected them what had been brought up by farmers during the opening discussion, and to a series of illustrative examples coming from the interview data and other examples discovered through desktop research. The three settings were then discussed in group. Guiding questions were: what do you consider possible on your farm?; what are you already doing that connects to these solutions? Third, small group discussions were held to facilitate the generation of innovative ideas. The workshop served as a validation of our findings by confronting key actors with our analysis. Hajer (2006) argues that a discourse analysis should always confront respondents with its findings as “*a way of controlling if the analysis of the discursive space made sense*” (74). In the workshop, the farmers indicated that they considered the structuring of their practices along the lines of the discursive frameworks valid and useful.⁴⁹ During the workshop, no ideas were brought up that hinted at the existence of fundamentally different discourses.

⁴⁸ One farmer had already been interviewed. Five other farmers had participated in the study trip.

⁴⁹As one farmer put it: “*All things we do, are here shown in distinct elements. It is so, so and so (gestures three columns). Structure. We do not often think of this. We are so busy on our farms, we are doing so many things, that in fact we do not realize what we are doing anymore. They have to help us a little, we are teacher, we are care farm, we are farmer that is [the latter] were it begins.*” (Woman, Forties, workshop, 2014)

5.4.2. REVEALING THREE EDUCATIVE SETTINGS IN ONGOING FARM EDUCATION PRACTICES

On the basis of the discourse framework introduced above, we elaborate upon the data to understand how the three educational settings are and may be represented in ongoing farm education practices. We also try to gain insight in how structural (discursive and non-discursive) constraints are allowing and impeding the development of the different types of educative settings.

RECREATIONAL EDUCATIVE SETTING

In a recreational educational setting the relationship between education and rural experience takes central stage. A rural experience allows consumers (including students) to enjoy farm life and its surroundings. This e.g. concerns participative play (farm golf, farm quest, board games, ...), cooking workshops, hiking and cycling routes, interaction with animals, etc. The emphasis is on the noncommittal nature of the farm visit and a spending of free time (or a school trip) in a pleasant way.

One example shows this relation between education and rural experience in the creation of learning possibilities for farm guests:

“People that stay over can join feeding the calves and help bringing in the cows at night. But also non-functional things are in the arrangement. For instance, brushing the calves or cooking with milk. That is not functional for me. So for this they need to pay extra... This is the added value for people who stay here. At least fifteen families have returned.” (dairy farmer, woman, twenties)

In rural tourism, the farmer delivers a service in the market and uses his/her particular assets as a farmer (e.g. the personal contact that he/she can make, associations people have with farmers) as a unique selling point vis-à-vis (Wilson, 2008, p.4) other touristic arrangements (Roberts et al. 2001). The farmer is thus positioned within a competitive field with other actors of rural tourism (e.g. amusement park, playground, petting zoo). In this quote a farmer explains why she focuses mostly on tourist arrangements and less on schools:

“I do think it is because we have a petting farm nearby, which is subsidized heavenly[...]At the beginning of the school year the school receives the information: ‘you can bake a bread for free, you can do that for free.’ Obviously this is preferred [over visiting her farm].” (dairy farmer, woman, twenties)

This is consistent with the observation that, within the network of farmers, farm education seems to be commercial only if it is linked to other diversification activities such as farm stays, farm sales, group events and local tourism. We have found several instances of this connection.

Farm education can be connected to farm sales. In this case, a farm visit ends with a taste session of their products. Customer loyalty can so be coupled to an increased knowledge about the workings and whereabouts of the company. Farm education is also inscribed in local tourism. Especially if the farm business is embedded in a scenically-culturally valuable environment opportunities are created to connect educational facilities (e.g. learning about the farm’s history, World War I tourism, environmental education) with hiking and biking trails. Cooperation with local governments appears to have a value in building up recreational-educative arrangements. Touristic routes with accents on local farms are worked out together. This farmer notes how she worked out an arrangement with the local municipality:

“Next Friday I’m receiving a visit from someone of the touristic service of [municipality x], since I have a lot of hiking and biking routes passing by and we want to do something on war tourism, to make a stopping point here” (pig farmer, woman, forties)

The analysis of the network shows that the reproduction of the recreational educative setting through the connection of farm education with other farm diversification activities is mainly done by farmers who have made significant investments in creating an additional income from farm tourism. Farmers who have done less significant investments will be less inclined to make the link between education and recreation and will often treat farm education as an ancillary activity (cf. infra).

Strengths and barriers of the recreational setting

The connection between farm education and recreational rural arrangements is bound by specific criteria and not equally accessible to all farmers. A first limitation relates to spatial embeddedness. The ability to provide a rural experience depends on the location and architecture of the farm, e.g. whether it is situated in an accessible, distinctive and picturesque environment, preferably surrounded by bicycle and hiking trails. Farms with a more modern architectural style or that are situated in a less attractive area, are considerably less suitable. Ownership structures also play an important role. Farmers that lease a farm will often be in an unfavorable position to make profitable diversification investments, such as guest rooms or a farm shop, which impedes them in organizing a recreational setting. Additionally, certain farming styles will be less apt to create a recreational setting. Intensive farms are a clear example. A specific problem for e.g. intensive pig farming is the (perceived) bad odor and the risk of transmitting pathogens, making it hard to organize close contact with the animals and farming practice. Only few larger scale, strongly specialized farms are part of the farm education network. There are some larger farms that engage in farm education activities but they do it sporadically, ask more and without the support of the network.⁵⁰

There are thus specific enablers and barriers associated with the social practices that adopt a recreational education setting in the organization of farm education activities. In the current Belgian situation, establishing an recreational setting creates the possibility to create additional income and strengthen broadening activities. This advantage, however, has an immediate counterpart in terms of limited inclusion, since not all farming styles have an equal access to organizing rural arrangements.

Reasoning in terms of ‘reaching society’ these practices have the potential to engage a lot of customers and teach them about rural and farm life and its enjoyable and interesting aspects. At the same time however the “customer-is-king approach” and the limited representation in terms of farming styles holds

⁵⁰ Outside the context of our case there are international examples of very large scale farms that engage in farm education see for instance www.fofarms.com.

the risks of simplifying or misrepresenting the intricate and multifaceted practice of farming. The non-committal nature related to a more consumerist experience might impede a more transformative learning process that touches upon less playful aspects related to political, technical and socio-economic realities.

Strengths	Barriers
Provides additional income in the market	Is not possible for a lot of farmers
Education as a means to strengthen other diversification activities	Insufficient as an autonomous educational activity
In accordance with the spirit of our age: flexible and non-committal	Might generate an oversimplified image of agriculture and fail to communicate less 'pleasant' aspects related to environmental sustainability and social justice
Brings attention to the rural in a positive and pleasant way	

Table 5.2. Strengths and Barriers Recreative setting.

AGRICULTURIST EDUCATIVE SETTING

Farmers who do not organize recreational arrangements and merely focus on communicating their farming practices rarely consider this a full blown or time intensive activity. A group of farmers participating in the network are motivated by what they term as idealism, proudness and hospitality. The facilities of the network are then seen as a way to guide and acknowledge these aspects. The following quote illustrates this:

“At the start there was sometimes somebody asking: “can we see your farm?” Well, of course, we are proud of it and they are welcome. But you have to take into account, it takes time, you put some energy into it, and often you don’t dare to ask anything [i.e. any reimbursement]. You know, these are people we know. Until we heard about the network. We thought, maybe we should do this [join the network]. Then things are more official and we aren’t so inhibited to ask something for it.”
(strawberry farmer, man, forties)

For these farmers it is clear that farm education does not have to be considered a commercial activity:

“We are ok with what we get. It need not be more. You get about 50 euro, but yes, you have to clean things up, you’re busy all morning. It’s more out of.. idealism I guess? Or I don’t know, hospitality? But a lot of farmers tell me they are not interested in this at all.”(dairy farmer, woman, forties)

These observations are true for many farmers. Prices for school visits (mostly 2 hours to half a day) vary between 50 to 100 euro for a group of students. Considering minimal (time) investments, this implies that farm education in terms of school visits is not an additional source of income.

Similar to the above, an important reason for entering the network has to do with the farmer’s will to acquire didactic skills: *“At the time I joined because my kids were at a primary school, which visited me every year. Then I thought, I could as well do this good, no? And now, well.. a few visits per year.”* (beef cattle farmer, woman, forties)

This quote also illustrates the contingent way in which schools and farmers are linked, i.e. as the result of a spontaneous engagement from teachers or farmers, not as something intrinsic to the school program. We thus infer that both the altruistic connotation farmers attach to farm education as well as the contingent nature of school-farm cooperation significantly weakens the image of the state as a mediator and supporter of farm education in terms of providing a public service in the institutionalized schooling system. This in turn creates a situation in which farmers are not inclined to invest in the education of students as an autonomous strategy.

Concerning the content of the education, respondents signaled that through the network’s activities they learned how they can communicate with students about the technical processes underlying agriculture and how they can translate their knowledge to the life worlds of the students. One way is to explain agricultural processes by offering simple tasks. The following quote illustrates this: ²

“To give an example. A cow eats seventy kilo of grass. You can then let the children pick grass and consequently use a measuring device to assess, ok, how many grass have we pulled. And compare this with what a cow eats, how much work it takes to gather 70 kilograms of grass... It’s at that moment they are surprised.” (Beef cattle farmer, woman, forties)

Or one makes a connection between a theoretical principle and its application in the context of the farming practice:

“For instance, when we talk about the skimming of the milk. Then, we can explain that this happens due to centrifugal force.” (Dairy farmer, woman, forties)

These connections between theory and practice illustrate starting points to relate specific learning goals within curricula to concrete processes in a farm environment. Depending on the target group the educational offer is adapted. The trainings organized by the network provide information e.g. on how to keep attention in a group of school children or how to work out educational topics for different age groups.

Strengths and barriers of the agriculturist setting

Farmers succeed in translating several aspect of the farming practice to various school groups. In addition, the educational content and process is related to both farming practice and its environment. Yet, certain farms face restrictions in maximally deploying their farm environment as an educational resource. Again, what matters is the ownership structure when e.g. certain interventions or ecological adaptations are made impossible by the tenant or hampered by spatial planning regulation. One farmer e.g. explained that:

“There are some farms [...] strongly engaged in environmental education, for instance those that have a puddle [...]I wanted to build a puddle here, but the owner [of the farm] did not allow it.” (Dairy farmer, forties, woman)

Important for the organization of agricultural education as a more public activity is the site where education takes place. In the network agricultural education is generally considered an on-farm activity. Most farmers shy away from speaking in a class room. Farm education is generally regarded as an on-farm activity because here the farmer sees him- or herself as an expert. It is generally supposed that schools come to the farm and not the other way around.

The role of farmers in contacting schools is also often seen as receptive. As this farmer states: *“The teacher needs to be convinced and take the first step”*. This

means that the individual interest of a teacher or school in organizing a farm visit is a crucial driving force in bringing about farm education. In Flanders, the educational institution is indeed free to decide whether or not to link farm education content to the expectations of the learning plan and the curricular subjects.⁵¹

Schools (in West Flanders) receive a 30 euro compensation to organize class visits. However, all interviewees confirm that schools without any habit to include farm visits in their educational program, are not easily convinced take their classes to a farm. A barrier that is repeatedly cited is accessibility and transportation costs. A main reason why schools choose not to visit farms is related to the costs of renting a bus:

"On that teachers' fair they had raffled a farm visit. A school around Ghent had won that prize. They then came to our farm, but said they wouldn't come back because the bus is too expensive. " (Dairy farmer, woman, forties)

In proportion, transport costs are much higher than the price asked by the farmer. In the farm education network they try to develop strategies to address this barrier. Thus they shall, for example, aim to reduce expenses by linking transport costs to the financial structure of other projects.

"We tried to link the bus costs to the MOS project [Environment at School, a project of the Flemish government], there was money for schools visiting companies, but we didn't succeed." (Dairy farmer, forties, woman)

"In the project Bonjour Boer we tried to cover bus expenses by addressing the Dutch Language Union."(Network coordinator, woman, thirties)

⁵¹ Some schools work with a thematic week on agriculture, with the visit as a final piece, other schools organize extramural internships with farmers as a permanent option for students, and some motivated teachers commit to teach on the farm site. However, these are rather exceptions and many schools have built no routine to embed agriculture education in their educational structure and content

This shows that not only individual interest of schools but also a series of more structural impediments play a significant role in the organization of farm education by the network members.

As mentioned above the agriculturist setting is also influenced by its relation with local petting farms. Not only do farmers state that the subsidized offer is in direct competition with on-farm activities but a recurring argument was that the petting zoo's emphasis on the recreational interaction with animals does not adequately reflect a modern farm in the sense that *'today no farm exists with so to speak two cows, two pigs and a two chickens'* (dairy farmer, woman, twenties). This rather simplistic perception is in contrast with the intrinsic complexities of contemporary farming practice yet plays an important role in the public perception of farm education.

Currently, however, the state leaves the agriculturist setting to the voluntary engagement of both farmers and schools. Organizing farm visits and connecting activities with learning goals is largely conditioned by an agency dimension. Even if a government should not choose to more structurally embed agricultural knowledge in education, it is at least in the position to lower the contact threshold between teachers and farmers. Providing such support can involve reimbursing logistical costs to increase accessibility, organizing school-farm networking events and promoting contemporary agricultural topics to schools and educational commissions.

If further efforts are expected from farmers such as e.g. organizing recurrent farm visits in which they are also made responsible for ensuring pedagogical quality, at least two further factors should be considered. First, a greater financial compensation will have to be taken into account. Second, and this is equally important, certain cultural aspects are at play. Not every farmer is interested in communicating his knowledge, partly because s/he does not have this routine, partly because s/he wants to keep his/her autonomy.⁵²

⁵² These cultural contextualities cannot be addressed here in more detail but deserve further attention as they not only determine the potentialities of farm education, but refer to a wider set of values and ways of thinking related to the relationship between agriculture and society at large.

Table 5.3. below summarizes a number of strengths and barriers of the organization of the agriculturist educative setting.

Strengths	Barriers
Can create farm income. Farmer engages in delivery of public education service	Farmer does not consider him/herself as teacher
Structurally integrating farm education in school curricula can significantly strengthen agriculture-society links	Potential costs and trade-offs Lack of vision on behalf of government and policy actors Contingent relationship between farmers and teachers
Experiential learning on the farm environment can raise awareness on the use of natural resources in a context of farming and rural development	Structural impediments to organize on farm visit (accessibility, schools means, etc.), lack of freedom as tenant

Table 5.3. Strengths and Barriers Agriculturist setting

EMANCIPATORY EDUCATIVE SETTING

We turn to the emancipatory educative setting which we have aligned with the Deweyian conception of education as mutual interest articulation between social groups. This way of seeing education as political expands farm education to the dialogical encounter between different social groups and their respective interests, motivations and actions in the agro-food system.

Although this discourse is often not explicitly articulated we do find a series of concrete elements that support the rationale of the emancipatory setting.

On a policy level, for instance, a (2004) decree of the Flemish government on farm education describes its objective as *"a knowledge exchange, dialogue and vision development about sustainable agriculture and the sustainable consumption of agricultural products by the public or specific societal groups in order to strengthen the social basis of agriculture"*. (Decree, art. 20, my translation).

Here the emancipatory setting is implicitly supposed since farm education is seen as a dialogue between farmers, citizen-consumers and other social groups

to accomplish a more sustainable production and consumption. However, as outlined above, Dewey's conception is not limited to dialogue. The primary focus of interaction is not to obtain shared values, but that actions be reconsidered in relation to other people's interests. In this respect, sustainable consumption and production in the agro-food system cannot be solved without considering a whole series of underlying factors related to price setting, dynamics between long and short food chains, access to knowledge, branding, health aspects and profitability of sustainability efforts (McMichael, 2000; Barbier and Elzen, 2012). In this context, it is clear that interests of several systemic actors conflict. In Flanders these conflicting interest are mostly articulated at a high political level such as the *ketenoverleg* [supply chain initiative], yet a pragmatic approach would suggest problem-solving to take place 'on the ground' between affected actors and groups, e.g. famers, food processors, retailers, researchers, policy makers and citizen-consumers(Dijstelbloem, 2007).

An example of the emancipatory setting was discussed at the workshop. A farmer describes what he thinks is the value of a conversation he joined at an Urban Agriculture forum, between two farmers that bear witness to an unusual collaboration: a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) farmer leasing 1.25 hectare of land from a conventional farmer leading to a mutual understanding.

"[I]t was clarifying to see classical agriculture and a whole different type of agriculture – more organic – next to each other. Both are in conflict now.. but in this confrontation you notice . .how Jen [organic farmer].. saw that.. what he does, is not against the organic idea.. and Jan [conventional farmer].. saw that from 1.25 hectare an income can be generated[...].What first seems impossible to bring together in theory, is here done perfectly in practice. I think it can give society a beautiful image. Because now, for those [individuals engaged in] organic, organic is seen as the holy goal, and conventional agriculture also has its reservations, but it is always interesting to put the two next to each other, to give society an image that isn't as distorted by the interests of [inaudible] agriculture." (Farmer, thirties, man)

This shows how the focus on mutual action, interest articulation and communication between different social groups can be the focus of an educational setting.

On the basis of our analysis of the farm education network, the emancipatory setting seems less articulated but farmers do show commitment to at least communicate about common and conflicting interests. The following dairy farmer stresses how she takes into account the interests of the milk processing company in her educational message. She explains:

“Before milk reaches the table a lot of work is done, things need to be taken care of, also in relation to food safety. If we walk in the milking parlor I emphasize the need for good cleaning. If a cow needs to be treated, it needs to be taken aside and examined. As a farmer you are responsible if you deliver bad milk. If you deliver a batch of milk that ends up in a big container of 50.000 liter of milk, it’s your fault that the whole tank has gone bad.” (dairy farmer, woman, forties)

Another example of how the communication of interests can be embedded in an educational context is exemplified in a sustainability project for schools (Food Rock) in which farmers engaged students in workshops that connect a cooking session to a narrative on sustainable consumption. The participating farmer comments on what she thinks is the gist of the project:

“We were thinking. After the crisis, people are in search for good food, qualitative yet not too expensive. So why not process your own meat... we want to communicate.. take for instance you want to have 5 kilos of potatoes, you can go to the shop and pay, say, 4 euro. Or you can get those same potatoes directly from the farmer and only pay 2 euro... Both get better from this really.” (pig farmer, woman, forties)

This farmer, through her participation in the project, became inspired to take a course in meat processing and to look for ways to offer meat 'close to home'. She still delivers most of her products to slaughterhouses but at the same time saw opportunities to sell part of her products directly to consumers. This is a good example of how communication about mutual interests can lead to reconsidering practice. But here the solution is still framed in terms of a relatively straightforward solution (lower price- higher income) based on a win-win situation for both parties.

Sometimes conflicting interests can translate to an educational context. During the annual activity organized by the network a visit was planned to the House of

Food, a recently formed educational center focusing on how food is produced in Flanders. The following quote illustrates a certain degree of sensitivity towards the communication of interests:

“There was an exhibition stand in which several products could be smelled, e.g. apple juice, milk, .. A very nice stand indeed. On the stand was a commercial sign of (brand of soy milk). That’s industry. One woman into on-farm milk processing, says, I think it is a pity that this only says [brand x] and not ‘farm milk’. But then of course [brand x] appears to be the main sponsor of the House of Food.” (Deer farmer, woman, forties)

This quote hints at the importance attached to how farmers are represented in the educational communication of agro-food interests, and the fear of other agro-food actors gaining dominance in that communication. Here, however, the actual confrontation between the farmer and the food processor never took place.

Related to this practice of representation is also the self-perception of farmers and their farm:

“I normally don’t do groups. Once I had a question for a group of retired farmers. .. I did not accept ... I think you should be able to show something spectacular to these people. And well, this is a rather old farm, we use the old stables for feeding cattle .. those farmers might come from a more spectacular farm of which one says ‘this is something new’.(Cattle beef farmer, woman, forties)

The above observation is interesting because it illustrates how the farmer seems to suppose the agriculturist over the emancipatory setting. Even though from the perspective of knowledge acquisition rather few innovative ‘facts’ can be communicated (because the group in fact consisted of experienced farmers), a dialogue on the future of agriculture could be made a topic of an interesting educational activity in this peer-to-peer context. The interview revealed the farmer to have specific ideas about how her farm development was related to agricultural advisers, the effects of particular investments in the dairy sector and the termination of milk quota. An emancipatory setting would not consider her personal life story as an anecdotal given, but as a potentially new reference point to consider how mutual interests could be considered, perhaps not leading to her decision to reject the offer.

Strengths and barriers of the emancipatory setting

Strictly speaking, the organization of an emancipatory setting does not require big material investments. Creating such a discursive space does not at all entail excessive material costs. The main impediments seem to be related to cultural and institutional barriers. The articulation of interests is often not associated with an educative environment. Furthermore, many farmers do not believe that emancipatory effects will last. One farmer referred to how he had addressed several people about how low prices for farmers, buying behavior and competition in the food chain are interlinked, but that this only led to temporarily changed behavior. He claimed that a majority of consumers continue to choose based on price and fail to acknowledge what they learned in a non-buying context.

We immediately add that consumer behavior and pricing is also influenced by sale channels, competition between retailers and the dependence of farmers on the retailer's product and consumer policy (Mondelaers, 2010). The emancipatory setting would also need to give a place to these types of dependencies by e.g. engaging retailers in a direct form of dialogue. on this level, there should be a consideration of relationships between different social groups of the agro-food system and the need for a more open attitude in the exploration of mutual interest articulation. Again, this directness in communication can be contrasted with the current consensus that any agro-food conflict should be discussed at the 'ketenoverleg' [supply chain consultation] between the representatives of food chain actors rather than between individual stakeholders.

In the short term, an emancipatory setting fails to provide an additional income for farmers. Yet, it does play a role in organizing a context in which more consideration for mutual interests and problems (including price setting) becomes possible. Attaining reciprocity in access to the pricing of agricultural products might than result from such an inter-professional emancipatory setting.

Table 5.4. below summarizes some contextual strengths and barriers of the emancipatory model.

Strengths	Barriers
Focused on understanding mutual interests which sets a basis for changing social relationships, thereby increasing the probability of successful inclusive innovation	The progressive definition of education is usually not acknowledged. There is no culture in transparently communicating on common interests
Can generate future income by initiating the road to a new level playing field	Generates no concrete additional income, can be time intensive
Can lead to the development of a new framework that channels the concretizations of new goals in which several qualitatively different interests are reconsidered next to each other (e.g. biodiversity, food production, rural development, vertical integration,..)	The role of structural power relations

Table 5.5. Strengths and Barriers Emancipatory setting

5.5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Our analysis suggests that farm education encompasses more than a dichotomy based on ‘commercial’ and ‘idealist’ motives as is often suggested by agricultural stakeholders (Boerenbond, 2014; Hauben and Van Goolen, 2012). Instead, farm education entails a multilayered practice. Our elaboration of the three settings shows that commercial success cannot be the sole basis to identify whether an activity of farm education is a professional activity. Each setting can be seen as a structural arrangement of an educational practice that enables and constraints farmers in undertaking particular kinds of behavior and routines. Farm education becomes a distinctively different phenomenon when it is conceived and realized in a framework organized according to either market structures, public service provision, or interest articulation between social groups. Our analysis has revealed that constituent elements of the three educative settings can be found in current farm education practices, and that it makes sense to structure farm education according to the discursive boundaries of the proposed framework.

But how should we consider the potential of each setting in terms of achieving sustainability in the future development of agriculture? We argue that each setting harbors potential to foster sustainability starting from ‘within’ agriculture. Based on Marsden and Sonnino (2008) and Darnhofer et al. (2010) we claim that sustainable agriculture should at least be able to (1) add income

and employment opportunities to the agricultural sector; (2) contribute to a renewed agricultural sector that meets the needs and expectations of society at large; and (3) reduce the environmental impacts of production systems.

With regard to (1), a recreational setting allows educative processes to become embedded in rural tourist arrangements where earnings can be expected from combining farm education with other diversification strategies, hence adding to farmer income. In the agriculturist setting, the epistemic dimension underlying farm education may justify it as an integral part of the public service of institutionalized schooling, allowing the government to compensate the farmer-as-teacher. The emancipatory setting allows for a pre-competitive or collaborative dialogue in which an increased awareness of existing problems, and a potential persuasion that effects behavioral change can spill over to changed market behavior.⁵³

Furthermore, with regard to (2), each setting suggests different solutions. A recreational setting opens up possibilities to communicate about agriculture to various groups in society combining a playful, interactive and educative approach. Effective farm investments allow farmers to both communicate personally and engage consumers in daily farming life. For the agriculturist setting it may reasonably be assumed that when students are stimulated to systematically learn about, work on and experience farming in relation to food issues this will in time create increase societal interest and create career interest and entrepreneurship in the agro-food system. The emancipatory setting takes the aim of social transformation as its very basis by questioning mutual routines, and thereby inevitably aims to re-think the agriculture-society relationship.

But how should farm education lead to the third goal, reducing the environmental impacts of production systems? The practice of farm education is not primarily focused on integrating environmental concerns. As discussed in this article's introduction, a successful integration of environmental concerns

⁵³ This need not be utopic. One example is found in the genesis of a Flemish local food system (food teams). In this case, a class on globalization effects on agriculture spurred a dialogue between citizens and farmers, which eventually led to the establishment of the alternative food network that aims to secure farmer income and local consumption (Crivits & Paredis, 2013)

depends largely on how the measures or innovations are in tune with the routines of farming practice.

Here we see the value of an emancipatory setting organized to understand how farm education can integrate sustainability efforts into farming practice. To approach sustainability in this way, will not result in sustainability efforts as imposed from outside, but as something that takes shape in interaction with farmers' practices and interests. It is in this respect that we argue that all too rigid polarizations such as 'commercial -ideal' or 'ecological -modern', delimit farm education to particular sub-categories of farming styles and hence forestall an inclusive view of farm education. Although there are quite a number of farmers who have significantly invested in a more ecological agriculture, taking only this group into consideration would unjustly ignore potential and essential changes within conventional agriculture. More 'industrialized', intensive farmers have a range of relevant technological, economic and social issues worth to be communicated to students, citizens and systemic actors. Both the agriculturist as well as the emancipatory setting enable their participation. Increased inclusiveness could then not only enables farmers to communicate a more nuanced image of agriculture but would likely increase effectiveness in terms of how farm education takes up sustainability concerns.

But how exactly can farm education contribute to enhancing sustainability? We can only hint at some suggestions. We have not been able to assess how precisely the educative settings contribute to the formation of learning experiences. Following Dewey, this would require one to investigate how experience enfolds as *a communicative, historical and cultural phenomenon* in the relation between the individual and the world (Hohr, 2013,1). However, our elaboration of the three settings and their coherent association with three dominant discourses in the agro-food system could initiate a first step in structuring a debate about the future development of farm education. Unraveling several discursive logics might be considered as a resource to consider things from a meta-perspective, before moving on. In practice, elements of the three (or more) settings will never be separated as strictly as we have done for analytical reasons. Yet, thinking through how farm education should be organized and why might be important to (1) give a voice to those clearly underrepresented educational practices and (2) empower farmers who are not used to defend their position within the public

sphere (Vandenabeele and Wildemeersch, 2012). Although today, in Flanders, the recreational setting is still prevalent, more investigation into the other less explored settings deserves merit, echoing Dewey's claim that beliefs need to be tested to now its true worth (Dewey, 1934).

But of course there is more than farming. This study has focused on the role of agriculture, and the need to take into account social and economic sustainability as a condition to move forward. Van Poeck et. al. (2014) argue sustainability problems are never represented in an unambiguous way but should be understood in terms of an intimate entanglement of a variety of actors, often unknowingly and antagonistically connected to a specific issue. Also from a pragmatist perspective, a process of experimentation would not begin or end with a communicative dialogue and the boundaries of an educational process would be insufficient to set the entire stage for transformation on a specific issue. But what debating and enacting farm education could do is at least facilitate a political interpretation of pragmatist thought, wherein more emphasis is put on the role of decentralized interaction in specific groups of citizens for specific problems (Dijstelbloem, 2007). The act of clearly distinguishing between discourses is a first step towards endorsing its particular potential in practice. Discourses enable actors to give meaning to what they are doing or want to do in the future. A discursive framework highlighting different meanings, values and power relations at stake, is an interpretative act of the scientist and thus needs to be (1) contestable and (2) considered as a political act that broadens the discursive focus in collective decision making processes (Wesselink, et al. 2013). Within the agro-food system, a concrete dialogue on which type of educative practices should be pursued, and on how farm education can be the object of social, economic sustainability might be a first step towards finding new ways to 'test' our beliefs.

CHAPTER 6

WHY INNOVATION IS NOT ALWAYS GOOD: INNOVATION DISCOURSES AND POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY

-CHAPTER 6 - WHY INNOVATION IS NOT ALWAYS GOOD:
INNOVATION DISCOURSES AND POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY
(ORIGINAL PAPER)⁵⁴

6.1. INTRODUCTION

Innovation' in common parlance invariably denotes some type of intrinsically desired newness such as a commercially interesting new technology, idea or organizational form. However, when innovation is considered as a multi-actor process, it becomes clear that different interpretations of what constitutes an innovation may exist and co-evolve. Shifts in how innovations are interpreted can alter the discursive circumstances in which innovation processes lead to innovation outcomes (Nahuis, 2007).

Based on a case study in the Flemish pig farming sector, this paper considers how emerging views on farmer participation in innovation are co-shaping the discursive conditions for innovation. Farmers' participation in innovation processes is often framed in terms of the challenge of creating the conditions to foster efficient interactive learning processes among all stakeholders. Mechanisms concerning knowledge brokerage (Hargadon, 2002), creating trust for learning (World Bank, 2006) and communication between different epistemic communities (Hoffmann *et al*, 2007) are considered key in promoting successful and inclusive stakeholder interaction in innovation networks. Developing an institutional environment that stimulates farmers to access and engage in knowledge creation and use then becomes an important component of agricultural innovation (Gertler and Wolfe, 2002).

⁵⁴ Crivits, M., de Krom, M.P.M.M., Dessen, J. and Block., T. (2014). "Why innovation is not always good: innovation discourses and political accountability." *Outlook on Agriculture* 43 (3): 147-155.

Although we agree that including farmers in processes of innovation involves an epistemic dimension, we consider the challenge to be wider than that. Participants in an innovation network are also representatives of their respective constituencies and practices. Consequently, any innovation network *nolens volens* mediates different interests and how these play out in problem framing, implementation and evaluation of innovations (Nahuis, 2007). An innovation process thus not only comprises the mutual generation of knowledge, but also connects to processes of interest articulation. This political dimension of innovation warrants a questioning of whether institutional arrangements leading to innovations are always intrinsically 'good' (Moe, 2005). The political dimension of innovation networks also necessitates a procedure that can secure the legitimacy of its collective outcomes. 'Including farmers' is then not only a question of inducing shared learning processes, but also of ensuring that innovation networks become accountable to the interests embedded in farming practice.

In this paper we elaborate a discursive perspective on accountability to farming interests. We base our analysis on evidence from the literature, data from qualitative research (11 interviews and 2 focus groups) and desk-based research. First, we develop our concept of discursive representation, as applied to the ongoing decision-making processes in innovation networks. We then draw on the case of pig farming in Flanders. Here we first substantiate two competing discourses on innovation based on literature review. We then show how these two discourses are simultaneously confirmed and contested by pig farmers. Finally, we analyse the outcomes of a process called 'pig dialogue days'. These were initiated by the cabinet of agriculture to empower stakeholders to debate themes relevant to overcoming the perceived stalemate in pig farming. The dialogue resulted in the articulation of 22 policy measures. We analyse these from the perspective of discursive accountability by examining their *discursive balance*. Without claiming to be exhaustive or to favor a particular political standpoint, the analysis reveals how a dominant discourse is still disproportionately represented in the political terms and technical guidelines that accompany the policy measures. In the discussion we reflect on these outcomes.

6.2. CONCEPTUAL APPROACH: DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

In this paper we adopt the concept of discursive representation (Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2008; Dryzek, 2010) as an operational approach that has the potential to integrate different interpretations of innovation in a political context. The concept, anchored in deliberative democratic theory, proposes that ‘interests’ are represented by means of ‘discourses’. Instead of relying on more familiar political ‘objects’ of representation such as territorial constituencies (‘I represent the interests of UK agriculture’) or social groups (‘I represent the food retailers’), discourses become the basis for representation (‘I represent the participatory innovation discourse’). Discourses here are thus defined as interpretative frameworks that embody a set of presuppositions on how ‘a problem’ should be understood, and who is ascribed to the relevant agency and on which grounds in the resulting ‘solutions’. To be democratic or legitimate, discursive representation must meet the standard of discursive accountability: that is, ‘all relevant discourses get represented, regardless of how many people subscribe to each’ (Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2008).

These ‘relevant discourses’ are not necessarily or solely those of actors in established, empowered political institutions. Dryzek (2010) speaks of discursive legitimacy ‘to the extent a collective decision is consistent with the constellation of discourses present in the public sphere, in the degree to which this constellation is subject to the reflective control of competent actors’ (Dryzek, 2010, p 35). In other words, within a public space, a variety of discourses are articulated and contested, and these are provisionally and ideally *transmitted* to some type of authorized political actors who may represent these and take them into account when deliberating about political outcomes. Public spaces include social media, bars, schools, farms and other places where members of the public can gather, along with public hearings, media commentators, social movements and citizens’ forums. Castiglione and Warren (2006) further show how political authority is increasingly diffused in informal networks of various state and non-state actors. Dryzek (2010) speaks of ‘empowered space’ to denote all those instances in which authoritative collective outcomes are generated.

Networks may be linked to a public space, an empowered space, or both; discursive accountability among members of such networks can be assisted by examining the underlying discursive justifications. As Dryzek (2010) notes, one way of trying to reVZach accountability 'is to try and ensure that a network is not dominated by a single discourse whose terms are accepted uncritically by all involved actors in a way that marginalizes other discourses that could claim relevance' (Dryzek, 2010, p 50).

The articulation of a discourse can thus become a political vehicle to facilitate more balanced deliberation in ongoing innovation processes. Moreover, as discourses consist of views concerning who obtains which role (agency) and on what grounds (motivation of agency) in devising and implementing an innovation, discursive accountability holds a key for a more balanced distribution of agency. When we look to innovation networks as a vehicle of political change, we thus need to gain insight into relevant discourses of innovation and assess whether these have been accounted for in the collective decision processes of networks.

6.3. RELEVANT DISCOURSES ON INNOVATION

Reasoning from an interpretivist perspective (Nahuis, 2008), we can discern at least two models of what constitutes agricultural innovation. The linear model is still dominant. Innovation is conceived in this model as a unidirectional process that leads from science to practice (Leeuwis, 2004; Godin, 2005). This mode of thinking ascribes little agency to farmers, considering them to be simply the adopters of science-based and commercially beneficial innovations. The linear model is increasingly contested by the *relational perspective* that takes into account not only knowledge suppliers but the totality of actors involved in innovation (World Bank, 2006; Klerkx *et al*, 2012). This model encompasses the co-evolution of social, economic and political factors shaping agricultural innovation processes (Klerkx *et al*, 2012). The adoption of a technology is considered within a larger framework of stakeholders, and the totality of innovation outcomes is considered in relation to their societal relevance (EU SCAR, 2012; Bock, 2012). Farmers are recognized as competent and knowledgeable actors who need to be actively included in innovation processes

and networks. At a European level, this has informed the organization of the European Innovation Partnerships (EIPs) that aim to give a voice to farmers in adapting research to the needs of farming practice (EU, 2012). We term these competing discourse models respectively the *linear innovation* and *participatory innovation* models. Here we use ‘participatory’ rather than ‘relational’ for emphasis, because a relational model implicitly reveals the underdeveloped participatory role for farmers in innovation processes. Table 6.1. summarizes the differences between the two models.

	Linear innovation	Participatory Innovation
Object of innovation	Technological	Innovation network
Relationship between actors	Division of labor	Co-production of knowledge
Type of knowledge	Codified knowledge	Tacit knowledge
Type of interest articulation	Self-regarding interests	Self and Other - regarding interests
Mode of cooperation	Autonomous actors	Networked governance
Conception of farmer	Adopter, follower	Competent actor, stakeholder
Motivation of agency	Commercial implementation	Collective innovation

Table 6.1. Discourses of linear and participatory innovation⁵⁵

Political accountability may be demanded from any institutional arrangement producing public or collective outcomes. Innovation networks such as those subsidized by European Framework Programmes can be considered as constituting empowered spaces. However, farmers have largely remained unrepresented in these spaces, which are dominated by research, business, NGOs and other organizations. Serious effort to shift from a linear to a more inclusive model would entail finding a way to include farmers’ interests and voices. Therefore, without explicit questioning of the distribution of roles in contemporary innovation networks, research and policy communities cannot be expected simply to alter their underlying political routines. As Marsh and Smith

⁵⁵ Drawing on Leeuwis (2004), Godin (2005) and Rogers (1962).

(2006, p 6) argue on the basis of their analysis of the structure- agency dynamics of networks, decisions within networks “*are not simply the result of a rational assessment of available options [...] but rather reflect past conflicts and the culture and values of decision makers*”. If this observation holds for innovation networks, then all stakeholders playing a (potential) role in innovation networks that aim to become more participatory will be affected by organizational routines still anchored in the linear model and in one-directional communication between actors who are framed as either the dominant innovators (research, policy, business) or as innovation users (farmers). Below we use the case of pig farming in Flanders to illustrate how the notion of discursive accountability may be used for the purpose of assessing the collective outcomes of innovation networks.

6.3.1. PIG FARMERS’ DISCOURSES ON INNOVATION

Flemish and European pig farmers are experiencing difficult farming conditions. Stagnating meat prices and rising energy and feed costs have culminated in persistent negative revenues, despite increasing productivity gains. This ongoing crisis has led to self-reflectivity amongst Flemish pig farmers. Traditionally they have adopted a rather productivist attitude, but persistent economic problems have led them to question their position in and the organization of the ‘food system’. Here we discuss pig farmers’ stances *vis-à-vis* the linear and participatory innovation discourse. We draw on data from qualitative research based on in-depth interviews with nine pig farmers conducted between November 2011 and February 2012. All interviewees were mid-career farmers, and all but one (mixed farmer) operated within a vertically organized production chain. In addition, two focus groups were organized (April 2012) with young pig farmers connected through an active network of a farmers’ organization and with mid-career pig farmers. The interviews and focus group questions were semi-structured. A standard list of questions was used but not handled systematically, in order to obtain a sufficient degree of expressive freedom. In the interviews and focus groups, the questions dealt with two themes: innovation and the importance of networks. These topics were chosen in relation to an ongoing research project, *Netwerken als Katalysator voor Innovatie*, which examines the use of networks in innovation processes.

Here we focus on farmers' understandings of innovation. Within the *Netwerken* project, innovation was widely framed as any significant change on the farm, either recently introduced (< 5 years), planned or considered for the near future. We found that networks were often considered in terms of human relationships, so farmers' ideas regarding networks also helped us to understand their position *vis-à-vis* other actors in the food system. The interviews and focus groups revealed that farmers in general acknowledge structural tendencies that confirm their position as 'adopters' in innovation networks. In doing so, they associate innovation with the ability to assimilate new yet externally developed applications that increase productivity and cost efficiency on their farms. Interviewees indicated that economic criteria were of prime importance in their decision to adopt these external innovations:

'Within agriculture I think innovation basically means, well, "return on investment", no? You are able to bring in extra costs, extra investments and all kinds of systems can be applied but in the end it has to generate more than the investment.'

Typically, the greatest concern the farmers expressed regarding on-farm innovation was the financial risk involved. Issues relating to changes in labour conditions or the intrinsic advantage of the innovation in use were typically considered to have secondary importance. An important reason why the farmers considered economic profitability the main criterion was because structural economic conditions force them to innovate:

"I think you have to move with the times, if not the value of your company decreases drastically..."

"Yes, it is something that keeps on evolving. Also economically, the supply chain, yes that is of course something over our heads."

"The situation of the market forces you to evolve in a certain way."

Thus the farmers did not so much welcome the intrinsic qualities of innovations, but considered the need to innovate due to an external inducement. Strikingly in this context, an on-farm 'novelty' was often depicted as 'something you need to work with' or even as 'something that feels like a limitation'.

However, the self-ascription of a role as ‘passive receiver’ formed only a partial account of how these farmers perceived their position in innovation processes. The interviewees clearly indicated how their innovation decisions were influenced by their active relationships with other supply chain actors. Strong agency was ascribed to particular actors in the *farm input supply chain*, which they further subdivided into merchants (such as feed dealers, barn constructors, veterinarians) and creditors (banks, investors). Merchants and creditors were regarded as important mediators of innovation adoption because they have direct interests in the investments of pig farmers. The analysis of the interviews suggests that farmers have a two-fold relationship with these actors. On the one hand, it is argued that the merchants and creditors are invaluable guides who support farmers’ technical and economic decisions.

Flemish pig farmers typically develop long-standing personal relationships with farm input agents. One interviewee specified this habituation process by suggesting that some pig farmers only changed their feed supplier when their personal merchant-adviser suggested that they should do so. On the other hand, the farmers articulated a clear awareness of the commercial motivation of merchants and the resulting non-neutral nature of the mutual knowledge interaction:

“It remains a commercial relationship. This is a fault in the system. If it would be possible to gather in a group, not working together but just sitting together, exchanging ideas on an objective basis, assisted by a coordinator who leads the discussion and knows where the tricky points are.”

This resonates with a general need the farmers expressed to become engaged in a more horizontal, symmetrical form of inter-farmer deliberation. A recent survey (BEMEFA, 2012, cited in Busselaers and Buysse, 2012) indicates that 79% of Flemish pig farmers felt the need to work together. Pig farmers also lamented the lack of communication with consumers and society at large. One interviewee clearly depicted ‘innovation’ in terms of consumer communication:

“If there is innovation towards consumers, I think it would be more interesting for the farmers if things were explained better, that things are framed better. Now it is always like two opposing parties [...] The consumer desires something and

therefore this is imposed [on the farmers] by retailers, but often farmers in fact do not understand the position of the consumer."

Our sample of interviewees framed innovation in terms of gaining more communicative access to the articulation of demand. Although they acknowledge and work with 'structures of demand' as they exist in 'the market', their views on demand show how they also struggle with the symbolic dimension of 'consumption'. The following excerpt comes from the focus group with young farmers, who engage in intensive pig farming and have a predominantly entrepreneurial approach to farming:

"There isn't one consumer who is interested. [...] When they are asked "do you think it is important – healthy pigs?" all of them say: yes! But if they have to buy then they buy the meat from Brazil. We have to come to terms with all kind of demands from Europe. And we just keep on paying.' Interviewer: 'Do you think it's the fault of the supermarket?' 'No, the government. Look, we think it is important that people who eat meat in Europe eat controlled and good meat. And then that is what forms the market price. Then I think the government should demand the same from all the meat that enters Europe from abroad."

On the one hand, these farmers acknowledge that they are subject to the rules of the economic game. The translation of a societal demand (in this case coming from the 'European citizen') is *what forms the market price*. On the other hand, these farmers hold the government accountable for creating a level playing field in which European consumers are able to recognize, and indeed account for, their farming efforts. Farmers who engage in innovative actions and investments to meet 'demand' want their efforts to be rewarded and recognized both *economically* through increased revenues and *symbolically* through communicative access to consumers.

Most Flemish pig industry farmers operate in international markets and vertically integrated food chains. This makes them dependent on other food supply chain actors for their communication with consumers. This enhances the likelihood of missing both symbolic and financial recognition of the innovations induced by changing societal expectations. It is this risk that warrants their claim to make 'government' responsible for ensuring political measures that represent the voice of farmers in the process of 'translating' changing societal expectations

(with respect to, for example, pig housing, castration methods) into economic demand. The above analysis illustrates how the linear model of innovation is reproduced and contested by Flemish pig farmers. They related their impaired connection with innovation to a number of causal factors: their asymmetrical relationship with other actors in the agro-food chain, their broken communication with consumers and society at large and their disappointment with regard to the responsiveness of government actors to their demands.

6.4. PIG DIALOGUE DAYS

Pig farmers' concerns did not go unheeded. In 2011 when the pig crisis had persisted for several years, Cabinet, administration and representatives of the largest Flemish farmer union initiated a series of 'pig dialogue days' *to hear the problem areas within the [pig] sector and constructively search for solutions and new strategies*.⁵⁶

In diverse multi-stakeholder sessions, experts, agro-food chain actors, farmer representatives and government officials gathered to discuss several themes related to market strategies, profitability, research and innovation and the relationship with the feed industry (VILT, 2011). However, retailers were not present, which was widely perceived as a serious shortcoming (personal communication, 2014).

The dialogue days could be considered as a process of accountability that prompted actors within the agro-food chain to explain and legitimate their ongoing behaviour. The six dialogue days aimed to 'develop a mid-term strategy via a participatory approach in Flemish pig farming'. The themes discussed included economic futures, high feed costs, market strategies (consumption), profitability, market strategies (quality) and discussion of the position paper written by the farmer organization. The government administration prepared background documents which posed critical questions and provided background

⁵⁶ Website: <http://www.groenekring.be/Default.aspx?tabid=2464>.

information on the sector. All discussions were transcribed (<http://lv.vlaanderen.be/nlapps/docs/default.asp?fid=469>).

The direct outcome was a *Flemish action plan for pig farming*. This consisted of 22 'policy actions' on several sensitive issues. This document was released by the Minister of Agriculture in December 2011. Some actions referred to or affirmed pre-existing measures, but other specific actions were direct outcomes of the dialogue days. Progress on each action was reported on the Administration website. Table 2 summarizes the 22 policy actions in relation to problem identification and related stakeholder needs, categorized by theme. We subsequently checked this analysis by conducting two interviews with participants from the dialogue days.

We now assess these policy outcomes, reasoning from the perspective of discursive accountability. Our analysis of the qualitative interview data revealed ongoing friction between the discourses of linear and participatory innovation. Following Dryzek (2010), we could now ask the question of whether the policy outcomes achieved discursive legitimacy: that is, to what extent collective decisions were consistent with the constellation of discourses present in the public sphere. The policy actions aim to initiate new mid-term strategies related to (i) increasing transparency, (ii) improving quality and sales, (iii) research and innovation, and (iv) accompanying measures. We assessed these actions (Table 3) from the point of view of four sub-dimensions of accountability:

- (1) performance (addresses the way the outcome is intended to have an impact);
- (2) authorized actor (describes who is authorized to organize and implement the action);
- (3) expected relevance for farmer (addresses how (through which medium) a pig farmer can benefit from the policy outcome), and;
- (4) accountability relationship (specifies who is answerable to whom).

Table 6.2. Policy actions: problem framing and underlying justifications.

Policy action	Description of identified problem and justification
<i>Theme 1: Increasing transparency in the agro-food chain</i>	
1 Key performance indicators of profitability	Incongruence of existing bookkeeping systems (used by administration, farmer organization and private consultant). This measure answers the need for clear and standardized values to evaluate profitability and investments within the pig farming sector.
2 Transparency of prices	Lack of transparent price setting. Farmers are insufficiently aware of how prices charged by traders and/or slaughterhouses are made.
3 Compliance with proper payment	There is uncertainty and ambiguity about how, to what extent and how many pig farmers have been structurally integrated by feed companies. One particular problem is related to the misunderstandings and/or communications regarding long-term customer credit. This policy action was meant to warn farmers on time and create better communication between creditors, farm costs/investments and chain partners.
4 Calibration of carcass classification	Slaughterhouses use a variety of measuring systems to classify the 'meat percentage' of carcasses. Different measuring devices use other calibration procedures, leading to varying margins of error. Need for a clear protocol for the classification of pig carcasses.
5 Orientation towards futures market	Answering to the need to cope with international price volatility by engaging farmers in the futures market.
6 Negotiation between suppliers and retailers	Producers have low bargaining power in the agro-food chain. This policy action refers to the ongoing processes of interest articulation in the <i>chain deliberation</i> : that is, a forum in which the agro-front (three Belgian farmer organizations) initiates discussions with other chain representatives and actors (retailers, processing, feed).
<i>Theme 2: Ensuring meat quality and market access</i>	
7 Support for producer organizations and inter-branch organizations	Low bargaining power for pig farmers warrants the need to organize inter-firm market networks. This policy action refers to the European producer organizations, part of the new CAP.
8 Preparing a code of good practices with regard to slaughtering	Research has shown how the slaughtering conditions (transport, unloading, waiting circumstances) have an impact on quality. Particular focus is on the problems concerning PSE meat resulting from rapid pH decrease. An <i>ad hoc</i> group has to be set up to evaluate the quality of Belgian pig meat.
9 Support Belgian Pig Meat	Lack of differentiation and popularity abroad. Belgian pig meat is insufficiently known at home and abroad. Need to promote its qualities more actively.
10 Simplification of quality control	Overlapping procedures for quality control result in unnecessary costs and administration. This measure aims to attain harmonization and administrative simplification in existing quality control.
11 Maintaining Piétrain pig breed	Belgian pig meat has a low fat content. This quality feature is typical for the Piétrain breed. This action aims to cope with the decline of this particular breed by updating the existing genetic book and by subsidizing Piétrain breeding sows.
12 Information on conversion to organic agriculture	In Flanders there are practically no organic pig farmers. Premium prices associated with organic farming could be considered as one potential road to betterment of contemporary markets. This policy action is inscribed in the existing strategic plan for organic agriculture in which some actions related to pig farming can be developed.
13 Short supply chain information and project subsidies	Most pig farmers are integrated in a vertical agro-food chain and are accustomed to accommodating large production runs. Information and experimentation are needed before farmers can engage in diversification or conversion. This policy action is inscribed in the existing <i>strategic plan short chain</i> .
14. Local meat and sustainability	Meat is considered to have become associated with a negative image. Pig meat is often associated with health, environmental and animal welfare issues in an undifferentiated manner. This policy action refers to a national campaign accentuating the sustainability of local meat ('Meat from here? With pleasure!')
15. Action plan for alternative proteins in feed	The feed and pig industry is increasingly dependent on importing soy. This calls for the need to provide alternative sources for proteins in pig feed. This policy action refers to an action plan that feed industry representatives worked out with the Flemish government. Important goals are setting criteria for import of soy (RTRS engagement), creating incentives for the validation of waste streams and by-products of feed (bio-energy) and research for alternative protein production.

continued on next page

Theme 3: Bridging farming practice and research

16 Service desk for pig farmers

There is a need for more objective information on several topics (regulation, technical processes, economic performance). This policy action has initiated a service desk which thematically clusters existing information from state-based research and extension and which allows farmers to pose questions.

17 Demonstration project technical indicators

Although a lot of technical indicators are available for pig farmers, the difficulty remains to interpret these indicators correctly so as to base decisions on them. There is a need to develop and sustain the use of indicators at farm level. The policy action relates to a research project (2010–2013) which aims to facilitate farmers in working with indicators by explaining the concept.

18 Strengthening research infrastructure

Structurally high feed prices cause the need for ongoing applied research. Existing research infrastructure will be renewed. More particularly, there will be the construction of an up-to-date test stable to be able to answer research needs.

19 Study and integration of available technologies for data exchange

Existing genetic information on boars in practice and in the Flemish studbook is not synchronized. This policy action aims to facilitate communication between existing databanks and (subsidies) for updating existing software to increase the quality of the studbook.

Accompanying measures

20 Accompanying measures: animal welfare

Animal welfare is a continuous concern in the pig farming industry. This policy action refers to a series of existing measures relating to alternatives to castration and support/information on the transition towards group housing (2013).

21 Accompanying measures: (tightened) manure policy

In order to comply with European water quality norms, manure standards will need to be tightened. This policy action refers to a series of existing measures related to extension and investment support for manure treatment technologies.

22 Structural reorientation of the entire sector

Several trends and external changes related to market conditions, increasing globalization and societal expectations have an impact on the structure of the pig farming industry. This policy action refers to the ongoing efforts of the Cabinet in the mediation of interests and the development of policy measures.

Table 6.3 Assessment of policy actions

Sub-dimension	Performance of policy measure	Authorized actor	Expected relevance for farmer	Accountability relationship
1 KPI profitability	Publication of performance indicators	Administration	Receiving information	Sector – farmers
2 Transparency of prices	Online publication of prices in slaughterhouses, doctoral thesis on market power	Administration, research	Receiving information on market prices	Slaughterhouses & traders – farmers
3 Compliance with proper payment	CSR publication of feed industry association	Belgian Compound Feed Industry Association	Being warned of risks	Feed companies – farmers
4 Calibration of carcass classification	Simplifying procedures for carcass classification and machine types	Department of Agriculture	Transparency in qualification of meat percentage	Slaughterhouses – farmers
5 Orientation towards futures market	Stimulating groups of farmers on futures market	Education departments of farmer organizations, private consultancy	Receiving education on futures markets	(opportunity in market)
6 Negotiation between suppliers and retailers	Deliberation and interest mediation actors, agro-food chain	Farmer organization representative	Being represented on interests in chain	Farmer organization – chain actor
7 Support for POs and inter-branch organizations	New legal framework for cooperation in market	EU, Cabinet, sector representatives	Organization structure cooperation	European economic policy – farmers
8 Preparing a code of good practices for slaughtering	Publishing code of good practices to inspire actors that organize slaughtering process	<i>Ad hoc</i> working group, department	Changed behaviour of slaughterhouses	Slaughterhouses – farmers
9 Support Belgian Pig Meat	Promotion through campaigns and representation at fairs	Promotional department (Belgian Meat Office)	Receiving marketing support as sector	State – farmers
10 Simplification of quality control	Administrative simplification of quality assessment systems	Department, umbrella organization, retailers	Cost reduction due to administrative simplification	Farmers – slaughterhouses – retailers
11 Conservation of <i>Pietrain</i> pig breed	Subsidies for keeping <i>Pietrain</i> sows	Department, European subsidies	Subsidies for breed selection	Support (transfer from public to empowered space)
12 Information on conversion to organic agriculture	Information for farmers; project calls	State extension department	Receiving information	Market opportunity
13 Short supply chain information and project subsidies	Information for farmers; project calls	Flemish Network on short chain	Subsumed in general programme/ no active role for pig farmers	Market opportunity
14 Promotion of local meat	Promotion campaigns	Department, office of promotion	Being promoted as sector	State
15 Action plan for alternative proteins in feed	Cluster biotech research projects, efforts for certification (RTRS) farmer information	Feed industry association, several research institutes	Adopting new technologies	Feed industry, protein producers
16 Service desk for pig farmers	Answering farmer questions on various issues (research, policy)	Department, service desk, several research institutes (public-private)	Requesting specific information	Increasing responsiveness to farmers
17 Demonstration project technical indicators	Providing data (eg age/weight) to support interpretation of indicators	Research institutes	Possibility to consult research report, <i>ex cathedra</i> presentations	Instrument
18 Strengthening research infrastructure	Experimental pig stable	Research institutes	Possibility to consult research report, <i>ex cathedra</i> presentations	–
19 Study/integration of available technologies for data exchange	Proving data on genetic quality of pigs	NPO studbook Flanders	Pig registration/information on breeding (genetic) value	Breeders – farmers
20 Accompanying measures on animal welfare	Subsidies for investments and information on alternative techniques	Administration (VLIF), extension, research	Adoption of policy measures	Farmers – state
21 Accompanying measures on (tightened) manure policy	Information desk and working groups (VCM)	Administrations (VLM), Coordination centre for manure	Adoption of policy measures	Farmers – state
22 Structural sector reorientation	Continuous deliberation	Cabinet	Being represented	Cabinet – farmers

We then evaluate the outcomes in terms of consistency with either the linear or participative discourse. The most striking revelation (see table 6.3) is the overall absence of farmers as authorized and competent actors in the organization and completion of the policy actions, even though in some actions they could potentially play an effective participatory role. For instance, farmers could take part in co-designing key performance indicators, discussing mechanisms of price setting, promoting pig meat, communicating sustainability efforts (for example, animal welfare) and considering alternatives to imported proteins in feed. Nonetheless, it is other actors who are consistently defined as competent and responsible. For example, relating to quality specifications, the communication of quality and sustainability efforts, along with gaining access to new markets, the 'action' is placed in the hands of other actors (supply chain actors, government, researchers).

An exception is the measure that relates to producer organizations (POs); however, this originated in EU legislation rather than via the dialogue days.

When scrutinizing the measures in terms of the sub-dimension 'expected relevance for farmer', we find that the mechanisms designed to achieve the outcome are expressed merely in terms of the acquisition of knowledge by farmers, by means of written documents, codes of practice, or invitations to request information. They are not considered a partner in the evaluation or co-creation of innovations. This assumption of farmers' epistemic ignorance is consistent with the linear innovation discourse. One striking example – which offers a striking contrast between 'innovator' and 'object of innovation' – is the policy action related to 'key performance indicators'. Here, the underlying problem of profitability is depicted as mainly an on-farm matter of concern, although the content of the technical and economic indicators is developed in an entirely off-farm environment. While data for these indicators were gathered from 20 'representative' farms, the procedures for evaluation do not include participation with farmers. This measure also reveals how 'profitability' is constructed as a self-regarding interest of the farmer, excluding the interests of other actors. Furthermore, none of the outcomes articulated the need for farmers to deliberate among themselves, with one notable exception: the policy outcome 'maintaining the Piétrain breed', which has been sustained in commercial production by a small group of farmers working together.

Analysis of the measures in terms of the dimension ‘accountability relationship’ reveals that pig farmers are either asked to express justification of their practices or are expected to receive and accept the justifications offered by others. Some measures, such as creating a legislative framework for the calibration of carcass measurement, necessitate state intervention in order to ensure compliance with authorized practices across the food system. Other measures – such as, for example, animal welfare or conversion to organic agriculture – seem to warrant some procedure allowing a voice to farmers in a process of accountability. But in the current situation, the policy outcomes generate few measures that create spaces for interactive communication, where ongoing debate could be organized in a more participatory manner.

To conclude our analysis we would like to address one more detailed and epitomical example that illustrates how the outcomes of the pig dialogue days are inconsistent with the balance of discourses in the public sphere: the issue of animal feed. Policy action 15 refers to an ‘action plan for alternative proteins in feed’. As indicated in table 6.3. the plan is entirely led by the feed industry association and supported by research institutes and policy makers. Farmers – the key purchasers of feed – are excluded from the delineation and process of this policy outcome. The main goal of policy action 15 is to increase the total import of certified soy as well investigate the possibilities to produce alternative proteins (mainly soy as well) on Belgian soils (through research).

What is however remarkable is that during the dialogue days the issue of self-mixing was discussed at length. In term of feed strategies, self-mixing is a promising practice for it allows farmers to gain more autonomy vis-à-vis feed supply industry, valorize resources they produce themselves on arable land and initiate exchange relationships with other farmers in terms of feed and manure. The practice of self-mixing also entails barriers, related to acquiring starting capital, expertise on recipes and organizational skills. In this respect, it is a promising practice to cope with the ongoing crisis but at the same time it is in need of regulatory support. Although a network of self-mixers was present at the dialogue days and both the advantages and barriers were discussed in dialogue day 2, in the outcomes, only policy action 15 was included. This shows how empowered space can obstruct the transmission of alternative discourses.

It is worth to consider the actual debate in more detail to support this argument, by quoting a passage from the second dialogue day.

Chairman (cabinet): *“At the end of this day we would like to address the issue of self-mixing vs. mixed feed.”*

[The network of self-mixers gives a short presentation on the advantages and challenges of self-mixing and suggests some specific policy solutions such as adaption of the VLIF (Flemish Investment Fund)]

Farmer 1: *“Sometimes it is possible to work together with the feed company and obtain better prices. The farmer delivers his grain to the feed company and at the same time promises to buy his (additional) feed with that very feed company.”*

Representative of feed company AVEVE: *“the animal feed customer receives a premium when selling his grains [...] A group of people at AVEVE is continuously working to improve quality control, traceability and feed conversion. It is certainly the intention to do this better than an individual farmer. We are not against self-mixing, if the feed prices fall this might be interesting, but if prices go up, than other channels of sale become important. In the egg industry additional feeding with own production crucial. If you don’t assess your costs this can imply an economic advantage, otherwise not really.”*

Chairman: *“The quality of feed is under pressure, farmers tell us. Is this correct?”*

Farmer 2: *“A self-mixer can definitely provide quality for his own business. A farmers here works together with a nutritionist and can thus work in a goal-oriented way to prevent problems in the sector of animal feed. Self-mixing can only be carried out by farms that are able to handle it, it is something extra.”*

Chairman: *“Concludes that self-mixing can be helpful for some farm businesses, but is not a solution for the larger group of farmers”* (transcript uses descriptive form).

Farmer 1: *“The group that mixes all his feed is very small, but a large group of farmers does add some of his own production to his feed.”*

What is here remarkable is that the chairman utilizes an argument of proportional representation in order to dismiss the relevance of a particular policy solution. Because only a limited amount of farmers adopts the self-mixing strategy, it is not needed to consider self-mixing as a solution to be supported by the state. In terms of policy rationale this is a doubtful argument and here seems to be used strategically to prefer the interests of feed industry above that of farmers. Indeed, the argument of proportional representation is not consistently implied throughout all measures. When can here for instance refer to policy action 5 'Orientation towards futures markets': although there are no farmers who yet adopt the strategy of operating on the futures market, this policy action has the aim to stimulate farmers to do so.

6.5. DISCUSSION

The question of which actions can or should be taken up in participatory processes cannot be answered here. We do not claim that the policy outcomes we have examined are insufficient or that all policy making or outcomes should proceed in a participatory manner. The linear model maintains its relevance. Yet what is striking is how little farmer participation or issues of discursive legitimacy are considered in the policy measures. In response, we pose a number of questions: Would it be a solution systematically to include more farmers in shaping and implementing policy measures? Would this model be realistic even if farmers do not have the time to become policy makers? Is it not impossible to have farmer participation on every measure, as the *participatory discourse* advocates?

The concept of discursive accountability responds to these concerns in at least two ways. First, it demands a balanced representation of relevant discourses. This means, for instance, that when a particular problem is better solved by adopting a specialist approach in which scientists develop a new technique in 'isolation', the linear model would be preferable. Discursive accountability only stipulates the need at least to consider other relevant discourses (such as the participatory discourse) reflectively. A second consideration is related to the difference between 'personal' and 'discursive' participation. Political measures

are in themselves inclusive/exclusive of particular interests. To some extent, whether farmers have participated in the design of a policy measure is an abstract consideration because, providing that there is apt responsiveness to farmers' interests, other actors can become (what Dryzek calls) *discursive representatives* for farmers. This adds a layer to the practice of representation that has a direct relevance for innovation networks. In political practice, actors would be prompted to think through the overlapping and mutually exclusive elements of their chosen model, in terms of direct versus discursive representation. One risk of discursive representation is that the representative may stand for a group's interests, yet insufficiently take into account the diversity of discourses articulated within that group. Another risk is that a discursive representative speaks for a specific discourse for which virtually no 'social support' exists. One way to resolve these challenges is through political deliberation. Attention to semantic usages in such deliberations is also important in order to balance consideration of whose agency is taken into account. Semantic terms, as these are known, used and interpreted, can as such become more or less inclusive to farmers' participation.

6.6. CONCLUSIONS

Our case study suggests that at a strategic level there will not always be a clear choice regarding which discourse is most relevant to innovation. We acknowledge that policy making is not fully rational; nor do we advocate a politics of consensus. However, we argue that a mechanism of discursive accountability can create a reflective, transparent and ongoing dialogue among interested parties, in which diverse interests and their underlying relationship with self- and other-regarding motivations can be articulated.

An assessment of the policy outcomes showed how the linear discourse remains dominant in the political terms that frame agency and competence within innovation processes in the Flemish pig sector. The practice of discursive representation warrants a more reflective stance. Democratic accountability and discursive balance could be attained by mechanisms that would allow consistent scrutiny in deliberation, and could lead to forms of political deliberation more open to the potential of farmers' participation in innovation processes

CHAPTER 7

DISCURSIVE ENACTMENTS WITHIN THE INSTITUTIONAL VOID: THE RISE AND FALL OF A GOVERNANCE NETWORK ON SUSTAINABLE FOOD IN BELGIUM

CHAPTER 7 - DISCURSIVE ENACTMENTS WITHIN THE INSTITUTIONAL VOID: THE RISE AND FALL OF A GOVERNANCE NETWORK ON SUSTAINABLE FOOD IN BELGIUM (ORIGINAL PAPER)⁵⁷

7.1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, democratic theorists have increasingly turned their attention to the topic of political representation. This renewed interest is inspired by a questioning of the *formalist* interpretation of representative government that presumes a strict division between elected political elites and deliberative participation in the public sphere. Several scholars argue that the standard account of representative democracy based on residence-based and electoral representation does not suffice to explain contemporary political practice (Urbinati and Warren, 2008; Dryzek, 2010). Not only does it fail to explain the role of self-authorized representatives and ‘sub-political’ organizations using representative claims to create political legitimacy, also the ‘fabric of issues’ coming with multiple and overlapping constituencies exceeds what can be captured in the concept of ‘territorial constituency’ (Saward, 2006). Political representation is not a static concept but can best be considered a ‘practice’ in which the object of representation and the grounds on which it is defended, co-determine ‘who’ and ‘what’ is considered politically legitimate and how

⁵⁷ Crivits, M., de Krom, M.P.M.M., Dessen, J. and Block, T. (forthcoming). Discursive enactments within the institutional void: the rise and fall of a governance network on sustainable food in Belgium, *Sociologia Ruralis*.

'interests' are to be represented (Castiglioni and Warren, 2006; Hendriks 2009a).

A dynamic or performative interpretation of political constructs becomes particularly relevant in more open political situations that, among others, result from the need to tackle complex problems and respond to increasingly pluralized constituencies. Hajer (2003) uses the term 'institutional void' to describe what happens in a political situation where there are no clear rules and norms about how politics should be conducted. As concept, the institutional void aligns with a scholarly turn towards 'discursive institutionalism' which acknowledges the role of ideas and discourses in explaining institutional change and examines how discursive interactions (on both substantive as well procedural values) shape policy designs, decisions and outcomes (Schmidt, 2010; Wesselink et al, 2013; Hajer, 2009). However, within a given political culture, entirely new institutional rules are unlikely to be invented from scratch but are influenced by the political 'scripts' actors bring in and the relationship with established institutional set-ups. Because actors have a 'background knowledge' related to political values and conceptions of democracy - based on past experiences of policy making and interactions with institutional settings and structures - they carry distinct political or democratic 'storylines' and beliefs (Hendriks 2005a; Hendriks, 2009; Skelcher et al.; 2005). The concept of political representation is an important part of these 'ideational abilities' (Schmidt, 2010) as its understanding is connected to the operationalization, deployment and legitimation of political behavior and of *'the internal processes by which institutions are created and maintained.'* (Schmidt, 2008, p 56).

This paper aims to understand how conceptions of political representation and the articulation of discourses on sustainable development are re-negotiated and enacted in a context of institutional ambiguity. We base our analysis on an interpretative reconstruction of consecutive phases of a sustainability governance process in the Flemish agro-food domain called the New Food Frontier (NFF). The main goal of the NFF was to engage a group of relevant stakeholders in the construction of sustainability visions. Once a first set of visions had been developed these would be disseminated to various organizations in the agro-food system and the public at large. The images would be presented in a festival like setting inviting experts, high level politicians and

the general public. Also there was the idea to couple the discursive outcomes to ongoing policy processes, aiming to find anchorage of the content in long term policy planning and resources to set up new practices, even setting up a state-supported network to concretize sustainability discourses and trajectories. All together this amounts to a new form policy making which gives greater emphasis to interactive processes of discourse.

We claim to have found several interacting political conceptions, that operated on both explicit and more tacit levels, which particularly shaped the political interventions within the institutional void of the NFF. We will describe these conceptions as a 'consociational model' that is strongly aligned with pluralist and neo-corporatist practices; a notion of 'Transition Management' (TM) that is an approach to governance which emphasizes the use of system analysis, expert based visioning and social learning; and a more implicit third model related to 'discursive representation', which is a democratic innovation based on deliberative democratic theory that was first conceived by Dryzek and Niemeyer (2008). What is more, we claim that institutional ambiguity that characterized the NFF could have been reduced if discursive representation had been more explicitly recognized as an (additional) political vantage point to organize the governance process, and to serve as an impetus towards a new political space.

The core of the article is devoted to a detailed empirical analysis of the governance process in the Flemish agro-food domain. Since transition governance often deals with competing views as well as unclear institutional norms about how sustainability should be translated to policy outcomes (Robinson, 2004; Paredis, 2013), it is particularly relevant to consider the concept of institutional void which we introduce in section two. In addition, section two addresses the approach and theory of discursive representation that we do not only claim to have identified as a representative practice within the governance trajectory of the NFF, but will also adopt as a theory to analyze the case. Section three addresses our methodology. In section four, we introduce the empirical case and reconstruct the sustainability governance process according to three phases (governance-in-the-making; articulation of meaning; and dissolution and re-construction). In the discussion (section five) we elaborate on how the articulation of substantive discourses as well as the negotiation on the rules of the game shifted along the several stages of the governance trajectory.

We argue that boundary work, reliance on an expert-based logic and the use of positional power clouded deliberative democratic notions and hampered the actualization of a new political space for sustainability governance.

7.2. DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION AND THE POLITICS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

7.2.1. SUSTAINABILITY GOVERNANCE AND THE INSTITUTIONAL VOID

Hajer (2003) argues that when a problem orientation becomes prevalent in a political setting, chances increase that an institutional void emerges. The underlying logic is that when a new issue becomes politically relevant, openness exists as to how it shall be addressed. The emergence of an institutional void does not mean that state institutions become redundant or that there is an 'institutional emptiness', but rather that there is a lack of rules that bind all parties. It is a phenomenological situation where the discursive logics of political participants conflict, a void of meaning causing the emergence of a new, essentially open situation in which substantive discourses (content, solutions and problems) and procedural values (rules of the game, political scripts) are re-negotiated. (Hajer, 2009). Within such a void, Hajer argues, we should thus pay attention to a double dynamic: (1) actors will deliberate to get favorable solutions for particular problems but at the same time (while deliberating) (2) negotiate new institutional rules, develop new norms or appropriate behavior and devise new conceptions of legitimate political intervention (Hajer, 2003). Here, the established interconnection between a meaning-making (substantive) and rule-making (procedural) rationale is thus temporarily broken up. When the process of re-negotiation succeeds in shaping alternative configurations, new and more established political spaces can come about (see e.g. Enticott and Franklin, 2009, Hajer, 2009)⁵⁸.

⁵⁸ Hajer seems to shift from his general understanding of a 'new political space' as all those political practices that cannot be resolved by established institutions (Hajer, 2003) towards a more nuanced differentiation between (1) less mature political spaces which operate under circumstances of high institutional ambiguity and (2) more mature political spaces that have acquired some form of authority. As Hajer (2009) writes: "*In a situation of institutional void, actors will often find themselves working in new ad hoc circles[...] Authority might, in this view, emerge from the participants efforts to negotiate trust and credibility to jointly author a framing of the problem and solution. Authority is then derived from the particulars of the group, and the particular way it stages its activities*" (35).

From the perspective of the dynamics within an the institutional void, two questions arise. First, how can normative diversity underlying the problem be addressed? Put differently, is the object of decision making addressed alongside its various substantive dimensions and interpretations? Second, to which authority must we speak? How do we determine in which kind of political setting issues are addressed and how political legitimacy is generated?

What seems to be clear is that most institutional voids in some form question the standard account of political representation. Governance, defined as the involvement of an increasing number of non-state actors in the process of developing and delivering public policies (Hendriks, 2009b; Benz and Papadopoulus, 2006), has undeniably played an important role in re-evaluating traditional decision making and the role of scientific expertise (Hajer, 2003). Nevertheless, governance-based decision making is not cut loose from traditional democratic procedures or existing policy arrangements. If political legitimacy is to be generated in a given political context, a governance process should relate itself in one way or another to traditional ways of doing politics. An institutional void is thus never completely 'empty' but open to how traditional and less traditional consecutive phases of political scripts interact and are re-combined.

Sustainability governance is subject to a number of predicaments that increase the probability of the coming about of an institutional void, such as the contestation of the problem orientation of sustainable development (Paredis, (2013) and the lack of one clear authority to address sustainability. Consequently, even if sustainable development is primarily addressed within the public sphere, its conception as an open-ended orientation of change (Grin et al. 2010) cannot sustain indefinitely but becomes dependent on how it is operationalized within the political arena. Ideally, the diversity of interpretations underlying sustainable development can be considered a rich diversity of options, rationales and perspectives, potentially leading to more informed decision making (Robinson, 2004). From a strategic perspective, however, actors tend to link societal or policy-related predicaments to particular and often concrete 'solutions', in order to create legitimacy to unlock resources or influence policy making in a particular direction (Grin, 2014; Wesselink et al., 2013). How a government or governance network deals with different

interpretations of sustainability, is partly dependent on the rules, norms and interactive patterns of the specific 'policy field' or 'policy arrangement' in which it is conducted (Van Tatenhove et al., 2000). In the context of the empirical case, we point out that the agricultural policy domain is largely influenced by codes of group-based representation in the neo-corporatist and consociationalist tradition (Deschouwer, 2009; Dezeure, 2004; Frouws 1994). Governance initiatives are thus confronted with a political culture prone to forms of classic-modernist policy making (Hajer, 2009).

7.2.2. DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION

In recent democratic theory, the concept of *discursive representation* has been deployed as an innovative way to wed the principles of deliberative democracy with the concept of political representation, to ensure '*that all relevant discourses get represented, regardless of how many people subscribe to each*' (Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2008, 482) Thinking in terms of representing 'discourses' instead of 'individuals' or 'groups' leaves a potential way out with regard some of the practical problems that the notion of deliberative democracy faces. More particularly, discursive representation could secure democratic legitimacy without the need to include all affected actors in actual deliberative interactions, by creating a political setting in which all relevant discourses are articulated and accessible by the public sphere or relevant constituencies (Drzyek, 2010). Discourses are considered as having a certain 'solidity' as interpretative schemes that co-construct practice, i.e. "*as an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices*" (Hajer, 2006, 67). Discourses are featured by distinct series of constitutive elements (Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2008; Wesselink, et al., 2013), which makes it possible for them to become represented (see chapter 4)

From the perspective of the democratic ideal of inclusion (see e.g. Young, 2000), this means that when a dominant discourse 'wins' (and becomes represented), certain groups, values and interpretations can also be denied relevance. When

discourse articulations pass into political action this might lead to processes of exclusion. Therefore, political decision making should enable its institutions to be informed by all relevant discourses. These 'relevant discourses' are not necessarily or solely those of actors in established, empowered political institutions. Dryzek (2010) speaks of 'discursive legitimacy' *"to the extent a collective decision is consistent with the constellation of discourses present in the public sphere, in the degree to which this constellation is subject to the reflective control of competent actors"* (Dryzek, 2010, 35).

Discursive legitimacy can thus be attained by organizing a form of deliberation within and between public and empowered space, the latter being a space which refers to all institutions that have the capacity and authority to co-produce collective decisions (such as governance networks, interest groups, etc.) (Dryzek, 2010; Hajer; 2003). Within a given political arena (this could be a parliament, a governance network, a neo-corporatist consult or a mini-public), discursive legitimacy will be effectively achieved when all actors are sufficiently informed about the substance and implications of each relevant discourse. At that moment it becomes relevant to appoint 'discursive representatives'. Ideally, these representatives understand the coherence of the discourse's underlying ideas, causalities and value commitments as well as succeed in communicating that discourse to a broader group of potentially affected citizens or social groups.

Multiple questions arise about how these discursive representatives are to be selected. Dryzek (2008; 2014) emphasizes the importance of chambers of discourses. A chamber of discourses refers to a 'productive institutional architecture' aimed at enhancing deliberation of policy proposals through concerns raised by discursive representatives. The role of this chamber would not be to reach agreement on what should be done (to formulate concrete policy actions) but to ensure that any proposal or policy outcome gets *"scrutinized in light of the variety of discourses that can be brought to bear"* (Dryzek and Stevenson, 2014:197-198). Ideally, this is not a mechanical process that repeats all discourses at every instance of the decision making process, but *"a deliberative and reflective process in which participants are amenable to changing their minds in light of what they hear, so proposals might get refined or even rejected rather than just scrutinized"* (Dryzek and Stevenson, 2014: 197-198).

7.3. RESEARCH DESIGN

Following the assumptions of ‘discursive institutionalism’ (Schmidt, 2010) and its constructivist ontology, we opt for an interpretive case study research design (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006; Hajer, 2009; Hendriks, 2009a; Flyvbjerg, 2001) that involves making sense of how meanings are articulated and enacted in shaping political practice. Following Hendriks (2009a) we examine how representation - considered as a performative political activity - is enacted or “comes into being” in the context of sustainability governance networks and how this affects the way the policy issue of sustainability is framed and understood by different ‘communities of meaning’ (Franklin and Blyton, 2011).

To structure our analysis we will divide the trajectory of the governance process in three phases: governance in-the-making, articulation of meaning, and disintegration and reconstruction of the governance network. These phases have been inferred as distinct steps in which the double dynamic of the institutional void evolved markedly. We give a detailed description of how actors’ ‘discursive abilities’ (Schmidt, 2010) were enacted, and how deliberative and strategic communication was embedded within the context of the institutional void.

To substantiate our empirical analysis we opted for several qualitative research methods and techniques. We have conducted interviews with nine key actors between January 2013 and August 2015. All of these interviewees were directly involved in the organization of the NFF, and were affiliated to academic institutions (2), NGO/civil society organizations (2), governmental agencies (2), interest groups (2) and a consultancy company (1). Furthermore, we analyzed internal documents and e-mail communication as well as publicly assessable policy documents and research reports. Finally, we conducted participant observation, i.e. during the last deliberative session of the NFF. The combination of these data and methods allowed for a triangulation of the findings.

7.4. A CASE OF SUSTAINABILITY GOVERNANCE: THE NEW FOOD FRONTIER

7.4.1. PREHISTORY

The case studied here can be associated with an emergence of sustainability governance⁵⁹ in the policy realm of Flemish agriculture. At the beginning of the 2000s a series of food crises led to political openings and increased reflection on the functioning of the agricultural sector (De Krom and Dessein 2013). In this context, two governance initiatives are worth mentioning. The project *DP21* ('Animal production in the 21th century') focused on the role and implications of a reduction of the Flemish livestock herd and involved a deliberative process with a broad group of public, private and academic stakeholders in the Flemish agro-food policy domain. The scenario-based approach however resulted in a tendency to protect sector-based and functional interests and triggered fundamental doubt whether sustainability values could ever be translated into Flemish economic practices and government regulation (DP21, 2008). A second noteworthy project was *On Tomorrow's Grounds* (OTG) and was initiated by the Flemish Policy Research Centre for Sustainable Agriculture in 2007 and engaged a similar group of stakeholders in a visioning exercise for sustainable agriculture (Nevens et.al., 2008). Based on a transition perspective of long-term systemic change, two future farm images were contrasted and discussed at length: one based on the sustainability discourse of ecological modernization and one based

⁵⁹ Sustainability governance is here understood in the general sense as described by Meadowcraft (2008) as "*processes of socio-political governance oriented towards the attainment of sustainable development. It encompasses public debate, political decision-making, policy formation and implementation, and complex interactions among public authorities, private business and civil society – in so far as these relate to steering societal development along more sustainable lines*" (107).

on several elements of a de-commodification discourse (cf. *infra*).⁶⁰ Both processes can be situated in a policy re-orientation that links long term planning with various sustainability discourses. Also important is that OTG introduced the ideas of ‘transition management’ (TM); a policy discourse and design that gained significant momentum in Flanders in the mid-2000s (Paredis, 2013).

In the larger institutional context of Flanders, relevant political events were (1) the federal policy advice on a sustainable food system in which NGOs, government and interest groups participated and introduced the idea to develop several sustainability strategies in ‘transition arenas’ (FRDO, 2010)⁶¹ (2) the Flemish strategy for Sustainable Development which advocated an alignment of different ‘transition paths’ with strategic long term policy objectives (VSDO II, 2011), and (3) the Flemish VIA program (‘Flanders In Action’), which adopted the goal to set up long-term transition processes in several Flemish administrations.

⁶⁰ Although the initiators did not seem to have a clear view in how these visions could inform policy, its inherent value can be inferred from the initial intention to systematically present the two future images to the different farmer sections of Boerenbond. But this intention faded when a key actor of the farmer organization - that actively participated in the vision process - was replaced by another “more conservative” actor (interview with an academic, may, 2014).

⁶¹ This excerpt makes it particularly clear that the council considered the relevance of transition governance: “*The FRDO believes that a long-term vision for a sustainable food system should be developed. This vision must describe where we want to be in the future in terms of a sustainable food system, how our sustainable food system should look like in X years from now. This sustainable system can be achieved via different strategies. These strategies can be developed in a transition arena, where stakeholders establish transition on a substantive and practical level*” (FRDO,2010, 16)

7.4.2. PHASE 1: GOVERNANCE-IN-THE-MAKING

ACTOR FORMATION

The New Food Frontier (NFF) was a two year governance process, starting in the spring of 2010 and ending in May 2012, in which a group of academics and NGO employees sought to initiate a broad and influential transition process towards a collectively desired and more sustainable agro-food system. All of the initiators had been involved in one way or another with previous sustainability initiatives in the empowered space of the agro-food system. The core-group consisted of the leading initiators of both DP21 and OTG; an NGO employee who had worked together with the largest Flemish farmers' organization 'Boerenbond' (BB) to produce a collective policy-influencing document; and another NGO member who had been responsible for delivering the federal policy advice together with a member of the Belgian federation of the food industry. Most of the initiators were particularly familiar with the TM approach to sustainability governance and a consultant/expert in systems thinking was also asked to give them advice throughout the process.

The initiators characterized the current food system by a series of persistent problems in a context of increasing complexity, and felt a sense of urgency to finally attain a breakthrough in long-term governance for sustainability. In order to do so, they wanted to establish a group of relevant stakeholders, an 'image group' to collectively develop creative and long term future images of the agro-food system. Subsequently, these 'images' would be transmitted to existing institutional groups such as supply chain actors, administrations and NGOs, who could discuss and enrich their quality. Finally, the NFF governance process should culminate in the establishment of a government-supported transition network. In this innovation network, plans of action could be based on the resulting 'images' and related 'transition paths', allowing organizations and

practitioners in the agro-food domain to engage themselves in, and operationalize a common policy program for sustainability. Accordingly, the governance process would “*link up top-down visions with bottom-up actions*”, which is something that lacked in previous governance experiences.⁶² Furthermore, the core group aimed to connect the outcomes of the process with long term policy planning such as the Flemish strategy for sustainable development.

Precisely because the initiators had experienced a limited impact of previous initiatives on traditional policy making processes and because they wanted to “*avoid that certain groups impede the process at a later stage*”⁶³ they considered to include both high-level government actors and influential interest groups. First, they contacted the head of the section Monitoring and Study, which is part of the Flemish Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. Although this head agreed to participate on an individual basis and not as a representative of the Administration, his engagement supported an implicit approval of the process. The Cabinet of Agriculture and Fisheries (executive power) took a more cautious position and wanted to stay informed and assess how the process evolved before becoming actively involved in the NFF.

The second and politically most critical decision the initiators faced, was whether they should involve two of the most prominent ‘traditional’ regime players, i.e. the largest regional farmer organization *Boerenbond* (BB) and the Belgian federation of the food industry. The initiators doubted whether they should merely inform or actively involve these actors. After a meeting with the president of BB in October of 2010, the farmer organization itself proposed to take them aboard because “*it was strange to develop a trajectory for the sector without involving the sector*” and their participation would be unavoidable to “*strengthen support afterwards*”⁶⁴. BB agreed to join the process on the condition that one of their employees would operate ‘in full autonomy’: he was not to be

⁶² Interview with an academic, March 2013.

⁶³ Internal document, June, 2010.

⁶⁴ Internal document, August, 2010.

considered an official representative of the organization. At about the same time, a delegate from the federation of the food industry (the head of the section 'Environment and Sustainability') agreed to join the process under similar conditions. This consolidated the group of meta-governors⁶⁵ - the so-called steering group: this group consisted of a hybrid mix of institutional actors related to academia, consultancy, NGO/civil society, government and interest groups who were empowered to organize and co-steer the governance process.

'SCRIPTS' IN THE META-GOVERNANCE GROUP

Our analysis revealed several political scripts (Hajer 2009) that can be associated with the representative status of the group. Scripts are here understood as procedural rationales that create a political setting and determine *'the characters in play'* as well as the *'cues for appropriate behavior'* (Hajer, 2009, 66). As these scripts determine how political content is shaped, an analysis of the strategic introduction of scripts at a specific moment, is particularly interesting to gain understanding on how actors discursively negotiate within an institutional void. We now elaborate on these scripts that emerged in the orientating phase of the meta-governance group (see also table 7.2).

A first script considered the governance process a 'testing ground' in which transition concepts and the quality of the future images would be evaluated. The interest groups took this position as *'they would evaluate if the process could evolve to a full-blown transition process'* and *'whether the future images would be inspirational and acceptable'*⁶⁶. The initiators believed that a positive evaluation by the interest groups would open doors and bring in additional resources. Intrinsic to this evaluative phase was the explicit demand of BB to allow for external communication of images only in case of full consensus within the

⁶⁵ Meta-governors are here considered as a group of actors that - operating under the existence of sufficient resources - are able to generate legitimacy and authority in the organization of a governance process or governance network (see e.g Sørensen 2006,)

⁶⁶ Internal document, may 2012; Interview with an academic, March, 2013

steering group. From the beginning BB stressed that ‘communication is holy’⁶⁷. This consensus-rule is further justified by the BB participant by stating that *‘previous processes with a similar character - such as DP21 - failed because certain actors hijacked the ideas that were still being formulated in a secure environment’*⁶⁸.

Second, from the perspective of representativeness, a peculiar mechanism of differentiation between political and non-political agency was agreed upon by all participants. Actors were considered ‘politically loaded’ when they belonged to an organisation that articulates or defends interests related to agriculture and ‘neutral’ when they did not. This led to the decision to mandate one of the initiators with an academic background as the official spokesperson of the governance process. It is notable that all actors endorsed such a partitioning logic, because it seems to contradict the idea that everyone had joined the governance process as ‘autonomous individual’. The pre-occupation with political neutrality was particularly articulated by the interest groups and might be explained by an anticipated bias in substantive outcomes as a result of the interest group’s minority position in the steering group.

A third script relates to epistemic concerns and the intent to foster social learning inspired by the TM framework. Transition theory argues to involve a group of actors in the governance arrangement who are both knowledgeable and have the capacity to communicate, learn and innovate (Hendriks, 2009b; Kerkhof and Weiczorek, 2005). This implies a need for (extra-institutional) social learning, and that the success of governance depends on continued intersubjective support that is independent from ‘institutions’.⁶⁹ For some actors the main goal was thus to build a sense of trust amongst participants of the steering group where *‘an appropriate form of interaction would have to be developed on the way’*, leading to the belief that *‘it is better to avoid working with*

⁶⁷ Interview with a representative of an NGO, June 2014.

⁶⁸ Interview with a representative of a farmer organization, September, 2014.

⁶⁹ Interview with a representative of an NGO, June 2014.

a 'fixed structure', but and to let the structure emerge along the way'⁷⁰ Closely related to the script of social learning, the TM discourse also inspired the use of a 'system analysis' to discern problems, challenges and levers of the agro-food-system and to inform and support the image group in the construction of their sustainability images (Maas et al., 2012). The interest groups endorsed the relevance of the system analysis but rather than interpreting the system analysis as a source of strategic knowledge to guide participatory decision making and social learning, they categorized it as a 'classic-modernist' type of policy support which assumes that policy outcomes are based on absolute scientific authority (see Enticott and Franklin, 2009)

Finally, a procedural script that significantly influenced negotiations in the steering group was the project-driven rationale of the governance process. Although an original approach was apparently taken to enthuse consultants as voluntary participants in governance and particular attention was paid to the need to facilitate "*the chemistry within the group*", eventually circumstances led to a typical project rationale and the need for resources to pay consultants and organize deliberative sessions. The laborious search to find subsidies triggered a practice of scrupulously crafting project proposals, going back and forth between the initiators and the interest groups and tempered the initial scope, e.g. by leaving out the facilitation of transition experiments.

7.4.3. PHASE 2: ARTICULATION OF MEANING

In November 2011, project subsidies were found at the Department of General Policy to organize the visioning process with a relevant stakeholder group (see figure 7.1. for an chronological overview of all key events). A few months later the system analysis exercise could be coupled to a separate project financed by the environmental advisory council. Although the initial idea was to use the system analysis to enable a rich input for the deliberative sessions, delay in the

⁷⁰ Interview with an academic, May, 2014.

former disrupted the timing. The system analysis was set up by the two academics, a consultant and a government actor from the meta-governance group of the NFF. The rest of the NFF steering group did not co-develop the system analysis but did reside in a follow-up committee of the system analysis project.

DELIBERATIVE SESSIONS

The initiators intuitively felt that the deliberative process of articulating sustainability visions would necessitate a new perspective on political representation. In an internal meeting between a NGO representative and one of the academics it was stated that *“we need to caution how we profile ourselves as steering group now that the farmer organization has joined, and avoid that other sectors demand a place in the group. The group is not an aggregation of representatives, but subservient to the group that will construct the future visions... the latter should be the protagonists.”*⁷¹

Uncertainty *about* whether authority resided within the steering group or within the image group caused friction: who would decide which discourses and counter-discourses were to be taken along in a political setting? In terms of discursive positions there was clear intersubjective disagreement among the members of the steering group. Interviews reveal that the interest group members were fierce supporters of an ecological modernization discourse, whereas some of the initiators clearly believed in elements related to sufficiency and de-commodification discourses (see table 7.2. on discourses). Despite these contested positions, the steering group nevertheless succeeded in bringing together a group of both ‘representative’ and ‘creative’ stakeholders.⁷²As a

⁷¹ Internal document, November, 2010.

⁷² In order to communicate the importance of the process, intake sessions were organized to inform participants on their role to construct visions which would be widely distributed to policy makers and key stakeholders. It proved a success because rather high level individuals participated such as CEOs from large corporations, ‘innovative farmers’ and highly placed persons in the agro-food chain.

guideline for selection, the ‘societal pentagon’ - a concept taken from transition theory (see Loorbach, 2007) - was used to invite actors from five groups: government, business, NGO/civil society, knowledge institutions and intermediaries (e.g. consultants, artists, journalists).

In the beginning of 2012, five deliberative sessions were conducted. In our analysis, we do not focus in depth on the deliberative process but rather investigate the discursive outcomes and how these have influenced the substantive and procedural enactments within the institutional void. However, apart from critical remarks about the first deliberative session, all interviewees confirm a good overall synergy within the image group, and the attainment of mutual respect for discursive outcomes as well as significant learning effects.

Nonetheless, the first session led to some controversy based on two occurrences. These are worth mentioning because they are characteristic of the clear disagreement on problem framing (cf. chapter 3, the rule of depoliticization). When causalities with regard to unsustainability were assessed, members of the BB questioned current procedures for sustainability assessment and stressed how significant progress had been made with regard to farmer’s environmental management. This led to the concern that the transition methodology was “*too pre-occupied with a negative approach*”. Related to this was a minor incident in which the process designers untimely casted a testimony of a caterer-farmer who had very specific ideas on how agriculture and food consumption ought to be (organic production and vegetarian consumption), which triggered suspicion of partiality amongst the interest groups. Although these occurrences illustrate the divergence of discursive positions, they did not significantly influence the outcomes of the image group.

The deliberative process of the image group led to three clearly distinguishable sustainability discourses (see table 7.1.): a discourse of Ecological Modernization (EM) (Hajer, 1995; McDonough and Braungart (2002); Jänicke, 2008) that was reflected in a future image emphasizing a hi-tech, eco-efficient and transparent agro-food chain; a De-commodification (DC) discourse (Manno, 2002) that

The invited participants could also generally influence the orientation within their organizational setting

stressed the importance of re-considering consumer-producer relations and re-introducing the value of labor in the agricultural system; and a Sufficiency (S) discourse in which ecological boundaries are approached as an inspiration to foster new socio-cultural and socio-economic relations (Galbraith 1998, Daly 1991; Sachs; 1998, Princen, 2005)⁷³ The discourses were ‘constructed’ on the basis of the consultant’s analysis of a series of personal future images as they were prepared (as some kind of ‘home-work’) by the participants of the image group. The consultant presented these personal narratives in a synthesized form, in the third deliberative session, as three ‘images’⁷⁴In that third deliberative session, groups constructed several more detailed visions of the food system based on the logics of those three images. For a detailed overview of the discourses see table X. The fourth session validated the images through a series of internal presentations. The fifth and final session of the image group, which was initially planned as a large communicative event towards the ‘captains of society’, was replaced by a closed workshop in which the stakeholder group was joined by more ‘experts’ to whom they could again explain and advocate the images (see also diagram x).

The image group thus evolved from a problem analysis to three consistent images or discourses on a future sustainable food system. In the conventional policy setting, EM is the dominant discourse on sustainable development, and is currently granted with the most discursive power in shaping policy designs and programs (Wesselink et al.; 2013; Stevenson and Dryzek, 2014). Yet, it is important to note that within the deliberative setting of the NFF, there was a balanced commitment to each discourse. A form of discourse ownership also clearly emerged. A questionnaire revealed that almost all participants were prepared to claim some form of engagement such as taking up ambassadorship and rolling out discourses in specific groups.⁷⁵ Furthermore, lines of contestation

⁷³ For a more detailed account about how these discourses can be applied to the agro-food system, see Crivits et al. 2010.

⁷⁴ The groups could choose which of the three starting points they wanted to use to work out a future image (the discourses were labeled as “highly efficient”, de-alienation” and “resource needs”).

⁷⁵ Internal document, April, 2012.

became clear. When the participants were asked to position themselves on a triangle, each corner representing one of the three discourses and the center representing a consensus position, a majority of the people stood at the extreme corners (personal observation). This form of discursive ownership was in fact a fertile ground to prepare what was an initially planned next step: the dispersion and enrichment of the discourses by communicating them to relevant organizations in the agro-food system, and finally, interaction with the public at large. This step was, however, never made, because the process was then already put to an abrupt standstill (see 4.4).

A CONTESTED SYSTEM ANALYSIS

The system analysis which was developed by three transition experts also involved in the NFF, was to add a dimension of 'expertise' to the governance trajectory through the identification of a series of problems and potential solutions related to the agro-food system. Disagreement emerged with regard to its epistemic status: interest groups pre-dominantly conceived it as a work of 'objective science' that was to guarantee the scientific soundness of (discursive) outcomes, but others took a more constructivist view, and emphasized that values and normative positions should also inform the analysis.

A key point of discussion throughout the NFF was the question of how to frame the 'sense of urgency' in sustainability challenges. During the entire process of the system analysis project, the interest groups were disconcerted that the contemporary agro-food system was conceptualized as problematic. As one of the report's authors recalls: *"the fact that we used a word such as 'systemic problem' was impossible, there were endless discussions on how we could term these kinds of things"*⁷⁶. Another actor argues that this refusal to think in term of systemic problems took away any sense of urgency: *"if we are all doing well, than we don't need to do a transition, there is no need to change the system"*⁷⁷ The

⁷⁶ Interview with an academic, May, 2014.

⁷⁷ Interview with a consultant, June, 2014.

interest group's reluctance to frame the sustainability challenge in terms of (systemic) problems was related to the assumption that *they felt targeted because they consider themselves part of that system*.⁷⁸

Within the (report on the) system analysis however, boundary work⁷⁹ had been done in the sense that 'transition' was used to connect 'challenges' of sustainable development with 'solutions' that were exclusively related to alternative practices or 'niches'. The following excerpt illustrates this: "*In order to tackle sustainability challenges, (system) innovations [...] are necessary [...]. Inspiration can be found in existing niches [...]urban agriculture, organic agriculture, eating differently and new paradigms of production. .. [In a further section] we indicate how each niche provides a solution to the existing hotspots.*" (Mathijs et al., 2012, 58, my translation).

Examples of 'hotspots' to be tackled by innovative niches are 'excessive or unrealistic consumer demand'; 'excessive forms of specialization that create a destabilizing division of labor'; 'asymmetric power relations'; and 'a chain level 'myopia' that increases environmental impacts'. Although the report stipulates that incremental innovations within existing systems are still important, its emphasis on the importance of 'radical' or 'niche' innovations triggered

⁷⁸ Interview with a representative of a farmer organization, September, 2014.

⁷⁹ As mentioned above transition theory is specifically linked to SD in that transitions are to be seen as long term processes that ultimately accomplish 'radical' or 'deep' changes need for enhanced sustainability, but as Paredis (2013) notes almost never makes explicit what this radicalism implies. It is in this sense that Hendriks (2009) refers to the word 'transition' as a boundary object:

"In particular, the word 'transition' (in dutch: transitie) lends itself well to multiple interpretations. It evokes a sense of transformation without specifying what will change or how. The word transition, thus, functions as an effective boundary object enabling actors with diverse interests to attach their own meanings and aspirations to the concept (reference omitted)."

Boundary work then refers to how actors engage in the 'sphere of multi-interpretability' that boundary concepts allow, and demarcate these concepts in order to gain credibility for a specific discourse. The result of a boundary work depends on how other actors react on those demarcations: do they accept it tacitly, do they contest its interpretation, reflect upon it or dismiss the concept altogether (Metze, 2010).

disagreement with the system analysis by members of the interest groups who were seated in the follow-up committee of the project: *“I didn’t think it was a neutral system analysis. This was especially the case in the second part where the niches were described. These were not neutral. I gave suggestions several times, but I had the feeling these weren’t incorporated [...] that’s why I refused to put my name under the report.”*⁸⁰ This perception affected how the concept ‘transition’ was interpreted as a whole, as the same respondent argues: *“Over time it became clear what transition meant. [...] There is a regime and you should then develop images that are not within the regime. The question then becomes: how can we scale up the niche to achieve those images, the regime cannot evolve towards the images.”*⁸¹ ‘Transition’ thus became aligned with the idea that niches - which are largely identified with non-dominant discourses - are the sole orchestrator of change, while the regime is being considered as merely the source of systemic failure. Actors positioning themselves close to the agro-food system felt offended as mainstream innovation were being ignored. As one interviewee put it: *“we felt as if we were placed in the pillory”*⁸².

Eventually, the concept of ‘transition’ was discarded by the interest groups and replaced by a new boundary concept ‘transformation’, which re-affirmed elements of the dominant discourse of ecological modernization. First, however, the governance trajectory of the NFF would be dissolved.

7.4.4. PHASE 3: FROM TRANSITION TO TRANSFORMATION

DISSOLUTION OF THE NFF

After the third deliberative session, the farmer organization sent a letter to each participant of the steering group in which it officially stated its withdrawal from the governance process, and considered its outcomes illegitimate. This abrupt

⁸⁰ Interview with a representative of a food industry federation, July, 2014.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Interview with a representative of a farmer organization, September, 2014

ending did not come entirely out of the blue, but was the culmination point in a “*process of constant tension*”⁸³.

One political moment, however, triggered the abrupt disintegration of the governance network. Shortly after the third deliberative session, three members of the steering group (academic, NGO, government) explained the objectives and ongoing processes within the governance process of the NFF in the specialized agricultural press. The article headed: “*the agro-food complex deals with a systemic failure*” (Vilt, 2013). It was the policy metaphor ‘failure’ that spurred furious reactions from the interest groups. They considered it appalling to describe the contemporary food system as *being-in-error* and argued that this description fully delegitimized their efforts in the process. The initiators had ‘crossed a border’ by not discussing the content of the external communication with the interest groups⁸⁴.

Additionally, the interest groups, possibly in response to the unexpected success of the process of discursive representation within the image group, began to push for a reinterpretation of the role of representation. They argued that – within the context of the food system – only those actors who represented a clear ‘interest’, had the right to make decisions about governance. “*This is simply the way our democracy works*”⁸⁵, one actor literally claimed. Academics involved in the governance group were now considered ‘interest-less’ because they represent no single social group (constituency) with defined interests. NGOs and social movements were also conceived from their organizational perspective and thereby reduced to representing single issues (e.g. ‘the’ social or ‘the’

⁸³ Several interviews confirm this.

⁸⁴ Interview with an NGO member, June, 2014; Interview with a farmer representative, September, 2014.

⁸⁵ Interview with an academic, March 2013

ecological)⁸⁶, laying emphasis on the fact that NGOs do not work for a professional or member-based constituency. On the level of the articulated discourses, practices and strategies inscribed in the two more alternative discourses of De-commodification and Sufficiency (e.g. CSA, short supply chains, internalization of environmental costs, promoting consumer sufficiency strategies, etc.) were now connoted either 'utopian', 'marginal' or 'niche'. The background reasoning became: although these initiatives are interesting and even desirable in themselves, they play only a small part in the existing practices of the agro-food system. It was based on this assumed supremacy of existing dominant practice, discourses ought to be taken into account. Consequently, the object of representation was set back from *discursive representation* to *proportional, group-based and functional representation*. Although there were, as a reaction to this disruptive strategy, several bi-lateral meetings and acts of remediation, the NFF, in the end, ceased to exist.

This, however, was not the end of the story. A final stage can be described as the re-construction of the governance network. Rather than boycotting governance as a political model all together, the interest groups decided to reconstruct the governance network based on new criteria. This is an ongoing process and it is interesting to see how these new criteria compare with those of the NFF governance network.

RECONSTRUCTION FROM A GOVERNANCE NETWORK

First, in the new governance network, the actor formation took a different course. The initiators were now the *“economic actors of the food chain”*⁸⁷. The

⁸⁶ Note here the similarity of conditions as laid down in the SALV, cf. chapter 3.

⁸⁷ Internal report, september 2012.

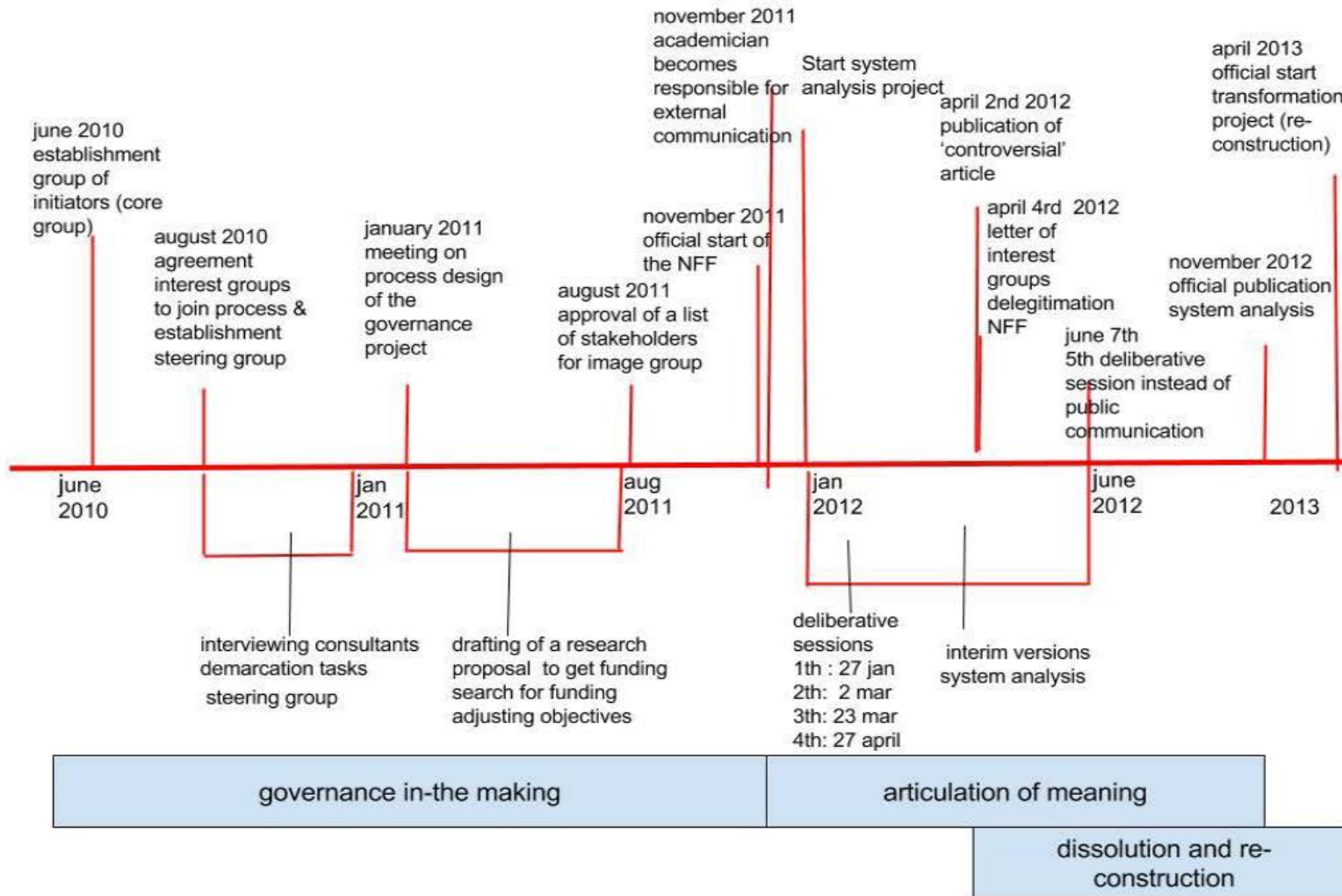
representatives of BB and the food industry federation invited other interest groups related to the (vertically integrated) supply chain, including most notably -a retailers union, representatives of the feed industry and one other farmers organization. Two NGOs were also invited to become involved in the core group, and to represent 'societal' interests.

Second, there would be no more separate *discourse articulation process*. In this respect, it was argued that the NFF was an interesting exercise to spur imagination, but now more *realistic* work had to be done. The argument was supported by a notion of proportional representation. As one of the initiators stated: "*most gain in sustainability will be achieved by changing 10 percent in the existing 90 percent of the food system, not by attaining major changes in a small part of the system*" (interview, Vilt, 2013). Remarkably, this storyline abstracts from the need to achieve any form of deliberative assent as to how 'minor' or 'major' changes are to be interpreted ('who' decides 'what', 'how' and 'how much' needs to change in the agricultural system and on which criteria)? Put differently, the discursive positions of the agricultural constituency are here presented in an unjustified dichotomy between those that join the status quo and those that want to make radical changes in the system. This dichotomy does not take into account the diversity of discourses farmers may ascribe to (e.g. after deliberation), or the diversity of practices they are willing to engage in, practices that can be a combination of several discourses (e.g. a combination of sustainability strategies).

Third, the 'transformation' perspective is underpinned by a *theory of change* related to the EM discourse, i.e. a step-wise, evolutionary process without any drastic changes in the existing political, economic and social systems. Within the new governance network this shift was supported by a discursive alteration: where *transition* was considered to long-term and drastic change for sustainability, *transformation* was held to be incremental and to operates within a time-frame of 10 years. The new dictum was: '*no revolution but evolution*' (Vilt, 2015).

A final striking difference with the NFF is that the reconstructed network immediately connected with a governmental program as government subsidies were easily found for a two-year project. These were used to organize multi-stakeholder sessions and to finance start-up innovation projects that ought to tackle sustainability challenges. The evaluation of potential projects is done by the core group. In other words, the authority of evaluative expertise is related to the representative status of the meta-governors and no longer to a correspondence between articulated discourses and innovative action (e.g. transition experiments), as was the intention of the NFF process. Also, the governance network aims to set up a monitoring device with a 'baseline measurement' and as set of (preferably quantifiable) indicators which track the evolution of sustainability, a more positivist conception of sustainability which also seems to align closely with an EM discourse.

Figure 7.1. Timeline with key events and stages.



DISCOURSES Constituent elements	Ecological Modernization	De-commodification (re-socialization)	Sufficiency (cultural dematerialization)
Ontological entities (what matters)	Eco-efficiency Monitoring and Assessment Transparency and effective information Objective knowledge Instrumental Rationality Technological Innovation	Re-valorisation of labor Diversification in modes of supply (family, state, community) Commons Civic participation Participatory democracy	Planetary boundaries Ecological footprint Frugality Simplicity Scarcity Immaterial consumption and service based economy Increase awareness Cultural roots of overconsumption
Causal stories (assumptions about natural relationships, theory of change)	Rational self-interest Economic partnerships Laws of demand and supply Trickledown effect	Citizen – Societal system Community based action Participatory value chains agriculture –society	Individual responsibility Reflexive self-consciousness Cultural change Personal assessment Ethical choice
Interests (actors and their motivations)	Collaborative innovation Economic growth Consensus driven	Co-ownership and interdependence Democratic deliberation	Individual responsibility Personal assessment Global responsibility
Symbolic devices (metaphors, rhetoric, slogans, storylines)	Green economy Agro-food valley More with less Cradle to Cradle	Food connects Think global act local Food democracy Food sovereignty	Less is more Simplify your life The art of enough-ness “The earth will not continue to offer its harvest, except with faithful stewardship. We cannot say we love the land and then take steps to destroy it for use by future generations.”
Excerpts from future images NFF	<i>Farmers are working together in large clusters with companies of the food industry. Processing will be highly efficient. Companies will generate their own energy. There will be few manual labor....</i>	<i>A system of de-alienation makes it possible to deal with the way in which human beings and society has become alienated from the process of food production.. Therefore there is opted for a closer relationship between the farmer-producer and the consumer .. the farmer's product is re-validated and he becomes part of a community..</i>	<i>Starting point of the model is the global food related carrying capacity of the planet; how much food can our planet produce, without endangering the future capacity to produce food?</i>
Literature	Hajer, 1995; McDonough and Braungart (2002); Jänicke, 2008	Manno (2002); DuPuis and Goodman (2005), Marsen ; Guthman (2014)	Galbraith 1998, Daly 1991; Sachs; 1998, Princen, 2005

TABLE 7.1. Sustainability discourses articulated in the image group.

7.5. DISCUSSION

7.5.1. THE DOUBLE DYNAMIC OF THE INSTITUTIONAL VOID

The NFF engaged a group of relevant stakeholders in the construction of future images, that were to serve as strategic input for organizations in the agro-food system and policy programs for long term sustainability planning (VSDO II, VIA). All together this amounts to a new form of policy making that gives greater emphasis to interactive discursive processes, which can be related to theories of deliberative governance (Hajer, 2003), discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2010) and discursive representation (Dryzek, 2010). The road towards this potentially new political space was explicitly influenced by two policy discourses, and actor's discursive abilities to enact them: those of neo-corporatism/consociationalism and of transition theory (see table 7.2.). Indeed, both of these policy discourses brought in specific scripts that guided key decisions within the institutional void. A consensus script, which emphasized that only full agreement on content would mandate the legitimacy of the outcome, is a common procedure related to consociationalist power-sharing (Lijphart, 1981; Lijphart, 2002). The rationale to allocate neutrality to those actors that do not represent clear constituencies and the shift towards the 'economic actors' after the dissolution of the initial governance network, is grounded in the neo-corporatist assumption of functional representation. The key activities of the project, however, were rooted in ideas inspired by a notion of TM. Developing future images with a diverse group of high-level experts and the use of a system analysis to give direction to a complex issue are typical for TM methodology. The policy discourse of TM also brought in ideas of social learning, trust building and developing innovation trajectories. But these TM expectations were not met. The unusual coalition made it hard to foster relations of trust. But also a procedural aspect is at play. As Hendriks (2009b) shows in a case for the Dutch Energy transition, regarding governance, TM tends to prefer epistemic concerns over democratic ones thereby downplaying the importance of "*designing in*" procedural matters "*to ensure that the democratic consequences of policy reforms are taken seriously*" (362). Indeed, TM's lack in transparency in how political legitimacy and representation ought to be understood and

communicated about, was crucial in the NFF. We refer to a ‘paradox of de-institutionalization’. On the one hand, the ideas from TM downplayed the importance of ‘defining a representative structure’ and of articulating institutional interests, to allow the governors to act freely and built mutual trust. But this ‘open’ attitude hampered a transparent deliberative process on the ‘rules of the game’ that is required in the institutional void, opening the door for other political scripts (functional representation, power-sharing) to fill the procedural (rule-making) void.

Tension about how sustainability ought to be framed reached its breaking point when the interest groups considered an act of external communication as an illegitimate move to obtain external legitimacy. The interest groups claimed that breaking the consensus rule made it impossible for them to ensure accountability to their respective organizations and to further represent common interests²⁶. However, at the same time as when the interest groups decided to break up the network, the image group had reached a point where distinctive discourses were articulated and an important step towards discursive legitimacy had been taken (see figure 7.1.). It is remarkable that the initiators who had previously stressed the importance of the sustainability discourses as political vehicles, did not counteract the arguments of the interest groups. They could have argued that the discursive positions of the steering group were of secondary importance and that what really mattered was a form of discursive legitimacy on the sustainability discourses, which was achieved within the image group. Alternatively, the organizers of the system analysis could have aimed to build in several co-existing discursive positions within their academic exercise.

This endorses the relevance of understanding the double dynamic within a political process under conditions of an institutional void, as a continuous interaction between a procedural and substantive dimension. If governance participants want to succeed in negotiating trust and credibility to jointly establish a more mature and stable political space (thereby increasing authority and decreasing institutional ambiguity), they need to bring about synergies between procedural norms and the production of meaning and content (related to the domain or issue at hand). In this context of the NFF we can conclude that (1) the procedural norms underlying the system analysis (epistemic credibility, policy advice, preparation for transition governance) were insufficiently tuned to

a (inclusive) meaning making process of the NFF and (2) the substantive process of generating content in the deliberative sessions was not sufficiently anchored within a procedural rationale (discursive representation, discursive legitimacy, public accountability).

The practice of discursive representation, now, could serve as one way to cope with the double dynamic in a context of institutional ambiguity by (1) ensuring deliberation to attain internal discursive legitimacy within the governance process and (2) generate external political legitimacy towards the larger political system, by acknowledging substantive outcomes (i.e. discourses on sustainable development) as legitimate policy inputs. We now elaborate on this in the final section of the discussion.

Stage /event	script/goals	Actors	Underlying policy discourse/representation performed	Meaning making devices
overall goal NFF	(1) articulate future images (2) disperse image to public and empowered space (3) state-support network based on sustainability discourses and according strategies	initiators (NGOs, Academics, administration)	transition management, discursive representation	Deliberative sessions.
governance in the making	consensus rule	steering group	power sharing (NC)	meetings, drafting research proposal
	division between neutral and non neutral actors	steering group	functional representation (NC)	meetings, drafting research proposals
	facilitate a process to foster trust and engage creative and autonomous thinkers	steering group	social learning (TM)	meetings, drafting research proposal
articulation of meaning (1) (=construction of future visions)	articulation and communication inspiring image	high-level players, 'representative' constituents	discursive representation, stakeholder representation	deliberative sessions, images
articulation of meaning (2) (=system analysis)	scientific solidity, instrumental rationality, normative plurality	transition experts and administration (authors), interest groups (in follow up committee)	epistemic representation	discussions on interim versions of the report
dissolution	violation of trust, breaking consensus rule	interest groups	power sharing	controversial article, break up letter

Table 7.2. Specifying the consecutive stages along the sub-dimensions of political scripts, actors involved, policy discourses and meaning making devices. Inspired by Hendriks (2009); Hajer (2009).

7.5.2. A PROMISING ROLE FOR DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION?

How could discursive representation support sustainability governance and inspire a perhaps more congruous confluence of traditional and emerging policy discourses than observed in the NFF process? Discursive representation departs from the idea that all relevant discourses should be given a voice. While TM aims at fostering creative innovation by conceiving co-existing future images of sustainability, discursive representation would be able to enhance TM methodology by linking its substantive outcomes (i.e. discourses on sustainable development) to a procedural norm of democratic governance. Transition exercises often struggle with the translation of their images to existing practice and their images are often framed as distant futures (Paredis, 2013). Discursive representation would allow for a joint consideration of dominant and alternative discourses, considering them as sets of ideas that have a specific relation to contemporary practice and thus spur more transparent and inclusive innovation paths. Furthermore, existing trade-offs between contending positions would be articulated more transparently, which might prevent strategic use of a dominant discourse as “subtle self-explanatory givens” (Hendriks, 2009b, 362). This would also enable a more reflexive organization of innovation processes. To give one example, a transition project that addresses meat consumption and that is anchored in (designed from the perspective of) a sufficiency discourse would – from the outset – aim to increase the ratio of cultural wellbeing/environmental impact and therefore e.g. not primarily assess the ongoing project results in terms of eco-efficiency of meat production (which could be done in another project framed in a discourse of ecological modernization). This could enhance reflexivity because the expectations and evaluation of the project are then framed along the lines of the coherent set of values, concepts, causalities and storylines of the discourse, which would likely decrease discursive ambiguity (e.g. opposing views of participants on how sustainability is being measured) and allow to more precisely assess the potentialities and pitfalls of the transition project. After the dissolution of the NFF this reflexivity was put aside by denying the relevance of different discursive positions and thereby silently emphasizing the status quo.

Finally, it is reasonable to suppose that, if governance actors would need to explore all potentially relevant discourses (i.e. attain discursive legitimacy), sufficient time would be allocated to deliberate intensively and attract several “outsider” discourses which would increase the chance to establish more inclusive innovation paths (Dryzek and Stevenson, 2014).

How can we understand the case findings in relation to the questions raised in section 2 on representing discursive plurality and allocating authority in sustainability governance? The practice of discursive representation gives suggestions as to how several substantive outcomes of sustainability governance should be dealt with within a democratic system. But how does discursive representation relate to the two guiding policy discourses within the institutional void of the NFF? First, the institutional architecture of interest groups does not appear to be optimal to communicate a *diversity* of discourses because they are generally accustomed to operate in a political context where unified and fixed political positions are defended in the pursuit of a non-integrative consensus. Although the structure of interest group representation allows contact between the representatives and the represented, discursive plurality at the base (within the constituency), is often ‘aggregated’ to single standpoints. On the other hand, where TM processes are better fit to acknowledge normative diversity – for instance through the development of transition paths for sustainable development - they have been depicted as “characterized by the absence of public engagement” and lacking accountability relations within and between TM participants and particular constituencies, which makes it hard to ensure public legitimacy (Hendriks, 2009b). TM would thus have a hard time to ensure relational accountability, that is, a long-term process of social learning between public and empowered space (Dryzek and Stevenson, 2014).

How could one organize a governance process that combines discursive plurality with relational accountability? In the case of the NFF, the image group, which took first steps towards discursive representation, could have initiated a process where practitioners (the affected) to some extent refrain from their functional interests and join discursive constituencies (or discourse coalitions) that revolve around shared discourses and establishing innovation projects. This need not be utopic but can be aligned with the NFF initiators’ plan to establish a government-

supported network which would adopt the resulting sustainability visions as guiding principles in organizing innovation projects. We refer to the “chamber of discourses” as a potential approach to scrutinize collective decisions, actions and evaluations in the innovation network. This involves at least two procedural components: (1) a continuous process of deliberation, scrutinizing and exploring existing and new discourses related to achieving sustainability in the agro-food system and (2) appointing discursive representatives with authority to ‘guard’ the design and evaluation of innovation projects in terms of those discourses.

Further considerations must be borne in mind. Discourses are solid but not absolute and therefore amendable to change: they can be re-considered, merged with other discourses or entirely new discourses can come to the fore. In this respect, Dryzek’s distinction between two deliberating sub-chambers is informative. Aided by socio-scientific methodologies (discourse analysis, Q methodology, in depth interviews) two types of discursive representatives could be opted for. In one chamber, more ‘extreme’ representatives defending one particular discourse would enable a fertile clash of ideas, while another chamber made up by ‘moderate’ discursive representatives affiliating with several discourses “might be better at reaching reflective judgment across discourses” (Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2008; 488). With regard to the network, the chamber of extremity could play a role in designing new discursive outlets in project calls and the program design of the innovation network ensuring a large spectrum of creativity, while the chamber of moderation would be more appropriate to evaluate the outcomes of transition projects allowing them to be framed in learning histories for several sustainability discourses and strategies, which could, over time, allow the concretization of more “hybrid” innovation processes (and project proposals).

These are but suggestions and if willingness to think in terms of discursive representation exists, other potential solutions are likely to emerge. Probably the process of curbing existing political culture will be far less straightforward. Again, the institutional and ideational components of traditional policy arrangements and TM do not automatically align with the underpinnings of discursive representation. But also issues of organizational power matter. In this context we refer to a reflection of the participant of the farmers organization on the idea to set up an innovation network:

“Only afterwards I realized the full intent. .. a platform where transition experiments can be realized and supported by government. ... The problem is that .. we weren’t ready yet... because it means that a part of Boerenbond, as organization.. needs to be transferred to another instance...This gives away your unique selling proposition”

This defensive reflex is potentially true for all types of organizations. Also NGOs have often scaled-up and professionalized making them more dependent on the state and the engagement with existing political and economic structures (Bloom, 2014; Debruyne and Van Bouchaute, 2014). This can induce the preference to shy away from an institutional void because it can lead to a new political space that does not guarantee a certain outcome in terms of securing institutional resources.

However, he then adds: *“I see it happening, the evolution from .. representative democracy to participatory democracy and also organizations such as ours need to adapt to these evolutions.”*

This type of ‘democratic reflexivity’ (Hendriks, 2009b) where democratic conventions are considered in a state of flux, speaks for the theoretical and practical endeavors to re-consider the standard account of democracy in terms of a more performative dimension. Our analysis of the process of the NFF has shed some light on how different political conceptions are existing next to each other and on the importance of simultaneously considering procedural and substantive vantage points in contemporary political practice.

7.6. CONCLUSIONS

In our case study, antagonist parties and discourses temporarily joined in a process of sustainability governance. Although there was no clear understanding as to how political procedures and norms were to be enacted, there initially was political will to negotiate new institutional rules of the game and experiment with representing different future conceptions or discourses on sustainability for the agro-food system. To understand this open political situation, we adopted Hajer's concept of the institutional void that entails a double dynamic operating along the lines of a procedural and substantive dimension. Our detailed empirical analysis of the NFF revealed how conflicting understanding of how political representation (and related political norms) were to be enacted, hampered the coming about of a new political space. The study suggests that apart from intersubjective disagreement and the receptiveness of established, and external political institutions such as a cabinet or elected politicians, clear conceptualizations of how substantive outcomes are embedded in a procedural rationale are key in reaching internal legitimacy. We have argued that an un-reflexive lack of discursive legitimacy and a strong emphasis on de-institutionalization have significantly hampered the discursive enactments to settle the substantive and procedural questions within institutional void. Therefore we argued that the concept and practice of discursive representation which connects the need to address societal problems with a variety of solutions, and with a normative notion of democratic governance, could be one way to inspire political actors to find a common orientation in a situation of institutional ambiguity.

CHAPTER 8
GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS



CHAPTER 8 - GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this dissertation I studied the question of how discourses that are articulated in the context of the agro-food system affect collective decision making procedures and institutional arrangements in the Flemish agricultural domain. In order to address this question the approach and theory of discursive representation was employed as an analytical framework. The overall aim was to explore how discursive representation and its accompanying concepts of transmission, discursive accountability and discursive legitimacy could be understood in the context of the Flemish agro-food policy domain and investigate its potentialities.

In section 8.1., I will reflect on the outcomes of the empirical chapters in terms of the different political components introduced in chapter 2 as well as discuss some of the findings and recent evolutions in the larger context of the Flemish agro-food policy domain. Section 8.2. readdresses the research questions of this thesis and draws conclusions about the relevance and potentialities of discursive representation. I then formulate a series of tentative recommendations to enhance the deliberative capacity of the Flemish agro-food policy domain (8.3) as well as formulate some avenues for future research (8.4). I end the dissertation by presenting a political scenario. The scenario has the goal to present one form of reconciliation between the established system and a deliberative system and describes in some detail how a new institutional component – an agro-food deliberative forum – can be developed in a stepwise manner (8.5.).

8.1. CASE STUDY FINDINGS IN TERMS OF DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION

Each case was designed to demonstrate and analyze different aspects of discursive representation. Although some of these aspects were already discussed in the empirical chapters, we would like to more systematically address the three cases vis-à-vis the approach and theory of discursive

representation. To this end, we will address some additional issues related to the cases in order to depict the relationship between the cases and ongoing activities in the agro-food policy.

8.1.1. CASE I FARM EDUCATION: NEED FOR DELIBERATION

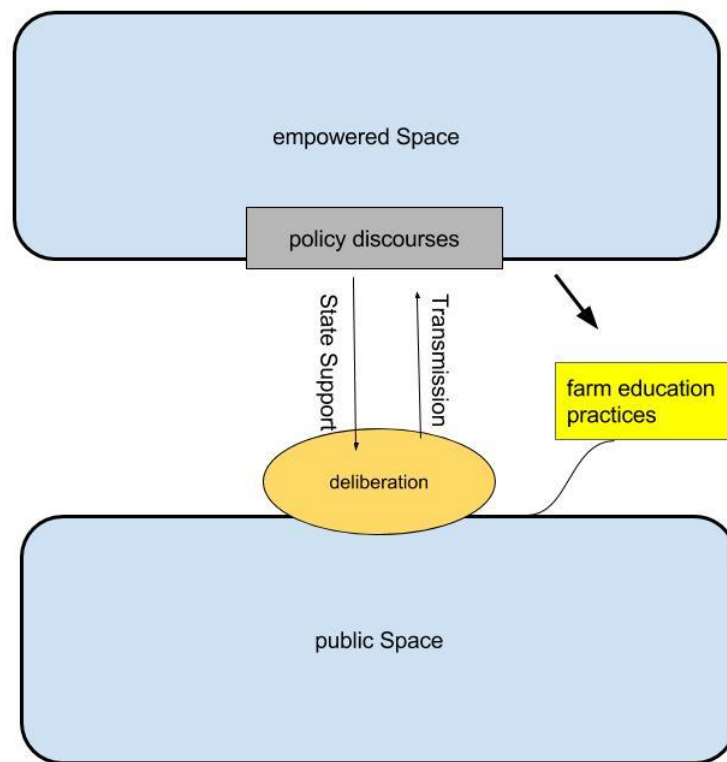


Figure 8.1. Transmission (Case I)

A first case dealt with an emerging practice, farm education, where farmers are actively communicating to schools and groups about their activities, motivations and passion for agriculture. It was noted that there is a perceived dichotomy between farm education as either a practice of entrepreneurship or something of free-time. The focus of this case study was on how engagement with and across discourses can shed a new light on what an agricultural practice entails. To this

end, we investigated how practices of farm education can be scrutinized from the discursive plurality of existing policy discourses (of neo-liberalism, productivism and strong multi-functionality) and explored how the constitutive elements of these key discourses give meaning to the goals, motivations and underlying values of farm education. Based on a qualitative analysis of ongoing educative practices in Flanders we demonstrated how farmers recognized and endorsed the implications of the three discourses (what we termed educative settings). This allowed us to initiate a first step to structure a debate about the future development of farm education and set the ground for a potential process of transmission from public to empowered space. It is clear that, in this case, we can hardly speak of any process of discursive representation because there is no clear intention to identify and articulate several discourses in any deliberative political process.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, the discourse analytical approach did reveal the relevance and potentiality of two discourses that are generally not associated with farm education. This shows how a discourse analytical approach can initiate a broadening of the debate by mapping discourses and relate them to ongoing practice.

The question now rises how these findings can be related to the political component of transmission. One conclusion seems to be that, within the case of farm education, transmission is not likely to happen without the organization of some sort of deliberative process about the role of farm education. Indeed, farm education is a non-politicized topic which makes it less likely to be the object of, say, an activist campaign, political conference or large public event. Furthermore, both public and empowered space seem to be pervaded by two discourses on farm education, that is, (1) a discourse on farm education as an entrepreneurial activity, which appears to be possible only when farm education is combined with other broadening activities and (2) a discourse that belongs to the private sphere and thus not the object of political or public discussion. This means that in order to bring in a more versatile (and politically more relevant) set of

⁸⁸ Although the intention was and still is to construct an action research which allow to couple a deliberative process with interested farmers to a project to unlock resources.

perspectives on farm education, a deliberative process in which more discourses are brought in might serve as a crucial means to prepare a transmission.

Within the context of the case – the West Flemish network of farm education - existing institutional conditions are not optimal to foster a deliberative process. As mentioned in chapter 5, European projects on which the network largely draws for its support to facilitate farmers, often depart from a logic where support is only granted to ‘new’ innovative practices. Project rationales (such as e.g. INTERREG or Horizon 2020 projects) often focus on achieving outcomes in terms of concrete (economic) activities (e.g. ‘tangible outcomes’ related to profitability), leaving less room to include a process which focuses on idea-generation or fostering mutual understanding amongst a series of potential stakeholders. Furthermore, people in empowered space often only approve or facilitate those types of practices that have already achieved some form of political or societal legitimacy. For instance, a recent project that aimed to experiment with the concept of ‘farm school’ by supporting farmers to set up an educational process, was denied subsidies on the ground that there was insufficient ‘proof’ that farm education creates any significant educational benefits (personal communication, 2015). What these instances seem to reveal is a self-reinforcing mechanism in which the articulation of a specific discourse is hampered because there are no or few existing practices that operate according to the logic of that discourse, which in turn leads to a continued lack of support for those alternative discourses and their associated practices.

Based on our Deweyian approach in chapter 5, one way to break with this cycle of what could be called the ‘dominance of the real’ (i.e. the tendency to prefer support to what is already well known and established in practice, also known as the paradox of embedded agency⁸⁹ (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Garud et al., 2007;

⁸⁹ The paradox of embedded agency is put succinctly by Garud et al., 2009: “*The theoretical puzzle is as follows: if actors are embedded in an institutional field and subject to regulative, normative and cognitive processes that structure their cognitions, define their interests and produce their identities, how are they able to envision new practices and then subsequently get others to adopt them? Dominant actors in a given field may have the power to force change but often lack the motivation; while peripheral players may have the incentive to create and champion new practices, but often lack the power to change institutions (references omitted).*” (9)

Grin, 2014) is to engage experts of the food system and empowered actors actively in agrarian practices.

8.1.2. CASE II FOSTERING RELATIONAL AND DISCURSIVE ACCOUNTABILITY

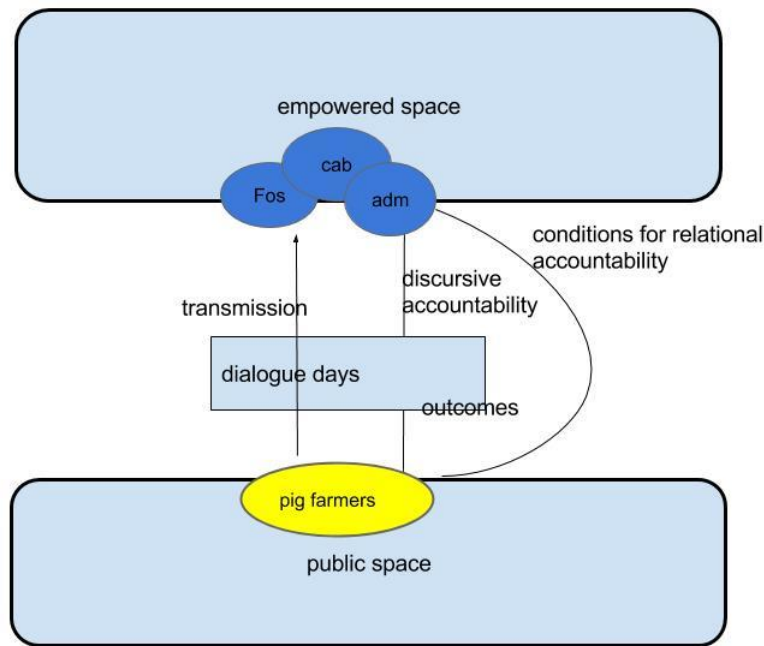


Figure 8.2. Discursive accountability (Case II)

The second case-study concerned one of the most economically important while at the same time most struggling sectors of the agro-food supply chain: pig farming. Stagnating meat prices as well as rising energy and feed costs⁹⁰, have culminated in persistent negative revenues, despite ever increasing productivity

⁹⁰ And more recently the economic effects of the Russian boycott on agricultural products.

gains. This ongoing crisis led to self-reflectivity amongst Flemish pig farmers. Traditionally they have adopted a rather productivist attitude, but persistent economic problems have led them to question their position in the food supply chain. These concerns did not go unnoticed and in 2011-2012 the then minister of agriculture, Kris Peeters, decided to organize a series of dialogue days to collectively address problems and solutions for Flemish pig farming.

The dialogue days enabled a meeting between actors of public and empowered space to reflect on a series of problems and potential solutions within a particular sector⁹¹. In that sense, the dialogue days were a mechanism of transmission. However, in chapter 6, we aimed to investigate the process of accountability and took a discourse analytical approach in order to develop a discursive perspective on accountability to farming interests. To this end we substantiated two competing discourses on innovation: the participatory innovation discourse and the linear innovation discourse. We found that although both discourses are articulated in public (e.g. farmers) and empowered (e.g. EIP) space, the participatory innovation discourse is largely absent in the articulation of the policy outcomes, which predominantly framed farmer agency as passive and the perceived production of knowledge as something happening for and not by farmers.

What this shows is that discursive representation might have been an important reflective learning tool to think through more consistently how and where the role of farmers can be of paramount importance in tackling the pig farming crisis. Consistent with the participatory innovation discourse, this would entail farmer's access to state support resources such as ad hoc working groups or research expertise as well as a substantial part in co-deciding how innovation projects can answer the crisis. Some examples related to pig farming where farmer participation might be crucial are working groups or research networks

⁹¹ Document analysis and interviews reveal there to be at least two kinds of actors from public space: farmers who were member from a farmer organization but not ordinarily involved in political work and experts related to the broader agricultural system such as researchers and consultants.

concerning alternative proteins for feed, feeding strategies or the facilitation of networks to set up marketing and promotion strategies.

Indeed, without the enactment of such an empowering counter-discourse, hegemonic conditions are maintained, namely that actors involved in negotiations aimed at bettering their own daily practices, concur with a perspective in which they are conceptualized as actors outside the empowered space of knowledge production and innovation research (see section 4.2).

But this does not mean that an initiative such as the pig dialogue days was entirely lacking in deliberative potential. Although the dialogue days resulted in a series of outcomes that lacked a discursive balance, the design of the dialogue days can as such be seen as a promising road towards achieving what has been called 'relational accountability' (Stevenson and Dryzek, 2014; Durose et al., 2015). Here, accountability is not considered as 'promissory' accountability which essentially entails a one-off action to secure the credibility of an elected politician, but as a relational and long-term process of social learning between public and empowered space (Stevenson and Dryzek, 2014). Relational accountability has an intrinsic connection with the theory of deliberative democracy and can be considered as an important criterion to achieve discursive accountability. Indeed without some form of deliberation between public and empowered space it is hard to imagine how an assessment and communication in terms of all relevant discourses can be attained. At this point, it is worth quoting at length a passage in which Dryzek articulates the political relevance of accountability:

"Two principal reasons underlie the importance of accountability and arguably justify the investment of resources in it. One is the potential positive relationship between accountability and deliberative qualities such as justification of positions taken, the integration of multiple perspectives, and the prioritization of public goods and generalizable interests. When an actor is required to explain and justify her decisions and actions to a wider audience, and then articulate her account in terms that the audience will understand and accept, this may in turn promote a degree of reflection and social learning on the part of the account giver as she becomes aware of the consequences of her action" (references omitted) (Stevenson and Dryzek, 26)

Here, it is crucial to emphasize that the organizational design of the pig dialogue days was able to host relational accountability. First of all, the overall intention of the dialogue days was to open up a debate towards a wider group of stakeholders - beyond the representative actors - including relevant insiders and practitioners. In addition, the problem assessment was well prepared as the administration had drafted a detailed set of critical questions about core issues in the pig farming sector which were sent to all participants on beforehand. Four days of deliberation were subsequently organized with invited experts, elaborating on each topic. This allowed for an in-depth assessment of the potential problems and solutions. After the publication of the policy measures - which contained detailed minutes of each dialogue day - it was also possible to follow-up the evolution of the measures on the website of the administration. These features kept open the possibility to establish a relationship between empowered space (administration and other actors carrying out policy outcomes) and public space (farmers, other supply chain actors, researchers) to tackle various problems within pig farming. However, these possibilities were not used. Several reasons can be advanced for this underuse of relational accountability. First, interviews reveal that several of the participating actors (experts, farmers) lost faith in the sincerity of the process as a whole during the dialogue days. This may in turn have promoted the lack of vigilance on how the policy measures were followed up.⁹² Furthermore, the government did not seem to actively communicate about the relevance of the outcomes, only reacted when occasionally asked about a specific measure and overall considered the dialogue days as a marginal phenomenon (interview, 2014).

These observations seem to point to an important insight, namely, that in order to achieve any form of relational, and indeed, discursive accountability, not only institutional conditions need to be fulfilled, but also discursive enactments of alternative political models or discourses are required. More concretely put, it would have been a serious difference - given similar outcomes - if the

⁹² After the publication of the final report hardly any attention was paid to the evolution or evaluation of the policy outcomes nor in the specialized press nor in the agricultural research and policy community.

participating actors had framed this exercise as an important and consequential act of deliberation about the evolution of pig farming rather than as a failed, marginal or stand-alone stakeholder meeting. Although some individual participants did praise the intrinsic relevance of the dialogue days, there was never a clear articulation nor debate on what the process of accountability ought to achieve.

Finally, we would like to note that only recently (February 2016), a new dialogue day on pig farming has been organized by the current minister of agriculture. Although this case has not been the object of our research, a number of striking differences can here be noted. The dialogue day (now called the G30) was considered as a sequel to the dialogue days in 2011, addressing the unchanged problematic situation in the pig farming sector (Vilt, 2016). Although reference was made to the last dialogue days, its outcomes were not re-evaluated or re-addressed systematically. Additionally, in this case, the process was limited to one day, nor was there any official publication of a series of policy actions. Rather, what now happened was that the minister announced a series of new subsidies at the day of the dialogue.⁹³ We can reasonably assume, that these institutional shifts (less well-prepared, less intensive, no clear outcomes related to the stakeholder process), make it significantly more difficult to attain any form of relational accountability. Furthermore, it illustrates the unreflective stance of government on governance.

⁹³ It was announced that 3.8 million euros would be made available to support investments for innovations (2 million would be allocated to technologies to reduce emissions such as e.g. airwashers) and 150.00 euro in order to improve the relationship between practitioners and research (Vilt, 2016).

8.1.3. CASE III ENACTMENTS WITHIN THE VOID: THE DISAPPEARANCE OF TRANSITION

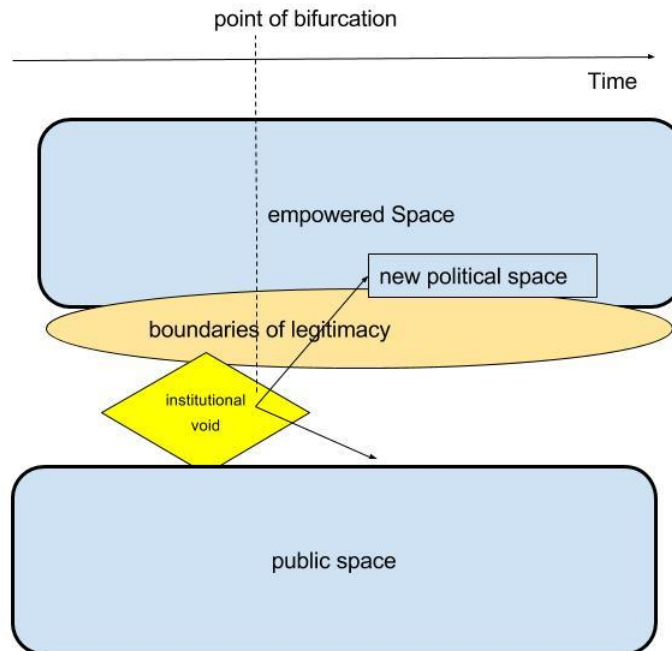


Figure 8.3. Institutional void (Case III)

The final case study, focused on a much broader and more politicized theme, that of the role of sustainability governance within the Flemish agro-food system. Here we analyzed the discursive enactments and political mechanisms in a specific and short-lived governance network, the New Food Frontier (NFF). The NFF, which took place between 2010 and 2012, had brought together an unusual mix of NGO representatives, policy makers, academic experts and interest group representatives in an attempt to set up a transition process for the Flemish agro-food system. This case study was selected in order to gain some insight into the dynamics of how governance actors discursively negotiate in conditions of institutional ambiguity. We adopted the concept of institutional void because it accurately captures how a governance process is not necessarily a stand-alone political experiment, but a potential road towards a more mature political space

based on a new consensus between different political models and modes of doing politics.⁹⁴

What we have found is that when a political process operates under the conditions of an institutional void it is both linked as well as in a tension with empowered space. A double dynamic between a meaning-making and rule-making dimension is being negotiated by the participating political actors. Depending on the outcomes of negotiation and the positional power of the involved actors, a political space might then 'transgress' the boundaries of political legitimacy and acquire a position within empowered space as a mature political institution with sufficient authority to orchestrate decisions under the surveillance of the state. This is what is depicted in figure 8.3.

In case of the NFF, the meaning-making dimension was primarily related to the interpretation of discourses on sustainable development (i.e. the political act of connecting specific socio-political problems to specific 'sustainable' solutions). The rule-making dimension was associated with the enactment of different policy discourses and conceptions of political representation. Let us now re-discuss both dimensions and how actors discursively interacted.

The meaning-making dimension of the NFF, was in fact addressed within three different political 'sites' or 'subspaces' that emerged throughout the process of the NFF: in the steering group, in the system analysis *and* in the stakeholder group (image group). In each subspace, the contestation of discourses took a different form. In the steering group a rule was established that personal discursive positions ought not to influence the outcomes, but nevertheless there was a clear dissent on specific discourses of sustainability⁹⁵, which in turn fostered a general sense of distrust that undoubtedly hampered the negotiations.

⁹⁴ As Hajer (2009) puts it: "*Authority might, in this view, emerge from the participants efforts to negotiate trust and credibility to jointly author a framing of the problem and solution. Authority is then derived from the particulars of the group, and the particular way it stages its activities (35).*"

⁹⁵ The dissent on discursive positions was not as such the object of discussion within the meetings of the steering group, but is clearly supported by the interviews as well as statements in other contexts (e.g. in specialized press).

In the system analysis, the discourses of Sufficiency and De-commodification took center stage and the discourse of Ecological Modernization was under-represented. In the image group, finally, three sustainability discourses were clearly articulated. In terms of the concept of discursive legitimacy – a principle which ensures that a collective outcome resonates with as many as possible relevant discourses (in the public sphere) – the outcomes of the stakeholder group were thus most discursively legitimate.

Importantly, it were the stakeholders of the image group that were to be the 'heart' of the governance project: they were selected and invited by the steering group as a representative sample of the constituencies involved (see chapter 7). Farmers, CEOs from food and retail industry, researchers, policy makers, all these actors participated and created a shared acknowledgment of *several*, co-existing discourses and strategies towards implementing sustainability in the agricultural policy domain. Given the fact that the key outcome of the NFF was a success, how can we gain insight in the mechanisms that prevented its communicative power from becoming fully articulated?

Key insights are provided by taking in to account what happened in the procedural dimension. First, the interest groups' move to withdraw legitimacy from the NFF was advanced on the basis of two rules. The rule of *absolute consensus* (i.e. only communicate externally when all participants agree on the content) was evoked to characterize the article in the specialized press as a fatal violation of trust. The NFF was further discredited by evoking a second familiar rule: *functional representation* (see chapter 3 and 7). Referring to this rule made it possible to characterize those actors that did not represent a clear constituency (academics, transition experts, engaged individuals) or do not have a professional member-base (NGOs, environmental movement) as non-political or at least less-representative actors at thus not capable to steer any process of governance. When the interest group representatives decided to set up a new governance network (*Transformation project*), rules familiar to the established neo-corporatist arrangement were again adopted to prevent discourses and actors to become fully represented. The rule of insulation (i.e. only those close to the professional world are knowledgeable) was referred to, to strengthen the argument of functional representation. These arguments ensured that the initiators were explicitly kept out of the new governance project. Furthermore,

an argument of proportional representation was used to make a distinction between 'dominant' and 'marginal' agricultural practices *and* discourses (see also 8.2.3), ensuring that less political relevance is attached to alternative discourse.

It is however crucial to note that although procedural arguments were adopted to (successfully) dislocate the NFF, the underlying reasons for doing so were connected to tensions that had emerged in the meaning-making dimension on sustainable development. First, the system analysis framed solutions predominantly along the discourses of sufficiency and de-commodification and largely associated the dominant system with the 'problem.' Second, the interpretation of the article about the NFF fueled this impression. By stating that the system struggles with a systemic failure⁹⁶, the discourse of ecological modernization, which assumes that solutions are to be found within the boundaries of the existing system, was not adequately represented. It were those instances which bothered or even frightened the interest group members to go on with the process, as was also clear from their intervention in the first deliberative session (cf. Chapter 7). It was precisely the possibility that political resources *could be* exclusively generated for 'alternative' discourses which allowed the interest groups' move towards dissolution. The above shows the relevance of the concept of discursive legitimacy. If the initiators (some of who were also the authors of the system analysis) had actively endorsed the relevance of existing and future developments associated with the discourse of ecological modernization⁹⁷ - such as e.g. development of resource-efficient technology or smart monitoring of agricultural products - it would have been much harder for the interest groups (or indeed any other antagonist) to claim that relevant discourses are not being taken into account. This would have been especially the case if the content of the images would have been communicated

⁹⁶ When the article is read more closely the term 'systemic mistake' actually refers to a passage where one of the initiators defends a better remuneration for farmer's sustainability efforts, a position not inconsistent with ecological modernization. So the heading was an editorial choice to focus on a 'radical', 'eye-catching' element.

⁹⁷ For instance if the VILT article had headed something like: 'NFF strengthens our existing food system with new visions and strategies'.

at large to public and empowered actors, an act of discursive accountability which was initially planned, but never came about.

Discursive legitimacy (and the lack thereof) was thus (1) an important motivation that guided political behavior, and (2) an guiding principle that could have shifted the outcomes of the NFF project significantly, if it were explicitly taken into account by all governance participants. Indeed, concerning (2), if discursive legitimacy had been adopted as a starting principle, the outcomes of the system analysis could have been tuned with the outcomes of the stakeholder group, leading to a powerful synergy between both events in the meaning-making process, and a strong support to unlock resources for *each* of the three discourses.

Although the interest groups were motivated to act because the lack of discursive legitimacy, they did not honor it as a guiding principle to guide political practice.⁹⁸ In the *Transformation* project, sustainable development was no longer understood as a series of different yet co-existing visions of agro-food system. We will address these issues further in section 8.2.2 and 8.2.3.

But for the remainder of this section on the NFF case, we wish to consider in more detail the role of the state in steering sustainability governance. We can here refer to the role of the state in meta-governance, because it is the latter that was and still is, in principle, most able to assign the rules and resources of a governance process. As Roy (2014) puts it:

Meta-governance implies that the state plays a key role in the oversight, steering and coordination of governance arrangements and in mobilizing the requisite resources used in governance and that it takes into account the question of legitimacy and accountability, what is in question of present governance.

In the case of sustainability governance in the agro-food policy domain, it is not entirely clear how the state has positioned itself. We elaborate somewhat more

⁹⁸ This shows a clear difference between an analytical and normative consideration of discursive legitimacy.

on the position of the state. On the one hand, a degree of freedom was allowed for the actors within the sub-political sphere⁹⁹ to organize a transition process and the Administration was even effectively involved in the co-steering of the NFF process, without ever being officially represented. Also the Cabinet of agriculture did not renounce the outcomes of the NFF. After the process of the NFF had ended, the Cabinet stated in their policy letter that “*the engagement, interaction and mutual learning had a positive effect on how the different participants evaluated the system*” and furthermore that “*the various involved organizations are reflecting on a potential continuation [of the NFF] and its form and content*” (policy letter Cabinet of Agriculture, 2012-2013). Also remarkable was that in April 2013, a member of parliament of the CD & V questioned the Minister of Agriculture (belonging to the same party) about the relevance of transition in the agro-food system (Vlaams Parlement, 2013). In her contribution, the MP acknowledged the need to think beyond technological solutions and take in account the relevance of the proposed ‘regime-niches’ that were investigated in the system analysis report (See Mathijs et al., 2012). She also asked whether processes of transition would be linked to policy resources such as the CAP. The minister replied that an evaluative analysis of what can be learned from the NFF process was ongoing¹⁰⁰ and that transition would not be linked to the CAP, because the latter is based on long-term change.

On the other hand, it is clear that the *Transformation* project- which was initiated by the interest groups also participating in the NFF - did succeed in unlocking resources from the government where the NFF was never able to do this. The ‘transformation’ project was also distinctively framed as a break with *Transition*. These above two points are clearly illustrated by the reaction of one of the

⁹⁹ We use this term to make a distinction between actors that are formally acknowledged by the state and those that clearly exert political influence but are less formally or more provisionally embedded in empowered space. The term can thus be used to denote the temporary nature in which actors engage within empowered space. For instance, a CEO or Senior researches can enter empowered space at specific moments, without otherwise actively doing so.

¹⁰⁰ At ILVO and the Policy research Centre for Sustainable Development (2012-2015). In fact, this doctoral dissertation is part of that evaluation research.

initiators of the Transformation project on an article in the specialized press which (wrongly) claimed that the latter was a continuation of the NFF: “*do not connect the new project (Transformation) with the think tank (NFF) because it does not seek to achieve transition but transformation in the near future. It is the agro-food chain who is now in charge and partly thanks to the government there is a 620.000 euro budget*” (Vilt, 2013). This clearly indicates that the interest groups are considering sustainability governance as a domain of political struggle in which they make use of the boundary concepts of ‘transition’ and ‘transformation’ in order to claim political authority.

What however followed was that the concept of transition seemed to shift to the background within the agro-food policy domain. The subsequent policy letters of the cabinet did not mention the word transition and in the policy letter 2015-2016 the minister states that “*her services have intensely worked on the transformation project of the agro-food chain that was presented to the public in May 2015.*” What is also remarkable is that the biennial Agriculture Report (LARA) from the Flemish administration took a major shift in focus when comparing the 2012 and 2014 editions. In the 2012 edition, the concept of sustainable development is discussed at length and defined as a contested and normative notion, and the theory of transition governance is explained and elaborated upon in detail and discussed vis-à-vis the agricultural system. In the 2012 report, the need to critically address the environmental, social and economic effects of the agricultural system is emphasized, and there is explicit reference to the insights of the system analysis and the NFF. In the 2014 report, however, the concept of sustainable development is entirely abandoned and sustainability is defined vis-à-vis the concept of the agro-food valley. The report takes a much more descriptive form, focusing on the CAP and the structure of the agro-food chain, and accentuates the importance of focusing on the entire agro-food chain and the potentialities to strengthen an export-based food strategy.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Some of these shifts are not necessarily political but also reflect editorial choices of the administration to focus on new relevant topics. Nevertheless, the differences between the reports do reflect (1) a clear shift away from ‘transition’ and (2) as shift from an openness towards various interpretations to unilateral (hence descriptive) interpretations. The table below lists the number of occurrences of the words ‘sustainable development’, ‘transition’

It can be reasonably assumed that these discursive shifts are intrinsically related to the political events that unfolded during and shortly after the NFF.

and 'transformation' in both reports, illustrate the shift clearly. Also notable is the shift in rhetoric about how 'niches' are described. In the 2012 report, niches were considered as potential solutions to solve a series of problems in the agro-food system and discussed at length. In the 2014, two niches (organic agriculture and 'local agriculture') are introduced as an addendum that also is worth mentioning as exemplified by the following phrase: "*In the end, we wish to mention a few niches that secure supply and that oppose large scale, intensive and export based production of agricultural.*"

	word used in 2012 report	word used in 2014 report
<i>sustainable development</i>	91	1
<i>Transition</i>	146	7
<i>Transformation</i>	4	11

8.2. RECALLING RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Section 8.2. readdresses the research questions of this thesis and draws conclusions about the relevance and potentialities of discursive representation. We first address the sub research questions (8.2.1, 8.2.2., 8.2.3.) and end with the main research question (8.2.4.).

8.2.1. HOW CAN DISCOURSES THAT OPEN UP NEW CONCEPTUAL SPACES FOR AGRICULTURAL PRACTICE BE TRANSMITTED TO EMPOWERED SPACE IN THE AGRO-FOOD POLICY DOMAIN? (SRQ1)

In the empirical chapters we have identified several discourses that open new ways to think about agricultural practices. To give some concrete examples: a CSA farmer working together with a conventional farmer, farmers cooperating with schools in a pedagogic trajectory, pig farmers actively exchanging information about on farm self-mixing of feed, farmers combining nature management and food production to address new markets. These and many more examples are consistent with discourses discussed in this thesis such as the discourse of emancipatory farm education, outdoor education (agriculturist setting), participatory innovation, strong multifunctionality and neo-liberalism. Unfortunately these initiatives could not be addressed at length within the scope of the empirical chapters of the dissertation. One reason why this was so was that focus of the cases was on the political process of how discourses are or are not represented at specific political sites in the Flemish agro-food policy domain and not on the exploration of alternative practices. Another more fundamental reason, however, was that our analysis revealed that - despite the potential of alternative discourses to support innovative ways of dealing with agricultural practice - all three cases did not succeed very well in transmitting new conceptual spaces for agricultural practice to empowered space. In the case of farm education, the limited range of discourses considered in the public sphere entails that the contestation of different discourses is largely absent in the public sphere. The case of the pig dialogue days illustrates how a relevant discourse in the public sphere is virtually ignored by empowered space. The NFF case

illustrates a discursive struggle to integrate a diversity of sustainability perspectives in the institutional context of the Agro-food policy domain, but results in a rejection of the relevance of alternative discourses (see also 8.2.2 on institutional ambiguity). In this section we wish to address what might be underlying mechanisms that enable and prevent the transmission of alternative discourses to empowered space.

A first mechanism that might explain a conservative reflex towards the transmission of alternative discourses is the tendency to consider an emerging practice from the same perspective as an established practice. This tendency seems to be related to the underlying idea that the success of an alternative is dependent on compatibility with the common ways of doing and saying (cf. 8.1.1.). For instance, even if it is increasingly accepted that agriculture is something that goes beyond the mere production of food, emerging broadening activities such as farm education are still largely perceived from a 'food production' perspective. Farming activities are then considered as practices that are similarly confronted with a decline of state support and the need to create new markets and profitability, as was shown in chapter 5 for the case of farm education. However, broadening activities center on other societal domains than that of economic food production and therefore policy options cannot be merely duplicated from one practice (food production) to another (broadening activities) but are in need to be at least considered in terms of alternative socio-political rationales. For instance, care farming can be considered to actively contribute to health policy objectives, farm education to education policy objectives and agro-ecological farming to environmental policy objectives. On the basis of this observation we suggest that *a larger policy scope* is crucial in order to achieve a larger resonance between alternative discourses in public space and its consideration in the collective decision making procedures of empowered space for it draws in new interests and goals to which practices can contribute.

A second mechanism that might explain why alternative practices are denied relevance, is epistemic in nature and relates to the knowledge of actors involved in collective (and individual) decision making processes. It entails that, when problems are discussed in a political forum, actors tend to silently re-enact the dominant way of thinking, *if* alternative discourses are not *explicitly* introduced.

For instance, with regard to the dialogue days - even given the fact that the participatory innovation discourse is well documented in literature, articulated in (some parts of) empowered space (for instance in the emergence of the European Innovation Partnerships, see also chapter 3) and in public space (see chapter 6), no-one explicitly utilized or referred to the participatory discourse in the deliberation or evaluation of the policy outcomes.

On the basis of our analysis it is not entirely clear if the cabinet has actively and consciously prevented farmer agency to become part of the policy actions or failed to do so by routine. What *is* clear is that some of the participants - both farmers and experts- did ascribe to and advocate participatory innovation *solutions*, that never made it to the outcomes. However, instead of consciously articulating the relevance of the participatory innovation discourse in order to hold the Cabinet accountable, these very participants disengaged in the process altogether, drifting to a more familiar skepticism towards the state.¹⁰²

Given this lack of awareness of a specific discourse, more efficient transmission of discourses might here depend on tackling the poor relationship between practitioners and the agricultural research community. Up to date, there is a gap between an international research community that has produced an abundance of literature on the potentialities of emerging discourses and a constituency of agricultural practitioners who are not familiar with the insight and arguments underlying that literature and research. Social science units might be crucial in setting up appropriate research projects that enable such discursive engagement across societal groups.

A third potential mechanism is the failure to tackle what could be called 'discursive lock-ins', that is, the lack of openness to re-consider the discursive contours of existing concepts, tools, policy measures, etc. This also relates to the Deweyian perspective on the intrinsic contingency of political concepts and his ideas on how concepts are the products of addressing solutions in a specific era of time (see 4.2.). Indeed most of the concepts that guide the communication

¹⁰² The participating farmers from ABS performed a short protest action: A 'Sinterklaas' handed over an 'empty box' to the minister of agriculture.

between applied research, farmer advisory services, policy and farmer constituencies is still dominated by a series of concepts that were relevant in the productivist era. These kinds of tools and concepts were developed in times when agricultural markets and prices were much more predictable (e.g. less price volatility, e.g. the so-called hog-cycle) and the role of the state was more prominent, and might now be in need for re-consideration. In chapter 6, we gave the example of key performing indicators, which is, as such, a good way to help farmers in orientating their business, but, at the same time, a tool which largely pre-supposes that knowledge about which decisions to make can be generated in abstraction of the farmer's individual cognition and context. Other examples are concepts such as 'end production value', 'average farmer income' and 'solvability', which dominate policy reports. Effective transmission of alternative discourses might depend on the development of new agricultural concepts that are more closely aligned with the effects of an increasingly more liberalized market and the need for farmers to create added value, which are reflected in the discourses of neo-liberalism and multifunctionality. For instance, concepts such as 'social capital' or 'value proposition' might be useful to assess if farmers are or are not increasingly adopting a stronger decision support environment or relationship with other supply chain actors (see also 8.2.3. on the need for deliberative space.)

All three of the mechanisms (lack of shifting views between agricultural practices, lack of awareness on discourses, discursive lock-ins) can be related to a phenomenon we could call 'the dominance of the real': the tendency to prefer (support to) what is already well known and established in practice. In literature this is also referred to as the paradox of embedded agency (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Garud et al., 2007; Grin, 2014).¹⁰³ Whether we speak of agricultural practice, political practice or (agricultural) research practice, in each case actors

¹⁰³ The paradox of embedded agency is put succinctly by Garud et al., 2009: "*The theoretical puzzle is as follows: if actors are embedded in an institutional field and subject to regulative, normative and cognitive processes that structure their cognitions, define their interests and produce their identities, how are they able to envision new practices and then subsequently get others to adopt them? Dominant actors in a given field may have the power to force change but often lack the motivation; while peripheral players may have the incentive to create and champion new practices, but often lack the power to change institutions (references omitted)*" (9).

tend to be insufficiently confronted or motivated to consider alternative discourses and their related practices.

As such this might not be an astonishing conclusion, but more remarkable is that discursive representation fosters a new way of addressing the paradox of embedded agency. When actors from empowered space are systematically and publicly confronted with alternative discourses they would need to politically include and account for the practices that concur with those discourses. In this respect, discursive representation opens a starting point to address the *dominance of the real* from a Deweyian perspective. Because alternative practices are discussed in an interaction between public and empowered space (rather than/in addition to an agenda setting based on elite deliberation), alternative practices are more likely to become discussed by both policy makers and practitioners which is a first step to move towards a ‘conjoint communicated experience’, that is, changing behavior on the basis of an increased interaction across practices. In chapter 5 we introduced this as the emancipatory educative setting, that is, the interaction between societal groups that would otherwise not meet, as a prerequisite to democracy. From a Deweyian perspective, such steps might be crucial to break the *dominance of the real*: doctors and health officers visiting care farms, subsidies for cooperation between intensive and polyculture agriculture, researchers and policy makers (administration) engaging in action research, all these types of initiatives could lead to new conceptions of practices and concepts of innovation. The perhaps utopic sounding nature of this Deweyian ambition might be more akin to the contemporary culture of the division of labor than to its practical or intrinsic impossibility.

8.2.2. DISCURSIVE ENACTMENTS BETWEEN POLITICAL ACTORS (SRQ2)

What does this study now tell us about how actors discursively interact within a context of institutional ambiguity?

First of all, the NFF case confirms Hajer’s assumptions about a double dynamic between a meaning-making (substantive) and rule-making (procedural) dimension. If governance participants want to succeed in negotiating trust and credibility to jointly establish a more mature and stable political space (thereby increasing authority and decreasing institutional ambiguity), they need to bring

about synergies between procedural norms and the production of meaning and content (related to the domain or issue at hand).

In the NFF, actors articulated substantive discourses about sustainable development for the agro-food system, that is, there were intricate discussions about how particular (sustainable) solutions could be connected to particular (sustainability) problems. This openness to meaning-making was related to the prominence of the topic of sustainable development as a legitimate social and political challenge. As such, the political importance attached to sustainable development justified an in depth discussion and deliberation, also making it hard to apply the neo-corporatist rule of depoliticization (i.e. doubting whether there is a sustainability problem to begin with). This confirms Hajers' general contention that important public political problems open up an institutional void.

But also procedural discourses were articulated in the NFF. Several political scripts and assumptions about political representation were used as reference points to make sense of what should be done, who had the right to speak and how political outcomes should be interpreted. Consistent with the rationale of the institutional void, it was the lack of consensus on the rules of the game, that opened the possibility to reflect on the potentialities of democratic storylines in the first place. In the dialogue days, for instance, there was no such lack of consensus (actors assumed to be handling under a business as usual scenario) which might also have been an important reason why there was no reflexivity on the long term relevance of the dialogue days as an institutional component of the agricultural policy domain (see also 8.4).

This study also shows that alternative discourses about democracy and governance are not merely external, academic, utopian or abstract normative conceptualizations of how politics ought to work but 'sets of scripts' that are effectively used by political actors to help guide them to organize political practice. In the NFF, for instance, it were ideas related to transition governance that initiated the attempt to couple several distinct future images (or discourses) to a state-supported network for innovation. The scripts and representative claims that were articulated by the interest group actors, clearly belonged to the (overlapping) democratic models of consociationalism and neo-corporatism. Furthermore, we argued that the additional vantage point of discursive

representation, which ties the deliberative aspect of the NFF 'transition arenas' with the democratic relevance of its outcomes, would have helped the participants in further legitimizing what was being done within the NFF governance process. This illustrates that discourses on democracy and governance are (1) actively used by actors to organize political processes and (2) can serve as a means to make sense of what political actors are doing in a context of institutional ambiguity. In chapter 7 we also illustrated how discursive representation can strengthen transition management (7.5.2.).

A condition that appeared to be crucial in the successful resolution of an institutional void is engagement across discourses and some sense of mutual recognition of the contending parties' discursive positions. When actors do not take into account all those discourses that are held or articulated within the sites of a political process operating under the conditions of an institutional void, resistance is likely to result in some form. Discursive legitimacy is thus a crucial mechanism to engage different political actors and holding them aboard. These considerations seem to be true both from a strategic as well as from a deliberative point of view (cf. Habermasian distinction between strategic and communicative action). From a strategic point of view, actors can try to foster or impede the achievement of discursive legitimacy depending on whether or not they prefer the continuance towards a more mature political space. From a deliberative point of view, it is necessary that all actors are sufficiently aware of the discourses (and thus values, expectations, beliefs, etc.) of the co-participants, so that they will not unknowingly orientate key decisions without taking into account alternative discourses.

To sum up, we do believe to have shown that discursive enactments within an institutional void shape the potential for the coming about of new political spaces. More precisely, an institutional void seems to enable a temporary and unstable political space in which a hybrid group of actors can become engaged and which has the potential to lead to a more established and legitimate political space which tackles societal problems in qualitatively different ways. Our study also suggests that an institutional void can in fact lead to such more stable political spaces, provided that at least three conditions are fulfilled: (1) that actors are sufficiently expert in the formulation of potential solutions, (2) that the involved actors are sufficiently empowered to influence social and political

outcomes in a specific domain and (3) that actors are able to combine established and new ways of doing politics.

8.2.3. HOW DOES AUTHORITY DEAL WITH CONTENDING DISCOURSES AND COMMUNICATIVE POWER IN THE POLITICAL PROCESSES OF THE AGRO-FOOD POLICY DOMAIN? (SRQ3)

In 2.2.2. we argued that the concept of communicative power can help us to understand the articulation of discourses as a political phenomenon of power. In this respect, power is not about specific political actors that have influence over other actors but about how ideas can become socially magnified and influence empowered space. For instance, a specific discourse can become so inescapable that a minister cannot longer ignore its power. Of course, both institutional conditions (cf. Habermas' *administrative power*) as well as particular actors within empowered space will be able to delimit and constrain the communicative power of discourses.

The case of the NFF illustrates how communicative power can first be generated and subsequently constrained throughout a political process. Within the image group of the NFF, three discourses were explored extensively by knowledgeable and influential actors. Although there was disagreement on the desired food system amongst the members of the image group, there was a mutual respect for each of the discourses as well as a willingness to externally communicate its underlying rationales, values and practices. The interest groups nevertheless prevented this communicative power from becoming transmitted to both public and empowered space: the article in the specialized press, the planned event to communicate the discourses to the 'captains of society', the idea to let the participants communicate the discourses within their proper organizations, all these avenues of communication were blocked by empowered space.

It is clear from the analysis in 8.1.2. that the role of both the BB as well as the Cabinet had been crucial in the act of preventing the communicative power of the discourses within the NFF to become more socially dispersed. Although in the aftermath of the NFF some communicative power reached the Parliament,

the relevance of the discourses soon faded. The Administration of Agriculture who had clearly more openly welcomed both the discourse of transition as well as the constructivist approach towards Sustainable Development (i.e., that Sustainable Development is a normatively contested concept that can be interpreted in a various amount of legitimate ways, see 8.1.2.) was clearly recalled by the Cabinet as can be exemplified by the sudden shift within the LARA report and the absence of the Administration (i.e. its Research Department) in the facilitation of the Transformation project. The fact that the interest groups (BB and FEVIA) quite easily received ample resources to organize a governance process where they took the lead, can be considered as a consequence of the close ties Cabinet and farmer organizations have in the neo-corporatist arrangement (cf. Chapter 3). This clearly illustrates a mechanism of positional power, consistent with the more general observation that Ministerial Cabinets are one of the most authoritative institutions in Belgian politics (Deschouwer, 2009; Walgrave and Dejaeghere, 2016).

But besides positional power what other mechanisms are at play in how empowered space deals with the contestation of various discourses in the public sphere?

One apparent mechanism by which empowered space seems to be able to deal with the contestation of discourses in the public sphere, is constituted by the frequent use of the principle of proportionality. This does not concern proportionality at the electoral level, but a principle of distributed proportionality related to neo-corporatist arrangements. It is related to what the German political scientist Lehmbruch (1967) had called *Proporzdemokratie*: the practice of distributing political resources according to the size of societal or socio-political subgroups. In the Flemish agro-food policy domain it is adopted at various levels. In chapter 3 we saw how it is used as a principle to divide resources for the Flemish agricultural policy between the more relevant 'agro-food valley' (i.e. export-orientated and vertically integrated agriculture) and the marginal alternatives such as organic farming, CSA, agroecology and multifunctional agriculture. In chapter 6 we saw it was used to consider self-mixing as relevant for a small group of 'exceptional' farmers and working with feed companies relevant for the large group of 'regular' farmers, hence leading to the exclusion of self-mixing in the policy outcomes of the dialogue days. In

chapter 7, finally, we saw how it was used by the interest group representatives to claim that sustainability governance should focus pre-dominantly on conventional practice and its (assumed) concordant discourse of ecological modernization and that only marginal sustainability gains could be expected from non-conventional practices. From a perspective of policy rationality, it is highly remarkable that this mechanism is not questioned in those particular cases. There are several arguments that can be advanced to support this claim.

First, when empowered space supports new practices that are related to e.g. the neo-liberal and productivist discourses such as the incentive to embark on the futures market or investments in air washers, resources *are* linked to a desired outcome of convincing a dominant group that did *not* use that practice before. In these instances, government support for new practices is thus not related to the argument of proportional representation. Put more concretely, if, for instance, a majority of farmers is not using a specific technology it is desirable to invest in strategies to make farmer adopt that technology but if a majority of farmers is not using agro-ecological techniques, this is an indication that agro-ecology is a marginal and less important phenomenon. This indicates that the neo-corporatist arrangement does not reason in terms of supporting specific agricultural practices but in terms of supporting specific agricultural discourses. Communicative power is thus constrained.

Second, the principle of proportionality does not take into account the diversity of discourses farmers are willing to ascribe to - both before and after deliberation - and that can guide them in the particular contexts and choices they are facing. As mentioned in chapter 7 the principle of proportionality is often adopted to re-enforce an unjustified dichotomy between those that join the status quo and those that want to make radical changes in the system. But this reference to a theory of change on the macro-level (evolution-revolution, regime-niche) rather reflects the politics of discursive struggle within empowered space than the primary concerns of farmers, the latter who are predominantly concerned with the future of their farming activities. This farmer concern can also be further illustrated on a macro-level. Currently, the average age of Flemish farmers is above 50, and less than 15 percent of those farmers above 50 have secured a successor for his/her farm (LARA, 2012). Given the current less favorable conditions for farming in general, this means that a

majority of farmers is reflecting on how future farming will take form and is thus open to all kind of scenario's and discourses. This warrants a more deliberative process, where farmers are actively engaged in several discourses and where resources that enable them to explore and develop those discourses in practice are supported by the state. Only *after* such a process of deliberative consultation, will it become clear how a government can most adequately support agricultural practice.

We like to end this section with a quote from a pig farmer, which illustrates succinctly why farmers are in need for a deliberative space:

“Education is crucial. [...] We are coming from a different agricultural policy. Do you know the treaty of Rome? No more hunger, no more war. Both are realized. The challenge formulated back then was to [...] assure sufficient, affordable food and a sufficient income for the farmer. It worked out well. With the familiar milk lakes and butter mountains as a consequence in the 1980s. This has now evolved towards a fully market orientated system. Why am I telling this: we are all – including myself – trained as technicians – focused on production. We need to start thinking economically, thinking in terms of a project. That is something we need to do much more. To learn how to put a vision on paper. You need to get to know your raison d’ être.” (Pig farmer X, 2014)

8.2.4. WHAT ARE THE POTENTIALITIES OF DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION IN THE AGRO-FOOD POLICY DOMAIN? (MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION)

We are now in the position to answer the main research question about the potential of discursive representation. We think to have shown that discursive representation is both an interesting analytical lens as well as a relevant approach and theory that can potentially contribute to the effectiveness and democratic quality of the agro-food policy domain. But what can we now say about the potentialities to effectively integrate discursive representation as an institutional component in the Flemish agro-food policy domain?

Based on the discussion of the findings of the empirical investigation we can conclude that in each case different dimensions of discursive representation are

at play. Table 8.1. synthesizes the difference and similarities of the cases along the dimensions of ‘deliberation’, ‘introduction of (alternative) discourses’, ‘reflexivity on the rules of the game’, ‘discourse topicality’ and ‘discourse type’.

	Attempt to introduce a deliberative process	Attempt to introduce alternative discourses	Clear form of reflexivity on the rules of the game	Discourse Topicality	Discourse type
Case I farm education	No	No	n/a	agriculture	substantive
Case II dialogue days pig farming	Yes	No	No	innovation	procedural
Case III NFF	Yes	Yes	Yes	sustainable development and democracy	substantive and procedural

Table 8.1. Cross-case perspective of the case studies.

Based on these findings, we can argue that discursive representation can be applied in several stages of a collective decision making process.

In a first stage, discursive representation enables the facilitation of a process of transmission. Especially when a discursive space seems to be dominated by a limited amount of discourses and the absence of deliberative (or indeed non-deliberative) mechanisms to force a consideration of alternative discourses, it becomes relevant to foster transmission. In this research, a discourse analytical approach proved to be one way in order to bring in new discourses as an object of deliberation and as a potential impetus towards social and political legitimacy of new practices.

A second stage is characterized by a situation in which a deliberative process of some sort is being organized but there is no tendency to scrutinize the process and its outcomes from a discursive perspective. The absence of alternative discourses than results in the perceived irrelevance to ensure discursive legitimacy or to reflect on the long-term an institutional relevance of the

deliberative process (cf. reflexivity on the rules of the game). In terms of discursive representation, this can amongst other be mediated by establishing relational accountability, that is, some form of continuous mediation between the outcomes of the deliberative process and the way in which those outcomes are used to address the problems of those affected. The desired effects of relational accountability would then entail that that a series of new discourses emerge from the learning setting between public and empowered space it aims to foster.

A third stage is characterized by the presence of deliberation, conscious articulation of discourses as well as a form of reflexivity on the rules of the game. In this stage, it becomes somewhat more probable that discursive representation is articulated, defended and performed as a democratic theory. When actors from public or empowered space meet in a context of governance there can be a certain willingness to consider alternative democratic storylines. In cases where governance actors are articulating contending discourses or searching for solutions by engaging actors from policy, market and civil society (for instance in the case of sustainability challenges, cf. Meadowcraft, 2007) discursive representation is particularly promising because it allows to connect discursive outcomes ('images', 'visions', 'solutions', 'innovation paths', etc.) with a democratic procedure (cf. Chapter 7).

A remarkable conclusion is that discursive representation is not just text-book theory but a political orientation that captures part of ongoing political practice. The case of the NFF shows that political attempts of discursive representation are being enacted, without the performing actors necessarily describing this in those theoretical terms. We argued that, although the entire NFF project was framed within the theory and methodology of transition management, its chief aims can also be understood in terms of discursive representation. The aim to establish a group of stakeholders to develop a series of images of the agro-food system to be considered as consequential outcomes, is essentially a practice of discursive representation. The goal to communicate and discuss these substantive outcomes - sustainability discourses and their corresponding strategies - with a larger group of stakeholders, can be associated with the mechanisms of transmission and discursive accountability. The final aim to set

up a government-supported network, where plans of action are based on the resulting images and related 'transition paths', can be seen as a political forum with similar features as Dryzek's chamber of discourses.

But although this study has been able to positively shed light on the potentialities of discursive representation, we here want to emphasize that the institutional and cultural conditions do not make it straightforward to integrate this as a democratic innovation. In the remainder of this section we will address to what extent the existing institutional arrangement in the Flemish agro-food policy domain is complementary or conflictive with discursive representation. In 8.4., we will formulate a political scenario aimed at presenting one form of reconciliation between the established system and a deliberative system.

To elaborate on the institutional context, we can return to Dryzek's concept of deliberative capacity that we have introduced in chapter 2. Deliberative capacity is defined as the extent to which a particular political arena or system exhibits the structure to host deliberation that is authentic, inclusive and consequential (Dryzek, 2009). Based on our findings, what can now be said about the deliberative capacity of the Flemish agro-food policy domain?

First, in Flanders, the political system related to agriculture is able to hoist authentic and inclusive deliberation, which was the case in the NFF where stakeholders from different backgrounds were able to discuss in a context of mutual respect. Indeed, the involved actors (NGOs, interest groups, academics, policy makers, consultants) were able to mobilize a variety of hybrid and capable actors to deliberate about a series of relevant problems and solutions in the agro-food system. Also the Flemish Administration has proven to be able to craft a thorough preparation in terms of presenting relevant questions in fostering a fertile debate. Likewise, the cabinet has (at times) acknowledged the importance of deliberation and a minister seems to have a significant degree of freedom and authority to implement trajectories of governance. These observations are promising in terms of integrating deliberative governance.

However, the main obstacle in terms of increasing deliberative capacity seems to be that outcomes of deliberative processes are not consequential. They are not considered as full political outcomes: both in the dialogue days as well as the NFF, the deliberative outcomes were not seriously considered as guidelines for

policy making. What might be potential explanations for this lack in consequential deliberation?

One kind of argument that has been referred to by stakeholders themselves (e.g. farmers participating in the NFF, interview 2015), is that European agricultural policy determines most of the decisions that are being made. But as we have shown in chapter 3, the Flemish agricultural policy still has a substantive freedom in determining how and under which conditions European policy is implemented. Furthermore, the Flemish government has got its own proper resources (e.g. agricultural research system, financial resources) as well as authority (e.g. setting up a supply chain arbitrage, measures of control, etc.) to implement policy measures that are consistent with new (combinations of) discourse and practice. Therefore, a lack of consequential deliberative processes can be more readily understood vis-à-vis an incoherence in terms of the rules of the game. This thesis has shown there to be tensions between the arrangement of discursive representation (belonging to the model of deliberative democracy) and the rules of the neo-corporatist arrangement. We elaborate somewhat more on this.

As table 8.2. below indicates, the structure of a neo-corporatist arrangement stands in sharp contrast with the assumptions underlying deliberative democracy. In this respect, we want to point out some of the key differences between the neo-corporatist arrangement and discursive representation.

A neo-corporatist arrangement is a structured and rigid way of dealing with interests in which few interest groups present singular positions. In a process of negotiation it is often perceived as a weakness to present different alternatives¹⁰⁴, and pre-defined positions are often brought to the table without

¹⁰⁴ Informative in this respect is the following quote of the ex-president of the BB (2008-2015) arguing the importance and rationale of defending singular standpoints at the negotiation table: *"I have been active for a long time in government organizations. I was the director of the food safety agency in Belgium and I was the chief of staff of the agricultural minister. And when I had to discuss with the Farmers lobby, I always liked it when they were divided. When they were divided, I always won, as a government official.. When they were united, it was very difficult. What I want to say today is that we have to work together amongst the different farmer organizations.* (Ex-president of the BB, speech at the 2010 IFAJ annual congress, retrieved on-line

the intention to attain engagement across discourses or make integrative changes. These 'politics of accommodation' leave few room for particular problems to be scrutinized from a diversity of discourses in the context of policy making. For instance, when farmer organizations sit together on beforehand to delineate a common position in order to claim a stronger representativeness, interesting perspectives that might have emerged in the pre-decisional process (e.g. amongst several members of the farmer organization, at the study department or in one of the associations of the farmer organization) are in risk of getting lost and not become addressed within the empowered consultation with the government.

Neo-corporatism's underlying model of functional representation, then, still prevalent in Belgium as a condition to get access to political arenas and policy-making procedures (cf. chapter 3 and chapter 7), stands in contrast with the epistemic assumptions of discursive representation. In a deliberative democratic model, engaging expertise is primarily seen in terms of increasing the quality of decision making and hence not restricted by those representatives that are affiliated with a member-based and territorially dispersed organization.

The related principle of proportional representation - which is applied as a means to allocate policy priorities (e.g. in the current policy agreement with the emphasis on dominant and niche types of agriculture) as well as institutional power (e.g. composition of the SALV), runs counter with the belief in a rationality of policy making related to discursive representation¹⁰⁵ (see 2.1.) In a neo-corporatist arrangement, substantive positions or political standpoints¹⁰⁶ are

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tx0UuXQo50c>). As mentioned in chapter 3, the two largest farmer organizations BB and ABS also pre-determine singular standpoints on issues such as climate change, the environment and spatial planning.

¹⁰⁵ I.e. in order to have an optimally informed opinion all relevant positions need to be taken into account.

¹⁰⁶ Political standpoints in the most general sense as positions on what would be best to address a particular problem, support a particular social groups, etc.

most often justified in terms of their representativeness: when a particular position is articulated by an organization that is representative for a particular constituency, this position has more political weight.¹⁰⁷ From the perspective of discursive representation, it is conceived as a risk to base the allocation of resources or quality of policy proposals on the mere ground that a standpoint is claimed by a representative of an organization with a large number of members.

Another point of divergence is related to the level at which political consultation takes place. In a neo-corporatist arrangement consultation takes place at the elite level. In discursive representation, it is assumed that deliberation within the public sphere as well as deliberation between public and empowered space are crucial to increase the democratic quality and effectiveness of collective decision making procedures. For instance, in chapter 7, we indicated that the relative dominance of ecological modernization over other sustainability strategies (de-commodification, sufficiency) was not substantiated by deliberative assent from the farmer constituency. A deliberative engagement with the farmer constituency could however result in a more informed scrutiny about farmer's actual expectations and strategies, constituting a counterbalance to more effectively coordinate the allocation of resources. This illustrates the contrast between the rule of elite deliberation (also engrained in the consociationalist tradition) and the rule of public legitimacy.

The above shows there to be significant tensions between the current neo-corporatist model of policy making and the democratic innovation of discursive representation. In a very strict sense, the theory of discursive representation even entails that representatives become entirely independent from a particular constituency. Discursive representatives represent discourses and are loyal to that discourse, not to a specific organization of constituency (See e.g. Dryzek, 2010). The role of interest groups would then, accordingly, become limited: for instance as 'bystanders', 'information providers' and 'process legitimizers'

¹⁰⁷ Again, we can here refer to a recent quote from the farmer organization BB to illustrate how the principle of proportional representation is defended: "*If BB takes a position, than this is supported by a democratic policy making procedure. This is not the case for some of the positions of particular would-be intellectuals or ideologists.* (Vilt, 2010).

(Hendriks, 2002). In this thesis, however, we wish to take a far more conciliatory position on the relation between the existing role of interest groups and the potentialities of discursive representation (see the political scenario in 8.4.). Based on our findings, we do think that discursive representation harbors possibilities to strengthen the effectiveness and quality of decision making and reveal new interests that are to the benefit of all participating actors.¹⁰⁸

In the final sections of this chapter we address this in detail by articulating a series of suggestions towards the integration of discursive representation in the agro-food policy domain (8.3), presenting a political scenario for discursive representation (8.4.) and formulating some future avenues for research (8.5.).

¹⁰⁸ Indeed it would be inconsistent with the practice of discursive legitimacy to expect that existing insituational arrangements would not be resistant to political change that does not take into account existing discourse and practice.

POLITICAL MODEL	NEO CORPORATISM	DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY
Resources		
<u>information exchange</u>	government - interest groups	government – stakeholders – public space
<u>status</u>	attributed to specific socio-economic actors	based on political legitimacy
<u>policy implementation</u>	disciplining members	relational accountability
Rules		
<u>decision making</u>	non-integrative consensus, accomodation, negotiation	meta-consensus, integrative negotiation, deliberation
<u>inclusiveness deliberation</u>	elite deliberation	interaction between empowered and public space
<u>knowlegde system</u>	Evidence based, positivist	plural, complex, uncertainty, intepretive
<u>function of discourses</u>	depolitisation of debate, discursive mono-dimensionality, hegemonic	unearthing contradictions
<u>transparency</u>	closed	alternately open and closed
Discourse		
<u>theory of political change</u>	incremental	incremental
<u>innovation</u>	linear innovation	open to all 'relevant' discourses
<u>sustainability</u>	ecological modernization	open to all 'relevant' discourses
<u>agriculture</u>	productivism, neo-liberalism, multifunctionality (weak)	open to all 'relevant' discourses
Practice of representation		
<u>model of representation</u>	functional representation, proportional representation	discursive representation
<u>object of representation</u>	social groups	discourses

Table 8.2. Key differences between the neo-corporatist model and the discursive representation -deliberative democracy model

8.3. SUGGESTIONS TOWARDS FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Based on our findings and consistent with the idea of supporting the agro-food domain with accommodating contending discourses about agriculture, sustainability and innovation, we offer some tentative ideas. Before addressing these ideas it is important to state the following. Because this thesis has not investigated ongoing activities in the public space related to Flemish agriculture, nor within or without the realms of farmer organizations, potential avenues of deliberation might be overlooked. The suggestions here are thus only a first attempt to integrate some elements of discursive representation and deliberative democracy in the Flemish agro-food domain. Indeed, a deliberative process about how to increase the deliberative capacity of the system might be most consistent with the theoretical and democratic assumptions of this thesis.

We structure our suggestions along the lines of some of the key players and activities in the agro-food policy domain.

8.3.1. STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

Ad-hoc workings groups

Engagement across discourses might bring in new solutions that might not otherwise have been considered. A deliberative process which brings in various discourses might result in new solutions that can meet the interests of both sides better than first imagined (Dryzek and Stevenson, 2014). For instance, ad-hoc working groups could be designed in such a way that several discourses are systematically considered. One concrete example is the current process of the implementation of the Natura 2000 special areas of conservation, which confront Flanders with a political and policy making process in which the interests of nature conservation and farming activities are in conflict. Although a lot of participatory and preparatory work has been done, the government now seems to favor an approach in which the contending positions of the stakeholders involved are merely emulated. The core focus of the government is currently on establishing a list with emission reducing technologies and techniques in order to allow farm business that are located in environmentally sensitive areas to cope with the need for reduction. This basically re-iterates a strict division

between nature conservation and growth-orientated (productivist) agriculture. As such, in terms of sustainability, there can be hardly made any objection against solutions that opt for strategies based on end-of-pipe resolutions, given that contextual conditions are favorable.¹⁰⁹ The point here is, however, that alternative solutions as well as alternative expectations and discursive positions of the involved actors (farmers) and interests (agriculture, nature) are excluded from the policy making process. One thus implicitly assumes that farmers are not interested in alternative solutions such as the development of new business models based on agro-ecological innovations or diversification to less intensive forms of agriculture. What is remarkable is that the research community of the Flemish government (ILVO in cooperation with the Flemish Land Agency, the administration responsible for managing open space in Flanders) has already developed a participatory tool that allows to map different layers to value land, allowing for a contextual and transparent decision making process with all stakeholders involved (see Kerselaers et al., 2015). Such a tool could foster a process of discursive representation by improving the quality of decision making and including the various preferences of the actors involved. These processes could be performed in a local context, where discursive representation allows reflection on the position of all local stakeholders in relation to all relevant solutions.

Sector-wide problem solving.

For problems that are not readily addressed within the market¹¹⁰ or the neo-corporatist consult, processes of relational accountability might be a way to address problems from a diversity of discourses. This is for instance the case when various actors within a particular vertical supply chain do not succeed in

¹⁰⁹ That is, farmers willing and able to make investments in new technologies and stable equipment and the continuance of their agricultural focus (e.g. dairy farming) as well as beneficial environmental conditions.

¹¹⁰ Those issues which cannot be readily solved in the competitive realm of 'the market' can sometimes be more readily solved in 'the forum' (cf. Bohman, 1998).

fostering relations of trust. Here, it can be important that a state (or potentially another actor from empowered space) facilitates a deliberative setting in which these trust relations can be addressed and lead to measures or relational shifts that foster better forms of cooperation. But problem-solving deliberation is also interesting in cases that are challenges faced by an entire sector, such as, for instance the need to find solutions to the environmental and economic impact of imported proteins for feed.¹¹¹

By repeating dialogue days at fixed intervals problem solving might be addressed in a cost-efficient and effective way. Administrations and researchers from the agro-food policy domain can bring in expertise via other ways than reports and brochures but by targeted interventions and by synthesizing and compiling outcomes from interpersonal discussion. Ideas can be brought back to the policy domain where they can either (1) be an enriched impetus to co-design policy measures or (2) become further addressed in working groups in which practitioners are involved.

8.3.2. GOVERNMENT

Democratic reflexivity

We discussed how a more reflective stance vis-à-vis the democratic model underlying governance could lead to a more transparent consideration about the role and legitimacy of governance in the larger political system. A consistent recommendation would then be that a government (cabinet, administration, parliamentary commissions) thinks through how it might address both the political relevance and outcomes of deliberative governance. Indeed, our study suggests that governmental agencies intuitively acknowledge the relevance of deliberative governance but never systematically address its potentials. Processes such as e.g. the NFF could be evaluated from the perspective of democratic reflexivity, reflecting the contention that shifting conditions of a democracy are in need of explicit consideration rather than a 'natural' evolution.

¹¹¹ Cf. Chapter 6. It is remarkable that such a sector-wide topic is only addressed by the feed company representatives and not by e.g. farmers.

Learning effects should thus enable a political system to evaluate the potentialities of governance. This thesis is one small contribution towards initiating such a debate.

Broadening the scope of policy objectives

As we have seen emerging agricultural practice is often considered from a rather narrow set of discourses. One way of opening up the relevance of agricultural practice might be to broaden the scope of policy objectives to which a specific practice can be connected. For instance, instead of considering multifunctional agriculture as an activity that is exclusively coupled to traditional agricultural policies such as income support (general payment programmes) or market regulation, the outcomes of multifunctional agriculture (care farming, ecological management, education, agro-tourism) could be linked to policy objectives in non-agriculture policy domains such as health, education and spatial planning. These types of connections might allow for both a more productive dialogue between different departments and their related stakeholders as well as lead to a financial re-appreciation of what farmers are doing in addition to the mere production of food. Although there is a budding literature about the wide societal benefits of agriculture (related to health, nature, social cohesions, etc.), in practice these connections are rarely explored. These types of concerns would seem to be in the interest of the farming constituency as a whole.

Innovative innovation networks.

The recent discursive (until now largely rhetorical) shift towards a more participatory form of innovation, could be strengthened by devising several new types of innovation networks. Although current budgets are absolutely disproportionate with the potentials of participatory innovation¹¹², the budgets to make it proportionate and effective might not at all be that large. As argued in chapter 5, organizing an emancipatory and deliberative setting does not entail any excessive costs. Minor shifts within budgets could suffice in order to achieve new impulses for innovation. Several types of networks could be set up.

¹¹² Cf. Chapter 3. It is striking that only a budget of 150.000 euro is granted to the EIP.

One type of network could aim to foster experimentation with hybrid configurations between sectors, agricultural practices and other societal actors. Consistent with the emancipatory setting introduced in chapter 5, these innovation networks could organize interactions between actors that would otherwise not meet. The network could organize interactions at different settings with different stakeholders from public and empowered space. As indicated in 8.2.3., the polarization between so-called 'regime' and 'niche' farmers is likely to be a discursive struggle at the top than it is a strict reality on the field. A cooperation between a conventional and CSA farmer, integration of organic farming methods in conventional agriculture, cooperation between local retailers and producer organizations, school-to-farm networks, cooperation between arable farmers and pig farmers. A network which enables such cross-fertilization could take many forms. Up to date, however, a lot of these social possibilities are not valued or even considered reasonable because they do not fit the dichotomous lines that are discursively reproduced by the principle of proportional representation (8.2.3.).

With regard to innovation networks for farmers, inspiration could also be drawn from the Dutch regional innovation network LIB (*Landbouw Innovatie Brabant*) supported by the local government, farmer organization and academic experts. Interesting for the Flemish case are two characteristics of this network. First, there is a broad discursive framing of what can be considered as an innovation. The network includes three kinds of innovations: (1) sustainability innovations in a growth-orientated and intensive agriculture (2) broadening activities that contribute to societal challenges and (3) new product-market combinations. Second, the networks provides resources (paid time, part of project costs) for bringing together actors from different networks and for deliberation about different innovation perspectives and ideas (LIB, 2015).

To sum up, what seems to be lacking in the Flemish policy rationale is the understanding to organize and support a pre-competitive and public space in which farmers can operate in an environment of knowledge exchange and idea generation. Even if the dominant EU rationale on agricultural support is still justified by the observation that most farms are still characterized by family labor, have low staffing, low R & D possibilities and thus limited power in the chain, agricultural support is still almost exclusively (see 3.4.2.) interpreted in

terms of material investment support. Resources for immaterial investments would need to be considered such as the facilitation of networking activities and two-way knowledge exchange in order to increase social capital, innovation capacity and policy participation. This could be done by:

- (1) devolving part of the CAP material investment support to immaterial investment support such as the establishment of farmer-to-farmer networks.
- (2) connecting farmers to networks and ongoing activities of researchers and policy makers in order to support efficient agenda-setting.

Broadening, disseminating and activating debate in the public sphere

Up to date, interesting debates about the role and future of agriculture, about potential solutions and issues related to market, society, environment, politics, etc. are far too often restricted to (parts of) empowered space and the (mostly specialized) media.

The parliament, for instance, addresses societal issues and organizes interesting debates but these hardly foster any discussions in the various public and empowered sites of the agro-food policy domain. The content of parliamentary debates could be amplified and discussed by the constituencies themselves and by actors involved in agriculture (e.g. researchers, consultants). Topics of direct relevance for the affected such as the role of scale enlargement, the role of urban agriculture, actions to tackle the pig farming crisis and the future of the VLIF could be discussed in the public sphere.

We can further illustrate this need for broadening the debate with an example. In the current agricultural discourse of the cabinet (as defined in the policy agreement of the Flemish government and the policy note of the Cabinet of Agriculture) the discourse of ecological modernization is prominent, focusing on a continuance of a growth, capital-intensive and export orientated agriculture combined with eco-efficient measures. This eco-modernist position was affirmed by representative experts in a recent parliamentary debate about the risks and challenges of scale enlargement (Flemish Parliament, 2016). Alternative strategies (e.g. local food systems, multifunctional agriculture, diversification, others) are then often mentioned as interesting but emphatically marginal

positions. The question then rises if these claims related to scale enlargement (and their proportional representation in the allocation of resources) can be legitimized by the constituency of affected persons, most notably, thus, farmers. A recent research report by Zenner (2013) published the results of a questionnaire (580 respondents) where 7 out of 10 farmers stated that scale enlargement entailed unjustified risk for farmers, almost 40 percent of the farmers thought that scale enlargement was not the only strategy and more than 70 percent agreed that power of buyers and retailers constitute a significant problem. Although these are but indications that need further deliberative assent, the above does indicate that a majority of the farming constituency does not endorse key elements of the discourse of ecological modernization, as defended by empowered space, such a strategy of growth or the idea that sustainability needs to be established within existing economic conditions (i.e. not questioning exiting power relations). The point is here not that each discourse should be given equal weight, but that the discursive balance of policy measures should not be merely a matter of elite deliberation.¹¹³

The need to broaden societal debate to the farmer constituency is even articulated by the BB. In a recent article in the member magazine of the BB, *Boer en Tuinder* one of the representatives ventures the idea to communicate the SALV debates to its members (Boer en Tuinder, 2013). In 8.4., we reflect on the position of strategic advisory councils, which could be re-thought in terms of the politics of discursive representation.

8.3.3. FARMER, FARMER ORGANIZATIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Although some of the above suggestions already hinted at the role of farmers and farmer organizations we would here like to suggest one potential way to integrate discursive representation with the organizational architecture of interest groups and one potential way to integrate discursive representation in the with the neo-corporatist consult.

¹¹³ Of course, for some type of policy measures dichotomous choices will be needed, but then, still, the quality of decision making would be significantly augmented.

One suggestion would be to complement the existing geographic and sector-based lines of political influence of the farmer organization (see 3.3.2. b) with a thematic line of influence. Topics such as climate change emerging multifunctional agrarian practices, the position vis-à-vis nature development and developing new relationships within the market are often not addressed by the members in the farmer organizations because they fall between the lines of the political topics addressed by the political representatives (e.g. MAP, Supply chain initiative). Thematic groups within the farmer organization might bring in new solutions and potential relationships that are not addressed in the neo-corporatist council, but yet have political or societal relevance. In the BB, these thematic member groups could inform the agenda of the *Bondsraad*, reviving it as a forum of substantive reflection and critical control of the Head office. Externally, these thematic groups could function as mechanism of transmission towards the state (although it is highly unlikely that the farmer organization will allow separate channels of representation).

A similar suggestion is related to the role of the farmer organizations in the neo-corporatist consult. Because often pre-defined standpoints are brought to the table (cf. 8.2.3.) and are thus only contrasted with the expertise of the administration, a third stream of 'alternatives' could be instantiated by theme related think tanks that operate autonomously from any organization. Member from civil society, farmer organizations, policy, research and others could be invited to participate in this pre-decisional process. These think-tanks would need to be both operating in seclusion, with duty of discretion and without any relations of accountability (in any direction). This would then allow a concrete substantive output considered seriously as an guide for policy making at the neo-corporatist consult. Such a think-tank (third stream, chamber of discourses) would be complementary with the SALV, where member are still associated with the organizational landscape.

8.3.4. RESEARCH COMMUNITY

A first general suggestion is related to the possibility to integrate discursive plurality within research communities. Still often, one departs from a mono-discursive perspective or a researcher does not seem to reflect on the underlying discourse his research questions might be supporting or denying. A more

reflective stance, might contribute to a more effective connection between research results and practice. For instance, a researcher might be actively contributing to the technical results of a specific technology or economic tool, while he/she may at the same time have interesting ideas on how to implement or facilitate the interaction with that outcome or have particular ideas about the policy support needed. A discourse analysis might then reveal the relevance of organizing other kinds of activities or realizing how new research proposals could investigate complementary aspects.

As Hajer (2006) specifies, a discourse analysis is not confined to academic circles, but needs to be performed in relationship with the community or social group that is the object of scrutiny. When the analyst has inferred discourses from reality, respondents are other members of the same constituency (say, pig farmers or feed company consultants) need to be confronted with the outcomes as a means to enhance the credibility of the research. When confronted with the discourses, they should recognize some of its internal coherence, qualitative differences between discourses and they should be able to relate discourses to existing or plausible practices with regard to their daily practice and field of expertise. In the case on farm education we confronted a group which were active in farm education with

three educative settings (that is settings consistent with three different discourses of farm education) in a one-day workshop. Here, we framed the rationale of the meeting as a feedback moment from research to practice and had the intention to employ the various conceptions of what farm education can be and do, in a research proposal, either focusing on one (underdeveloped) discourse or a combination of discourses. The underlying idea was that a research project can investigate whether and under which conditions a particular discourse can be implemented in practice, without the need to fix anticipated results at the beginning.

This leads to a final suggestion about the need to re-orientate project calls and research project rationales towards more possibilities for idea generation, discourse analysis and deliberative processes. Here, expected outcomes would not entail any concrete innovations or tangible outcomes in terms of profitability or societal impact, but desired outcomes would be that a significant group of practitioners is engaged in a series of reflective exercises on how one relates

ongoing practices with personal positions and potential societal solutions. These kind of projects might then foster new possibilities to create future projects with more effective and broadly legitimate innovation outcomes.

8.4. Avenues for future research

In this section, we briefly touch upon some future avenues of research.

What is clearly lacking in this doctoral dissertation is the role of political parties. Although it was not the topic of this dissertation, several interviews did suggest that political parties are often wary about deliberative democracy and governance and are tended to deem their integration as rather unrealistic, for instance by referring to 'far more important' effects such as the relationship between politics and the media and electoral concerns. In fact, the relationship between deliberative democracy and political parties is a largely neglected research topic (Johnson, 2006). Given the relationship between democratic discourses and their enactment in politics, both scholarly and political scrutiny towards deliberative democratic theory might be crucial. Political parties could, for instance, re-address the importance of democratic models, such as deliberative democracy and its relationship with NC at party congresses or even in parliamentary debate. An interesting object of research would be constituted by an empirical analysis of the barriers and challenges of why political parties (and especially elected politicians) seem to be so reluctant towards alternative democratic models or democratic theory in general. Put differently, what might constitute the division of labor between political theory and practice?

Another limitation of this study was that we only brought in a specific kind of discourses, most of them related to sustainability and the potentialities of enhance cooperation. It needs to be mentioned that the discourses introduced in this thesis are not the only discourses that can be considered, nor are the potential practices associated with them considered to be exclusive or automatically better. To give one example, the discourse of financialization in agriculture (see e.g. Martin and Clapp, 2015) - which emphasizes the importance and growing role of private financial actors in supermarkets, commodity and value chains and the food system in general - has not been considered within this

thesis. Potential practices that concur with this practice are the of speculation on commodity markets (e.g. future contracts) and the integration of farms into large agro-business complexes. Future research could assess to which existent alternative discourses bring in other perspectives on agricultural development, sustainability or more specific practices within the agro-chain.

Related to the research strand of deliberative democracy a number of interesting avenues for future research in the context of the agro-food policy domain could be embarked upon. We here mention two possibilities:

The concept of meta-consensus (Niemeyer and Dryzek, 2007) could be further investigated as a procedural guideline to facilitate deliberative processes in the agro-food policy domain. Different scales ranging from the negotiations in the neo-corporatist consult to small scale innovating networks or ad hoc working groups on nature development in agricultural zones could potentially benefit by making a distinction between three types of consensus on the meta-level: (1) normative meta-consensus as agreement on the level of overarching values (e.g. we all think that agriculture should be generating a fair income for the farmer), (2) epistemic meta-consensus as agreement on how beneficial actions relate causes to effects (e.g. a fair income is provided from the market) and (3) preference consensus as agreement about what should be done (e.g. we need to support instantiate innovation project x) (Niemeyer and Dryzek, 2007).

Interesting combinations might also result between the combination of discourse analysis and mini-publics. Mini-publics should always try to address a broad range of perspectives and stakeholder selection or expert engagement can result in skewed framing (Kahane, et al., 2013). An interesting approach would be to combine insights from the theory of discursive representation with action research on mini-publics. To what extent can discourse analytical methodologies support stakeholder selections as well as expert interventions? Both type I and Type II deliberation research (cf. Chapter 2) could be conducted.

A final suggestion for future research would be related to how discursive representation can be 'traced' along the lines of discourse institutionalisation (Hajer, 1993). Based on Erjavec et. al (2015) and Hall (1993) we can reasonably assert that the process of discursive representation or the effects discourses

have on institutional change, can be brought down to three distinct aspects (stages). First, discourse is used to justify a particular policy goal or program. In the latest CAP reform, for instance, the discourse of multifunctionality was explicitly deployed and used to structure the debates (Swinnen, 2015). In this part of the political process, the key democratic principle of inclusion seems to play most, since the omission of certain discourses is – under certain conditions – a threat to understanding the full political intent of a specific policy domain. One could for instance investigate why the discourse of agro-ecology does not make it to the CAP debates. Second, plays the momentum of how a discourse is integrated into specific policy measures, that is, which policy measures are maintained, omitted or designed in accordance with the underlying assumptions of the discourses. Here an interesting question could be to what extent the selected policy measures result in the desired values, motivations and actions underlying a specific discourse. For instance, how are new CAP policy measures relate to greening affect the relationship between farmers and the environment. A third level of discourse institutionalization is constituted by the process of budget distribution, i.e. the proportionality in which each discourse has been reflected in the allocation of resources amongst the different policy measures. Here an issue of representativeness plays. An analysis might aim to reveal how discursive balance can be aligned with effectiveness of policy. All three levels of discourse institutionalization could be looked in an integrated manner, potentially enhancing insights on the deliberative capacity of a political system.

8.5. FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE : A POLITICAL SCENARIO FOR DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION IN THE FLEMISH AGRO-FOOD POLICY DOMAIN

An issue now arises about how a political system reflects on the relevance of deliberative governance for a specific policy domain. Who determines whether a governance project is considered as an ‘interesting but stand-alone experiment’ or ‘a new component for policy making procedures’? Is it the role of the parliament and political parties to actively reflect on the relevance of alternative democratic procedures? Up to date, it seems to be the cabinet (and to some extent the administration) who determines the *raison d’être* of governance initiatives.

As we have seen for the agro-food policy domain, government has an unreflective stance on governance. When an MP asks the question about the relevance of governance outcomes for the CAP (see 8.1.3), why does this not induce a more reflexive attitude within the cabinet or the larger political system? In the agro-food policy domain, several governance initiatives have been initiated since the 2000s such as e.g. DP21, On Tomorrow’s ground, the FRDO advice on a sustainable food system, the NFF, the Pig Dialogue days. It is remarkable to see that none of these initiatives have been consequential nor have they been considered from their political potentialities, i.e. as alternative and improvable ways to contribute to agricultural policy making. In the conclusions we have referred to the role of the positional power in the neo-corporatist arrangement and the friction between a deliberative and neo-corporatist arrangement. We have also tried to make sense of power as a mechanism of communicating discourses.

In this section we wish to initiate a first step towards a ‘positive’ implementation of discursive representation in the existing agro-food policy domain. To this end we will present a political scenario. Two important reservations need to be stressed. First, future research needs to be done in order to more explicitly determine the potentialities of discursive representation (see 8.5.). Second, this

thesis alone can impossibly address the concrete barriers for integrating deliberative democracy in a concrete policy domain because any thesis remains an isolated endeavor to propose a new way of looking at existing practice, whose potential uptake is largely dependent on the existing political and scientific culture.

Although this was not the topic of this dissertation, both political culture as well the scientific community seem to be impeding rather than fostering the coming about of democratic innovations. Politicians and political parties are (exceptions noted) often wary about democratic innovations and - at the most - consider deliberative democracy as a political experiment which is interesting yet marginal. To give an example, when the G1000 - a deliberative mini-panel organized in Belgium in 2012 - was addressed by the Flemish Parliament, the speaker in Parliament praised the initiative as an 'interesting experiment' and considered the potentiality of citizen panels as one potential additional stream of influence. But he also stated that the conditions for it to become a permanent political practice will depend on the participating citizens themselves (Peumans, 2012). This is highly remarkable for it assumes that the consideration of democratic innovations is a public rather than a political matter. Furthermore, democratic innovations that are occasionally introduced by politicians¹¹⁴ are often not seriously considered. At the other end of the spectrum, political scientists and political philosophers rarely engage in action research or innovative political practice consistent with their innovative ideas. Especially the discipline of political philosophy is characterized by a disinterest in social science, increasing the distance between conceptual and empirical perspectives. But also political science is often pre-occupied with being descriptive, failing to see the relevance of the normative assumptions that inevitably guide a political system.

The presented scenario is thus but one possibility that (1) would need to be further consolidated and worked out by political theorists and (2) would need to be welcomed and worked out by the political class.

¹¹⁴ In August 2015 Peter Vanvelthoven, member of the Federal Parliament e.g. advanced the idea to transform the Senate of Belgium to a permanent assembly of citizens.

Political scenario for discursive representation in the Flemish agro-food policy domain.

Summary:

The scenario has the goal to present one form of reconciliation between the established system and a deliberative system. For heuristic reasons, figure 8.1. and figure 8.2. aim at depicting the established and deliberative system, respectively. Figure 8.3. depicts a general scheme in which the two political systems are merged.

The political scenario describes in some detail how a new institutional component – an agro-food deliberative forum – can be developed in a stepwise manner. The parts in italics concern a – highly simplified – example in order to further illustrate each step. The example will consider the problem of combining nature preservation with agricultural production in the context of a densely populated Flanders and the need to politically cope with environmental and socio-economic interests of the involved actors.

Political scenario to integrate discursive representation in the agro-food policy domain: Setting up a deliberative agro-food forum as a third stream for policy inputs

Step 1: Mapping discourses. Identify all relevant discourses about a specific topic by interviewing farmers and other knowledgeable actors related to the food system, by documenting what is said in public and political debates, by performing focus groups, by identifying practices and examples that concur with those discourses, etc. Here use can be made of established social science methodologies such as discourse analysis and Q-methodology. This step is thus a research-based one. However, as indicated in chapter 4, a discourse analysis is not performed in academic isolation but needs to be recognized by practice.

Four discourses have been mapped through means of the discourse analysis (see e.g. Keulartz et al., 2004). A first discourse accentuates the importance of nature and landscape preservation. A second discourse stresses the importance to continue a growth-orientated and modern form of intensive farming. A third discourse stresses the need to foster agro-ecological innovations where the production of food, multifunctional agriculture and nature management can be combined. A

fourth discourse advocates the necessity to implement wild zones of nature, where natural processes are allowed to develop with a minimal interference of man-made interventions.

Step 2: Deliberation. Organize a series of deliberative sessions. Here some form of selection of discursive representatives is necessary. Importantly, a group of people needs to be found who are familiar with the specific rationales that underlie the discourses (its values, responsibilities, causalities, rhetoric) and are able to transpose these rationales to the specific issue at hand. Ideally, there is a mix of scientists, practitioners, agricultural experts and (neutral) policy makers. From the perspective of policy making, the most important aspect is that a series of potential and concrete solutions emerge, that can be transmitted to the decision making unit (**step 3**).

The process of deliberation should be as authentic and inclusive as possible. This for instance means that there would be no repercussions from empowered space (e.g. a farmer organization of cabinet trying to steer the discussion in a certain direction) or that barriers to include affected actors are overcome (e.g. pay farmers for their time to participate). The organization of such a deliberative session could be taken up by consultants, deliberative democrats (mostly academics) and preferably an administration (who is more neutral). There should be ample time to organize as many deliberative sessions needed to arrive at a robust and well-argued set of proposals, principles and actions.

A preparatory document is drawn including relevant questions and the overall policy rationale (e.g. the EU policy rationale) of the particular issue. Five deliberative sessions are organized. The first four sessions each present, assess and evaluate a particular discourse's perspective in terms of the specific challenge at hand. At each session several discursive representatives present the rationale of a discourse. Debates are organized on the level of (1) the general norms and values underlying the perspective (2) relevant information that supports or refutes proposals consistent with the discourse and areas that need further research (3) the concrete implementation logic of concrete policy outcomes. In the final session, outcomes are framed from the perspective of the four discourses.

Step 3: Transmission to empowered space

A third step concerns the communication of the deliberative outcomes to empowered space. Because this concerns a specific topic, this can be a rather concrete set of well-argued proposals, principles and actions. The outcomes should preferably be formulated in an official document that would need to be taken into account by the decision making center, e.g. the neo-corporatist council or the Cabinet. The outcomes ought to be considered as a legitimate political input. This could be compared with the advice of a strategic advisory council. From a democratic standpoint, a crucial difference between the SALV and the deliberative agro-food forum is that in the latter case the policy input will take place *before and not after* the negotiations within the decision making center. This will allow a legitimate third stream of ideas in addition to the proposals of the farmer organizations and the administration.

The report is structured along the line of the four discourses. The report is communicated internally. The outcomes are not communicated publicly before the process of collective decision making has reached an outcome.

Step 4: Decision making

Decision making is thus a confluence of three sources. A set of ideas and proposals from the agricultural representatives, the administration and the deliberative agro-food forum. One or several representatives of the deliberative forum could also be invited to the decision making unit, in order to further clarify certain aspects. Collective decision making will continue to take place in secrecy in order to safeguard confidentiality and allow fair bargaining and processes of negotiation (see e.g. Chambers, 2004 and Mansbridge et al., 2010 for the role of secrecy and self-interest in deliberation). This will for instance allow for the identification of win-win situations between farmer organizations and the government or strategic considerations with regard to the interpretation and implementation of policy. In the process of decision making the outcome of the deliberative agro-food forum is read and reflected on systematically. The administration and the farmer organizations will be able to compare those proposals with theirs. Research departments will be able to give feedback on

implementation issues. If a decision cannot be made the cabinet has final decision making authority.

In the case of combining nature and agriculture the government opts for an approach of co-existent policy measures. This entails that – given certain preconditions flexibility is given to local stakeholders to opt for locally desired approaches towards either segregating or combining nature and food production. Tools are used to help stakeholders define preferences and identify concrete possibilities. When possible legal conditions are adapted.

Step 5: Accountability

Just as in the SALV, the decision making center will need to motivate to the deliberative forum why certain proposals were not considered. Accountability will also remain largely in the hands of the Flemish parliament who can continue its scrutiny activities. It will remain a requirement for a cabinet to follow up and account for the policy goals and frames in the policy agreement that has been approved at the beginning of a legislature. However, also the deliberative forum's policy inputs could be taken into account when the policy agreement is drafted.

In its scrutiny activities, the parliament can utilize the ideas in the reports of the agro-food deliberative forum, but can only refer to the ideas as a source of potential solutions and not as data coming from an authoritative body. It is also prohibited to utter representative claims related to persons or organizations that participated in the deliberative forum. The deliberative forum needs to be considered as a source of additional ideas, solutions and policy proposals rather than a legislative assembly.



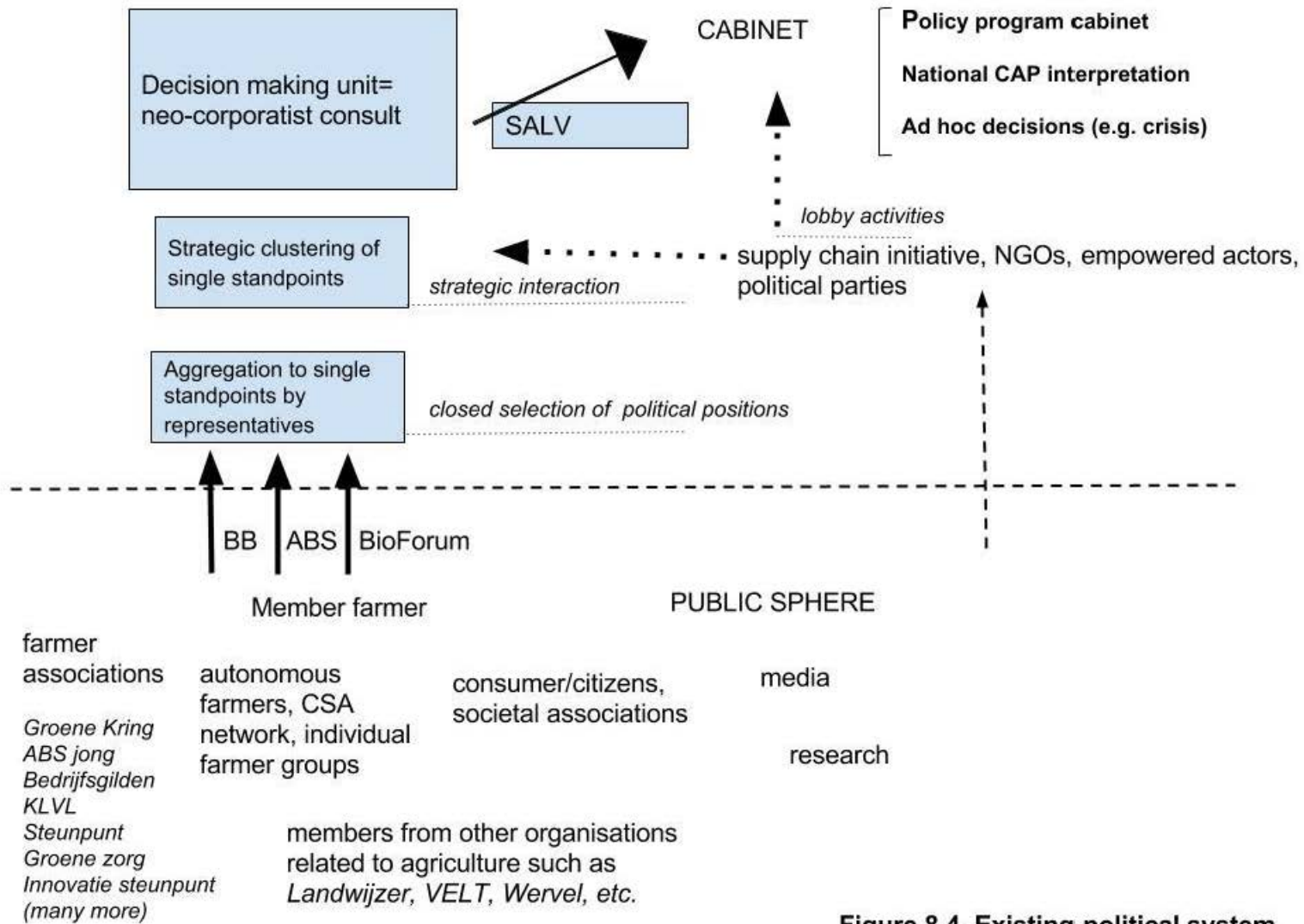


Figure 8.4. Existing political system

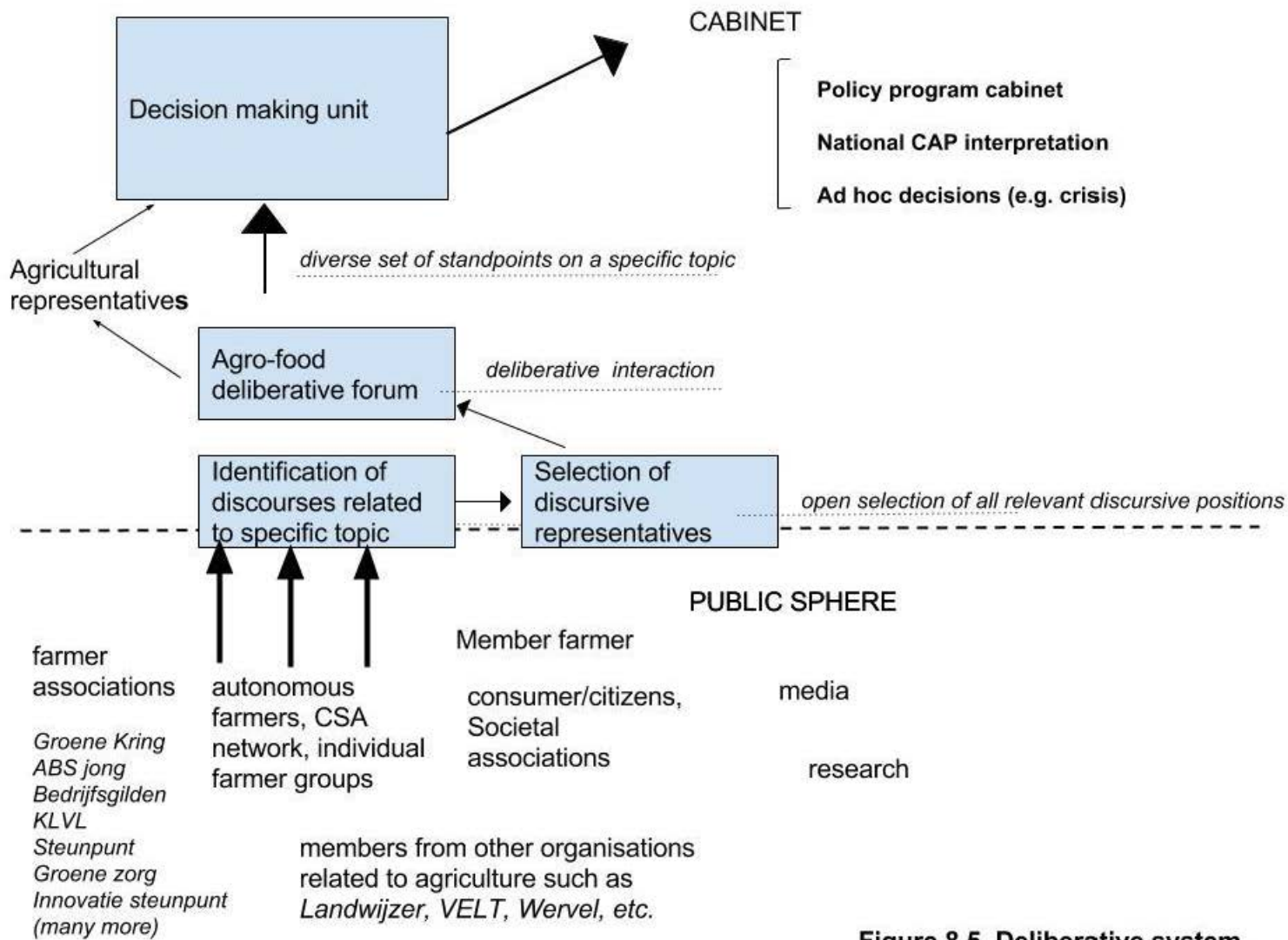


Figure 8.5. Deliberative system

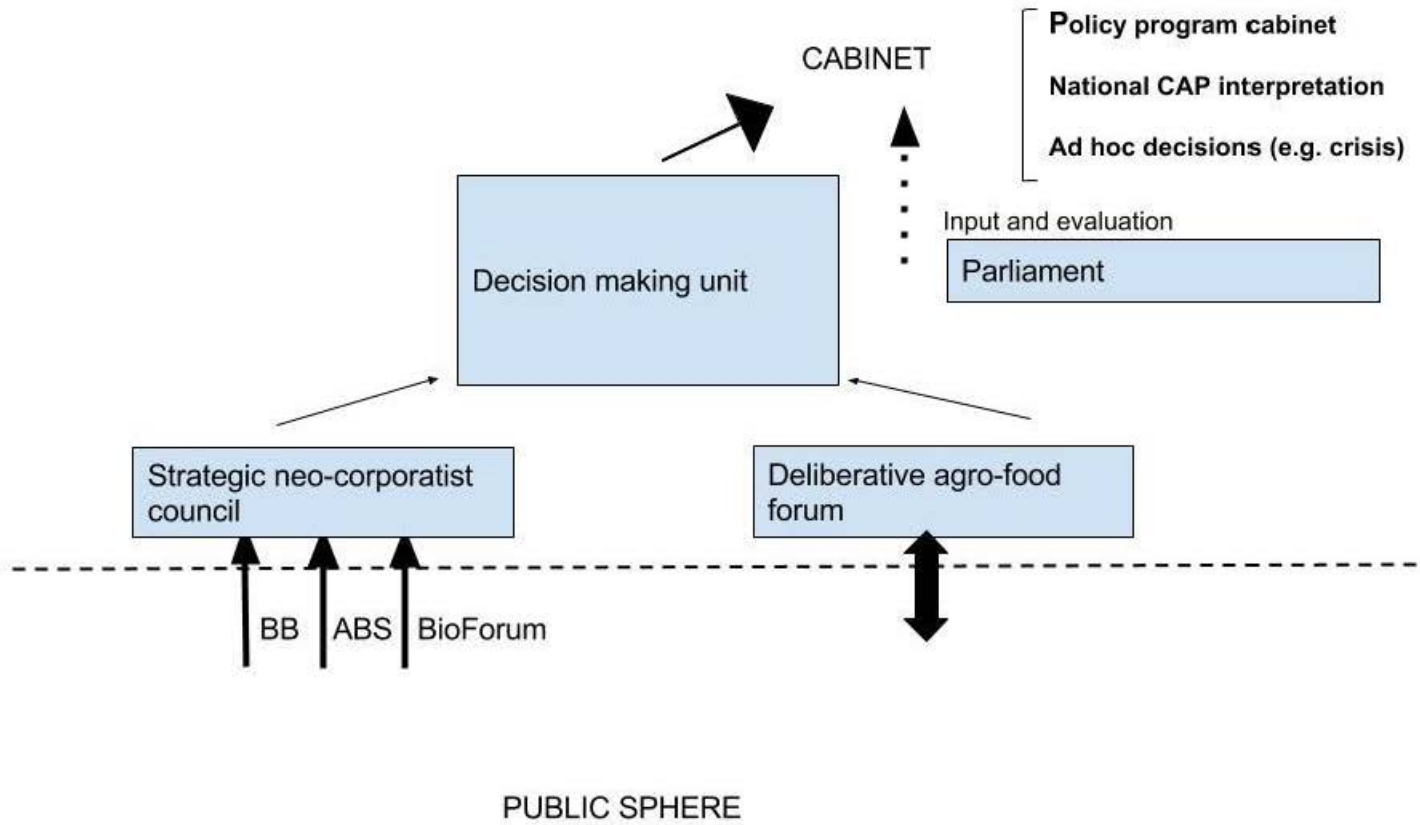


Figure 8.6. Merged system

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SAMENVATTING

In dit doctoraat wordt onderzocht hoe verschillende relevante discourses rond innovatie, duurzame ontwikkeling, landbouw en democratie een rol spelen in de politiek-institutionele context van het Vlaamse agro-voedingssysteem. De laatste 30 jaar onderzoek in de politieke wetenschappen en politieke filosofie heeft duidelijk kunnen aantonen dat woorden tellen in politiek, en heeft de grondslag gelegd voor een 'argumentative turn' waarbij het stijgende belang van argumentatie, taal en deliberatie voor besluitvormingsprocessen en democratische systemen wordt benadrukt. De analyse in het doctoraat baseert zich op de theorie van *deliberatieve democratie* die een reeks conceptuele instrumenten voorziet waarmee de mogelijkheden en relevantie van discourses voor besluitvormingsprocessen kan worden onderzocht en begrepen. Centraal in het doctoraat staat *discursieve representatie*, een democratische theorie en aanpak, geconcipieerd door de politicoloog John Dryzek, waarbij de principes van deliberatieve democratie worden gekoppeld aan de praktijk van 'politieke representatie' en het sociaal-wetenschappelijk concept 'discours'.

Discursieve representatie kan worden samengevat als een innovatieve praktijk van politieke representatie waarbij 'belangen' worden gerepresenteerd aan de hand van discourses. In plaats van zich te beroepen op meer gekende 'voorwerpen' van politieke representatie zoals territoriale kiesgebieden ('constituencies') (bv. "Ik representeer de belangen van de Vlaamse kiezer") of sociale groepen (bv. "Ik representeer alle landbouwers"), worden discourses hier de basis voor representatie (bv. "Ik representeer het multifunctionele discours"). Het theoretisch kader van discursieve representatie en haar onderliggende veronderstellingen en concepten dienen als een leidraad voor het onderzoek naar hedendaagse politieke processen binnen het Vlaamse landbouw- en voeding domein. De theorie wordt 'getest' op drie gevalstudies: landbouweducatie, varkenshouderij en duurzaamheids-governance. Daarenboven worden de gevalstudies gecontrasteerd met het dominante institutionele arrangement van het Vlaamse landbouwbeleid, het neo-corporatisme, dewelke ook uitvoerig wordt beschreven.

Een eerste gevalstudie bestudeert de ontluikende praktijk van landbouweducatie, waarbij landbouwers actief communiceren naar scholen en groepen over hun activiteiten, motivaties en passies voor landbouw. In deze case wordt betrokken van een discours analytische aanpak en wordt getracht om een inzicht te verwerven in de voorwaarden om de publieke sfeer te engageren in een breder gamma aan discourses ten aanzien van een specifieke praktijk. Gebaseerd op een kwalitatieve analyse van lopende educatiepraktijken in Vlaanderen tonen we aan hoe landbouwers de implicaties van drie discourses herkennen en erkennen, waardoor we een eerste stap zetten in de structurering van een debat aangaande de toekomstige ontwikkelingspaden van landbouweducatie en de daarbij horende institutionele middelen.

Een tweede gevalstudie betreft één van de economisch meest relevante maar tegelijkertijd meest gekwelde sectoren van de Vlaamse landbouw: de varkenshouderij. Stagnerende prijzen en stijgende energie en voederkosten culmineerden in aanhoudend negatieve inkomsten, ondanks een globale stijging in productiviteit. Deze aanhoudende crisis heeft geleid tot reflexiviteit bij Vlaamse varkenshouders. Traditioneel opteerden landbouwers voor een productivistische attitude, maar de aanhoudende problematiek heeft ertoe geleid dat zij hun positie in de keten in vraag stellen. Deze bezorgdheden bleven niet onopgemerkt en in 2011-2012 besloot de toenmalige minister van landbouw Kris Peeters om een reeks *dialogodagen* te organiseren om met alle belanghebbenden op collectieve wijze problemen en oplossingen voor de Vlaamse varkenshouderij tot stand te brengen. Aan de hand van een kwalitatieve analyse worden zowel de standpunten van varkenshouders als de uitkomsten van de dialogodagen geanalyseerd ten aanzien van twee innovatiediscourses.

Een derde gevalstudie richt zich op een breder en meer gepolitiseerd thema, met name de rol van duurzame ontwikkeling in de sturing van het Vlaamse agro-voedingssysteem. Het betreft de analyse van een zeer specifiek en in de tijd afgebakend *governance netwerk*, de New Food Frontier (NFF), waarin verschillende politieke actoren hebben gepoogd om het agro-voeding beleidsdomein te doen evolueren naar een duurzaamheidstransitie. In deze case onderzoeken we hoe actoren discursief negotiëren in een context van institutionele ambigüiteit. We doen dit door te reconstrueren hoe verschillende praktijken van politieke representatie en politieke scripts werden gebruikt doorheen de verschillende fases van het governance proces.

Gebaseerd op een cross-case analyse van de empirische bevindingen concluderen we dat er doorheen de gevalstudies verschillende dimensies of fases van discursieve representatie kunnen worden ontwaard.

In een eerste fase, maakt discursieve representatie een proces van transmissie mogelijk (i.e. het communiceren van relevante discoursen van de publieke naar de politieke sfeer). In het bijzonder wanneer een discursieve ruimte wordt gedomineerd door een beperkt aantal discoursen alsook de afwezigheid van politieke mechanismen die nopen tot het beschouwen van alternatieve discoursen, wordt het relevant om transmissie tot stand te brengen. Dit onderzoek toont aan dat een discours analytische aanpak één manier is om nieuwe discoursen binnen te brengen als voorwerp van deliberatie en een impuls geeft voor de politieke en sociale legitimiteit van nieuwe praktijken.

Een tweede fase wordt gekenmerkt door een situatie waarin een overlegproces in één of andere vorm wordt georganiseerd maar waarbij het proces en de uitkomsten niet worden bekeken vanuit een discursief perspectief. In termen van discursieve representatie, kan hieraan worden tegemoetgekomen door het opzetten relationele verantwoording (*relational accountability*) een vorm van voortdurende bemiddeling tussen de uitkomsten van het deliberatief proces en de wijze waarop deze uitkomsten worden gebruikt om de problemen van getroffen individuen aan te pakken.

Een laatste fase wordt gekenmerkt door de aanwezigheid van deliberatie, een bewuste articulatie van verschillende discoursen én een vorm van meta-governance. In dit geval wordt het waarschijnlijker dat discursieve representatie wordt geuit en tot stand wordt gebracht als een democratische praktijk. Het onderzoek toont aan dat indien actoren van de (sub)politieke sfeer elkaar ontmoeten in een context van meta-governance en institutionele ambiguïteit er een bepaalde welwillendheid kan ontstaan om alternatieve democratische modellen in acht te nemen.

In de conclusies worden de uitkomsten van de gevalstudies alsook het onderliggende theoretisch kader van discursieve representatie gecontrasteerd met het dominante neo-corporatistische institutioneel arrangement van het Vlaamse landbouwbeleid. Tot slot worden een aantal suggesties gegeven die de deliberatieve capaciteit van het Vlaamse landbouw en voedingsbeleid zouden kunnen versterken.

SUMMARY

In the context of this dissertation, we try to gain knowledge on how discourses play a role in the political context of the Flemish agro-food system. In the last 30 years, political science and philosophy has provided ample support for the assertion that words matter in politics, and prepared the ground for an ‘argumentative turn’ which emphasized the increased relevance of argumentation, language and deliberation in policy making and democratic systems. Our analysis is anchored in the theory of deliberative democracy, which, we think, provides a series of conceptual resources to understand and explore the potentialities and relevance of discourses for policy making. In this effort, we will adopt John Dryzek’s concept of *Discursive Representation*, which weds the principles of deliberative democracy with the practice of political representation and the socio-scientific concept of discourse. In short, discursive representation can be considered as an innovative practice of political representation which proposes that ‘interests’ are represented by means of discourses. Instead of relying on more familiar political ‘objects’ of representation such as territorial constituencies (e.g. ‘I represent the interests of the Flemish citizens’) or social groups (‘I represent the retailers’), discourses become the basis for representation (‘I represent the multifunctionality discourse’). The framework of discursive representation and its underlying concepts and assumptions then serve as a guideline for our study of ongoing political processes in the Flemish agro-food system.

Throughout the thesis, we adopt several key political concepts such as “legitimacy” and “accountability”, using a discursive perspective, and utilize them to make sense of political processes in the Flemish Agro-food policy domain. Furthermore, Dryzek introduced a series of ‘systemic’ components that we will use as a guideline to explore the process of discursive representation. The empirical centerpiece of this dissertation flows from these premises. We explore empirically how discursive representation can be understood as an analytical lens to make sense of ongoing practices within the Flemish agro-food system. The theory of discursive representation is ‘tested’ on three case studies: farm education, pig farming and sustainability governance.

A first case deals with an emerging practice, farm education, where farmers are actively communicating to schools and groups about their activities, motivations and passions for agriculture. In this case we take a discourse analytical approach

and try to gain understanding on the conditions to engage the public sphere into a broader spectrum of discourses with regard to a specific practice. Based on a qualitative analysis of ongoing educative practices in Flanders we demonstrate how farmers recognize and endorse the implications of three farm education discourses, thereby initiating a first step towards a structuration of a debate towards the future development of farm education and a process of transmission from public to empowered space.

A second case concerns one of the most economically important while at the same time most struggling sectors of the Flemish agro-food system: pig farming. Stagnating meat prices and rising energy and feed costs have culminated in persistent negative revenues, despite increasing productivity gains. This ongoing crisis has led to self-reflectivity amongst Flemish pig farmers. Traditionally they have adopted a rather productivist attitude, but persistent economic problems have led them to question their position in and the organization of the 'food system. These concerns did not go unheeded and in 2011-2012 the then minister of agriculture, Kris Peeters, decided to organize a series of dialogue days to collectively address problems and solutions in Flemish pig farming. Based on qualitative research, both pig farmers' stances as well as the outcomes of the dialogue days are discussed *vis-à-vis* two discourses on innovation.

A third case focuses on a much broader and more politicized theme, that of the role of sustainable development to orientate the governance of the Flemish agro-food system. It concerns the analysis of a very specific and short-lived governance network, the New Food Frontier (NFF), in which several political actors tried to influence the agro-food policy domain towards a sustainability transition. We investigate how actors discursively negotiate in a context of institutional ambiguity. To this end, we try to reconstruct how different practices of political representation were enacted and interacted throughout the governance process.

Based on a cross-case analysis of the findings of the empirical investigation we conclude that in each case different dimensions of discursive representation are at play:

In a first stage, discursive representation enables the facilitation of a process of transmission (i.e. communicating relevant discourses from the public sphere to the sphere of institutionalized politics or what Dryzek terms empowered space). Especially when a discursive space seems to be dominated by a limited amount of

discourses and the absence of deliberative mechanisms to force a consideration of alternative discourses, it becomes relevant to foster transmission. In this research, a discourse analytical approach proved to be one way in order to bring in new discourses as an object of deliberation and as a potential impetus towards social and political legitimacy of new practices.

A second stage is characterized by a situation in which a deliberative process of some sort is being organized but there is no tendency to scrutinize the process and its outcomes from a discursive perspective. The absence of alternative discourses than results in the perceived irrelevance to ensure discursive legitimacy or some form of meta-governance in which several approaches can be discussed, or both. In terms of discursive representation, this can amongst other be mediated by establishing relational accountability, that is, some form of continuous mediation between the outcomes of the deliberative process and the way in which those outcomes are used to address the problems of the affected individuals or constituencies.

A third stage is characterized by the presence of deliberation, conscious articulation of discourses as well as a form of meta-governance. In this stage it becomes somewhat more probable that discursive representation is articulated, defended and performed as a democratic theory. When actors from public or empowered space meet in a context of meta-governance there can be a certain willingness to consider alternative democratic storylines. In cases where governance actors are articulating contending discourses or searching for solutions by engaging actors from policy, market and civil society (for instance in the case of sustainability challenges) discursive representation is particularly promising because it allows to connect discursive outcomes ('images', 'visions', 'solutions', 'innovation paths', etc.) with a democratic procedure.

In the conclusions of the dissertation the case study findings as well as the underlying theoretical framework of discursive representation are contrasted with the dominant neo-corporatist arrangement of the Flemish agricultural policy domain. Finally, a series of suggestions are made that might strengthen the deliberative capacity of the Flemish agro-food system.

