

**Micro-mobilization, social media and coping strategies:
some Dutch experiences**

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1. Introduction

Political parties, non-governmental organizations, interest groups and single issue movements, have traditionally played an important role in the way political demands are being voiced. These organizations do not merely operate as transmitters of information, they also promote specific frames, provide platforms for discussion, debate and help to synthesize issues put forward by citizens. Moreover they support and facilitate negotiation processes (Gerhard & Rucht, 1992; McAdam, 1998; Agre, 2002). In doing so, they fulfil a role in ‘softening’ the claims originally put forward so that can be politically managed (Klandermans, 1984).

These intermediary organizations normally act at the meso-level of protest politics (Norris, 2000; Van den Donk et al., 2004; MacCaughy & Ayers, 2004). There is also a micro-level. Micro-mobilization refers to the mobilization by small, ad hoc and loosely coupled collections of individuals which use new media to achieve political mobilization. Davis (1999) argues the internet would provide for a new resource and power structure for micro-mobilization which could lead to the end of interest group politics or even to the dismissal of political organizations as we know them. Micro-mobilization is expected to increase in significance, due to the widespread distrust in the functioning of the institutions of representative democracy, in the ‘the iron triangle of bureaucracy, politicians and vested interest groups’ (Adams, 1981) well as the emergence of a relatively educated, emancipated and empowered citizenry which act as consumers with high expectations (Barber, 1984).

As a result, micro-mobilization may confront traditional intermediary organizations and policy-makers with rather ‘uncontrolled’ demands for change which might manifest themselves as possible focussing events that might challenge the legitimacy of an organization or a policy program as well as existing consultation and negotiation patterns (Birkland, 1998). Governments need to cope with these focussing events.

In this article we first want to understand how policy makers in Dutch government organizations cope with focussing events that emerge when social media (web 2.0), are used by micro-mobilizing individuals to gain political and public attention. First, we address the nature of political mobilization and issue expansion (section 2). Secondly, we focus on how (traditional and new) media provide an opportunity structure to citizens to gain political and public attention thereby creating focussing events (section 3). The next step is to understand the ways in which policy makers cope with these events (section 4). Based on these explorations we develop a research strategy which used to analyze three recent Dutch micro-mobilization cases (section 5) while in the last section (section 6) some conclusions are drawn.

2. Micro-mobilization, focussing events and agenda-setting

Mobilization aims at persuading people to contributing resources, such as time, commitment, knowledge and money, to support a mobilization actor (Melucci, 1996). These efforts are either focussed on achieving consensus by trying to get support for specific view points, or they are focussed on undertaking actions like a demonstration. These mobilization efforts are often intertwined, but occur at different levels (Klandermans, 1984). Macro-mobilization refers to people mobilizing according the lines of large mass-oriented movements. Meso-mobilization refers to the mobilization of people by an individual organization (Gerhards & Rucht, 1992). Micro-mobilization refers to mobilization attempts by small, often ad hoc groups (Snow et al, 1986; Bimber, 2003). Some authors (Gerhard & Rucht, 1992; McAdam, 1998; Agre 2002) argue that micro-mobilization can only be successful if loosely coupled small groups of individuals are able to connect to an intermediary organization at the meso or macro-level, because they provide a platform for debate and provide for access to relevant resources, communication channels and contacts.

Successful mobilization depends on the alignment of frames. Throughout a mobilization process, particular issues are defined and re-defined. This process is known as framing, which refers to the creation and reproduction of the interpretive schemes (i.e. frames) held by individuals (Snow & Benford, 1988). Identification within the group, a prerequisite for successful mobilization, occurs through a process of linking frames to one another, allowing for a shared understanding of a problem and its solutions and strategies (Snow & Benford, 1988). Frame-alignment can be considered a necessary condition for expanding issues to a broader public (the public agenda), and for placing these issues on the political agenda (Kingdon, 1972).

However, the existing political system and institutions work to the advantage of some and to the disadvantage of others, because of a bias towards the status quo, therefore it becomes difficult for some issues to gain attention (Bachratz & Baratz, 1970; Cobb & Elder, 1972; Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Jones & Baumgartner, 2005). Focussing events (Birkland, 1998) or trigger events (Kingdon, 1984) play an important role in the creation of attention. A focusing event is a unique, sudden event, it is relatively uncommon and it can be reasonably harmful or revealing potentially greater future harms. Moreover, they highlight problems to which government or other institutions might respond (Birkland, 1998:54). Focussing events like earthquakes, hurricanes and other disasters can lead interest groups, policy makers, news media and other members of the public to identify new problems, or to pay greater attention to existing but dormant problems, leading to a search for solutions in the wake of apparent policy failure. In our view focussing events should not always been seen as the starting point for issue expansion and mobilization as Birkland (1998) suggests, but unforeseen and massive mobilization processes themselves (especially when starting at the micro mobilization level, surpassing intermediary organizations) can be seen as a focussing event. As such the creation of focussing event, which very often gives us a glimpse of the national mood, might help to open a 'policy window' (Kingdon, 1984). This window might be used by various mobilization actors and policy entrepreneurs to advance and link specific frames regarding alternative problem definitions or

solutions. (Kingdon, 1984; Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). However, it is interesting to see whether the opportunity structure the media provide helps micro mobilizing individuals to create a focussing event.

3. The power of the media

Mass media play a powerful role in the articulation and expansion of issues. The power of the media can be conceptualized in three ways. First, the power of the media is perceived primarily as discursive with its potential to create and to align frames (Street, 2001). Media help individuals to pick up particular versions of reality in order to understand them. (Newton, 1999; McComb & Shaw, 2007). Secondly, access power refers to the way in which mass media control the range of voices or interest. The kind of media used creates specific barriers to actors advancing their ideas and frames, thereby influencing the likelihood that these ideas will be picked up by a larger public. Thirdly, media power can also be defined as resource power (Street, 2001). This refers to how the control of infrastructural services that media organizations provide can affect the actions of government, politicians, and political parties or interest groups. These services provide a platform that politicians, policy makers, interest groups and citizens need to get attention, since politics have become mass mediated politics (Bennett & Entman, 2001).

Although the media can mobilize support for issues, the agenda-setting power of the media should not be overestimated (Cobb & Elder, 1972; Kingdon, 1984). It is rather contingent (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). Media may enhance existing mobilization processes, for instance by showing that the 'official representation' of problems and approaches does not match the facts ('reality') (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). However, this may create a snowball effect, as media stories are picked up by other media, interest and issue groups and political parties, which helps to align frames. That is why it is relevant to pay attention to the so-called media-logic (Luhman, 1990). First, the media are more likely to report on surprising and unexpected

occurrences. Secondly, the complexity and ambiguity of these occurrences are reduced to simple, clear and consistent, almost binary occurrences which are preferably personalized and dramatized. Thirdly, this process of selective imaging, is increased by the tendency of the media to refer to each other and repeat each other. As a result all kinds of cross over effects occur between traditional and new media; blogs, news websites, television shows and newspapers increasingly use and link to each other's reporting (Bennett, 2003).

In this article we primarily focus on the opportunity structure web 2.0 media provides for political mobilization. Web 2.0 points at a new generation of internet and web based applications, which distinguishes itself from the older generation (Web 1.0) by its social and interactive nature (O'Reilly, 2005; Boulos & Wheeler, 2007; Stanyer, 2009). Web 2.0 emphasizes the importance of user participation, openness and network effects. Typical for Web 1.0 is that these applications are primarily computer-based, one-directional and rather static. As a result the effects of Web 1.0 applications on political mobilization have been described as limited, because it tends to reinforce existing mobilization processes, routines and practices and therefore the positions of established actors. (Norris, 2000; Van de Donk et al, 2004; Kraemer & King, 2006). Therefore Web 1.0 not being used as a way to organize an organic and flexible process of (open) content production, collaboration and content sharing occurs. However, this is typical for web 2.0. which tries to use the collective and self-organizing intelligence that is present in a social network, which is open to new participants, with their specific experience, knowledge and ideas (Benkler, 2006; Bimber, 2003; Bekkers, 2004). Moreover, communication within these networks have an instant and many-to-many character, due to use of instant messaging devices (Facebook, Twitter, MSN). Furthermore, communication is not restricted to text but also encompasses video and audio streaming (Stanyer, 2009). Finally, wireless technology has resulted in an increased mobility, which has also led to instant communication and information retrieval.

In terms of the power that web 2.0 provides citizens with, we expect that in terms of discursive power, the many-to-many communication and the instantaneous character of the

communication by Web 2.0 networks may facilitate a rapid, almost real time process of frame alignment. Also the increased significance of images and sounds may help to frame an issue. As mentioned earlier the discursive power of web 1.0 is rather limited, due to its limited interactive potential. In terms of access power, we expect that web 2.0 applications make it relatively easy to establish links between and within social networks, thereby enhancing a process of inclusion which adds to the growth of network of contacts to be mobilized for action. Subscription is easy and inexpensive compared to subscriptions to news papers or cable television. The formats used are simple, and can be easily adopted and used. Hence, access to relevant information, experiences and contacts can be mobilized easily, quickly and on a large scale. The access power of web 1.0 websites is primarily based on providing the public with relevant information. With regard to resource power, web 2.0 networks and platforms emphasize the potential to mobilize free available resources for self-organization. This in contrast to traditional media, which are institutionalized, top down organizations with strict boundaries, who try to control and monopolize the broadcast of their messages. This idea of unilateral control of the content of the information provided is also present in traditional (web 1.0) websites. In terms of resource power, Web 2.0 may offer citizens the possibility of co-producing relevant content. In theory, any individual is able to start a blog and to communicate and 'broadcast' political ideas. The same is true for a traditional web 1.0 website that can be used to advocate specific political ideas.

4. Coping

The rapid, massive and unforeseen expansion of issues – originally framed at the micro-level of protest politics – by the use of social networks and being picked up by the traditional media, may generate a focussing event that challenges the legitimacy of policy programs and their supporting organizations. This may cause irritation (Ansoff, 1980; Luhmann, 1990). The question is how policy makers act upon these events. In the psychology literature, based on the work of Karen

Horney (1945), four coping strategies are being discerned, which we will use as a metaphor to describe the reactions of the involved policy makers:

- Moving with: people react to disturbances in their personal life by developing relationships involving compromise and negotiation. As a result policy makers may use the expressed claims to create a policy window so alternative approaches can be discussed (Baumgartner & Jones, 2002). Two types of reactions can be discerned. The first one is the conversion of policy program which is based on roundaboutness (Majone, 1989). In doing so policy makers fundamentally discuss and reconsider the goals of and assumptions which lay behind a program. In this learning process the dominant set of ideas that shape the political discourse is being questioned and replaced by alternative ideas, which question the assumptions which lay behind a program.. As a result policy makers become engaged in a process of puzzling and ‘trial and error’ , which might lead to paradigm shift, to the introduction of new rules of engagement, or the introduction of new players (Hall, 1989; Bennett & Howlett, 1992). The second type of reaction can be called accommodation (Thelen, 2003). Possible changes focuses at the improving the perceived added value of the actions and instruments that are used to achieve the goals of the program (Hall, 1989; Bennett & Howlett, 1992). In the end this may result in rather incremental changes in the existing policy program or to a change in organizational procedures, routines, tasks etc. (Bennett & Howlett, 1992). In doing so a new layer of changes is built upon earlier changes, although the core of the policy program is being preserved (Thelen, 2003).
- Moving toward: people avoid disturbances by giving in. Policy makers may ‘go with the winner’ for instance due to changes in the public opinion which cannot be redressed (Baumgartner & Jones, 2002:16).

- Moving against: people seek confrontation to prevent further disturbance. Policy makers may develop a counterbalancing strategy, which aims at starting a contra mobilization process that tries to reinforce existing or earlier expressed views and practices or to convince (Baumgartner & Jones, 2002).
- Moving away: people, recognizing the damage of a possible disturbance, avoid a possible confrontation. Policy makers create extra time so the pressure will diminish and decisions or changes can be postponed. Policy makers can also choose to push forward another but related issue, thereby trying to shift the public and political attention shifts to this other issue.

5. Research strategy

5.1 Case study method and selection

The research strategy in this study involves a comparative case study. The advantage of the case study method is that it recognizes the complex nature of social phenomena in a coherent and integrated way. It acknowledges the complex and meaningful interaction between relevant social processes and actors, instead of limiting the study of social phenomena to a highly specific set of variables and the relations between them (Yin, 2003). Framing plays an important role in our case study: at the micro and meso levels, in new and traditional media, and by policy-makers in terms of assessing the nature of these focussing events and how to cope with them. Framing involves interpretation. It is important to use a research strategy that enables us to describe, analyse and reconstruct the interpretations of relevant actors and the framing processes that take place. Therefore we have combined a variety of research methods. First, we directly observed and analyzed the interactions and the content of the communication – discussions, photos and videos – in relation to relevant (social network) websites and other internet sources as well as the

coverage by the traditional media (television, news papers, magazines). Secondly, we conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 5-7 relevant stakeholders per case. Thirdly, a focus group consisting of seven (academic) experts and experienced and involved policy-makers has been organized to discuss the research findings and its policy implications. The triangulation of interviews, content analysis of relevant websites, news papers and other forms of media coverage was intended to enhance the validity of the research findings (Yin, 2003), while the discussion in the focus group was as a finale step in this process of validation.

The case selection was based on several criteria. First, we selected cases of micro mobilization that gained public attention and we could actually follow. The real-time occurrence of the events was especially relevant in relation to the study of the interactions that took place online. Secondly, due to the emphasis on the expected benefits of Web 2.0 in contrast to their Web 1.0 predecessors, we selected one Web 1.0 based case and two Web 2.0 based cases in order to get more contrasting findings. This implies that the comparison of relevant similarities and differences may contribute increase the plausibility of the research findings (Yin, 2003). Hence, these comparisons aim at achieving analytical generalizations instead of statistical generalizations.

5.2 Expectations

Our research strategy is focussed on the qualitative exploration of a number of expectations derived from the theoretical insights that are presented in the previous sections. In general two sets of expectations are being examined.

The first set refers to the role of new media in the micro mobilization processes of which we expect that this contributes to the creation of a resonating focussing event. We expect the expansion of an issue to depend on a process of frame alignment. In order to achieve this social network technology may contribute to this process, if we look at the discursive, access and resource power that these technologies provide to micro-mobilizing individuals. We further

expect that the rapid and massive expansion of an issue through social network technology may have spill-over effects into the traditional media. ‘Media logic’ furthers this spill-over effect. We also expect that media play an important but not a decisive role. We suppose that micro mobilization can only be successful only, if it is linked to the meso-level of protest politics, in which traditional intermediary organizations are involved. Moreover, we propose that political mobilization alone is not enough to gain political attention. This also depends on the national mood, the emergence of (other) focusing events and the role of policy entrepreneurs who advocate the issue and help to open possible policy windows.

The second set of expectations refers to the perception of the nature of this focussing event by policy makers and the way they cope with this focussing event. We expect these focussing events will cause irritation, but more decisive is the question how policy makers cope with the possible harm that these events may generate? We expect that the reaction of the policy makers resembles one of the four coping strategies or that they try to combine strategies. Furthermore we expect that this coping strategy is based on either a first order or a second order learning process. Either they fundamentally reconsider the program, or they make some minor adjustments in the instruments to be used.

In order to investigate both sets of expectations we use the following model for description and analysis.

Table 1: Analytical model

Research focus	Relevant factors
Mobilization and issue expansion process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why was the issue articulated, and how was it framed? • How did the frame-alignment process develop? • Was there support by intermediary

	<p>organizations (political parties, interest groups)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did focusing events occur, and were policy entrepreneurs present to open the policy window?
<p>Role of the media in creation of focussing events</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did the mobilizing actors use the discursive, access and resource power of the social and traditional media? • Was a media logic present (surprising occurrences; simple binary, personalized and dramatized coverage; repetitive coverage by cross reference)?
<p>Coping with and learning from focussing event</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How surprised were policy makers by the issue expansion process? • What have been the coping strategies of the involved policy makers (moving with leading to either conversion or accommodation , moving toward, moving against and moving away)? • What kind of changes were proposed by policy makers (incremental program changes, organizational process changes or more paradigm shifts)?

6. Empirical findings

In this section, we present the three case studies according to the framework presented in the previous section .

6.1 Student protests against the 1040-hour norm

Background

The introduction of major reforms in primary and secondary education during the last decade caused the quality of education to be a widely discussed issue in the Netherlands. In 2007, the discussion focused on the government's enforcement of the '1040-hour norm'. This norm refers to the yearly number of hours of lessons students are required to follow. Although required by education inspectors to comply with this norm, many schools were unable to do so, because of teacher shortages. Schools were forced to take a variety of 'false' measures (e.g. hours for 'self study' or homework) implying students were receiving education. Students complained about being required to remain at school, even when no lessons were given. In November 2007, students across the country revolted against the perceived absurdity of this norm.

Mobilization and issue expansion

The National Student Action Committee (*Landelijke Actie Komitee Scholieren*, LAKS), which was can be considered as trade union for secondary school students, started the mobilization process. In early November 2007, LAKS launched several protest actions. The nature of the issue helped LAKS to attract attention and acquire the support of many school boards. The issue was unique, and it directly affected students. As framed by LAKS, the 1040-hour norm was detrimental to school quality, claiming that 'if you are in favour of quality, you are opposed to the 1040-hour norm'. This framing made it quite easy to understand why the students were angry. Other terms that framed the issue included 'kennel requirement' or 'kennel hours' (in Dutch, *ophokplicht* or

ophokuren). This frame dominated the discussion, and it was adopted by most of the involved actors, including the media.

One key figure in the expansion of the issue was one individual student, Kevin. On Friday morning 23 November, strikes and demonstrations took place in many cities. Throughout the country, thousands of students came into action, which in some incidents cause for orderly disturbance. One day before, Kevin had forwarded the following MSN message to his friends: *'All students in the Netherlands are going on strike because the number of lessons are increased to 1040 hours. As a result, we have to stay in school longer, and a ninth hour is added to the schedule. Therefore, the whole Netherlands will strike on 23-11-07, immediately after the first break, simply on the school playground, and ignore the lessons. FORWARD THIS TO ALL '* Kevin also set up a Hyves group (Dutch equivalent of FaceBook) entitled 'Away with the 1040', which grew to about 50,000 members. Postings were made to announce strikes on schools. Many of the actions were recorded by pupils with their mobile phones and uploaded to YouTube. In a statement, LAKS declared that it had not organized these protests.

As a result of this, on November 28th, the House of Representatives met for an emergency debate. When a large majority of the Representatives continued to support the government, LAKS summoned the students to demonstrate on Friday 30 November in Amsterdam. About 20.000 pupils participated in this demonstration. LAKS announced it was planning to enter negotiations with the ministry, ending the campaign for the time being. However LAKS stated it would resume its actions in February 2008 if the government refused to take measures.

No further action was necessary. In mid-January, twenty secondary schools announced their refusal to comply with the norm. More schools followed. At the same time, LAKS incited students to be absent during all school hours in which no teaching took place. The norm received a new and final blow on February 13th 2008, when the parliamentary inquiry committee, named after its chair (J. Dijsselbloem) published its report 'Time for education' (*Tijd voor Onderwijs*) in

which the results of a series of educational reforms were assessed, among which the 1040 hours norm. It was argued that the present norm was ‘too much contested’ and should be reconsidered. A policy window opened, which added to the legitimacy of the claims that were put forward by the LAKS and the schools.

Meso-mobilization and micro-mobilization alternate in this case. Although LAKS had originally articulated the issue, it temporarily lost control due to the micro-mobilization efforts by Kevin and other students. When the issue expanded spontaneously, LAKS played an important role in the consensus-mobilization process, thereby also involving teachers and many school directors. This allowed them to place the issue on the political agenda so it had to be discussed by politicians. The ‘wildcat strikes’ and other spontaneous micro-mobilization actions surpassed LAKS at some point, challenging its mobilizing monopoly and negotiating position as the official ‘trade union’. It recaptured the initiative by organizing the demonstration on November 30th.

Media

In this case, the media played an important role in the expansion of the issue. During the revolt, students preferred Web 2.0 technologies for mobilizing and organizing themselves as a group, including instant-messenger programs, social networking sites (Hyves) and YouTube. The use of mobile telephones and digital cameras thus facilitated the real-time coverage of the disturbances and police actions online accompanied by personal experiences and comments.

The traditional media also contributed to the successful mobilization of the issue. Media coverage in newspapers, television and radio was quite extensive, and it followed the patterns of ‘media logic’. The disruptions obviously had considerable news value. The traditional media also played an important role in the framing and expansion of the issue. They adopted the notion of ‘kennel hours’ in their reports on the issue. A dominant factor in the framing of the protests by the media was the question of whom would win and who would lose, and whether the Deputy Minister would succumb to the students’ protests, which personalized and dramatized the

conflict. In addition, the chair of LAKS became an important icon in the conflict. The traditional media provided him a platform for free publicity, which could not be ignored by politicians (Swart, 2007). The visual power of the LAKS chair led the media to contribute to a relatively positive image of the actions among the wider public (in terms of discursive power). According to some respondents, the messages of the actions, the frame of which was presented by LAKS to describe the perverse effects of the 1040-hour norm, dominated the discussion in the media.

Coping

The responsible senior policy managers and the Deputy Minister were completely surprised by the massive scale of the protest and the speed of organization of the protest actions. They were also surprised by mobilizing force of the internet. Before then, internet discussions had not been seen as relevant sources of information only opinions and information that were expressed by the vested organizations were. They were also surprised by the perceived one-sidedness of the internet discussions, in which hardly no attention was paid to the arguments of the ministry.

Policy makers were confused on whether and how they should react and which media they should use to inform students and the wider public. They decided to use the traditional media. They feared, once the opinion of the deputy minister was posted, students would manipulate the message, given the open and flexible character of the content in Web 2.0 environments, and he would become a joke.

In their reaction policy makers moved away from the world of the new media. They did not want to be damaged. However, this strategy was combined with a moving against strategy, for which the traditional media were used. During the peak of the revolt policy-makers adhered to the established standard operating communication procedures, to counterbalance the claims made by the students, thereby relying on the ministry's access to the traditional media. Moreover, by installing a research committee in order to gain time, policy makers choose for a moving away strategy.

Despite the dominant strategy of moving away, in the end policy makers did learn. As a result of these experiences, the ministry is now developing a new communication strategy, including the use of Web 2.0 technologies, for monitoring policy-relevant networks, blogs and other websites in order to gain a better understanding of voices that are raised in domains other than vested forums for policy consult, which are still considered important. Also a new department which is focussed on environmental scanning has been erected. Hence, some organizational changes are being pursued, which as earlier been described as the outcome of an accommodation process.

Considering the content of the issue itself, the ministry reacted in a traditional way by appointing a special committee to address the 1040-hour norm in relation to the broader discussion concerning improving secondary education quality. The outcome is the norm itself will not be changed substantially (to 1000 hours), while the quality issue itself was hardly discussed. Through the creation of a 'time out' and marginal changes the issue has faded out. In terms of coping this could be understood in terms of 'moving away'. The policy program was adjusted in an incremental way which can also be understood as the outcome of an incremental, first order learning process. In doing so policy makers coped with the issue by going, marginally, along with the claims of the students.

6.2 Dissident military voices in Uruzgan

Background

In late 2005, the Dutch government received a request from United States' President Bush to relieve the approximately 1,500 Canadian soldiers present in the Uruzgan region in Afghanistan. In 2007, the Dutch Parliament agreed to continue the presence of troops until 2010. This gave rise to a lingering public and political debate regarding the nature of the mission. Although the

mission was originally presented as ‘a reconstruction mission’, most of the time was actually spent on combat activities against Taliban and Al Qaida.

Mobilization and issue expansion

At the beginning of the Uruzgan campaign, the Ministry of Defence started an active media policy aimed at consensus mobilization, opting to mobilize support for the mission, as well as to improve its image as being transparent, open and realistic. The issue was framed in terms of the fight between right and wrong, thereby referring to 9/11 and international terrorism. Journalists were invited to join the forces as ‘embedded correspondents’. Soldiers were free to talk to these journalists. At the same time, the ministry was convinced that unlimited access to the internet would support the morale of the troops and their families. The dominance of embedded journalism provided the Ministry with substantial control over the media coverage. The frame advanced was that everything was under control: ‘Yes, there is some fighting but we still hope to make a substantial contribution to the reconstruction of Uruzgan’. In this regard, the media policy was highly successful.

In the meantime, however, micro-mobilization occurred in response to the mobilizing efforts of the Ministry. The triggering events for these micro-mobilization efforts were a number of attacks on Dutch soldiers, which led to a series of casualties. Free access to the Web 2.0 applications allowed many individual soldiers to communicate events that were actually taking place. They complained about the one-sided way in which the situation in Uruzgan was being covered. These dissident opinions were advanced on weblogs (uruzgan.web-log.nl; waarbenjij.nu), Hyves and FaceBook pages. In addition, photographs and videos were uploaded on YouTube. These dissent voices were not a deliberate attempt to influence the political agenda; they were intended to influence the public agenda by telling and showing friends, family and the general public what was happening. As time progressed, soldiers attempted to express the failure of the reconstruction mission; thereby stressing the essence of the mission was to fight. This

frame was picked up by the traditional media. Television programs used uploaded films and photos to show the Dutch public and politicians that they had a distorted view of the nature of the events.

To control the expansion of this alternative frame the Ministry tried to counterbalance this counter-mobilization process. Policy makers were concerned that the death of a soldier would eventually generate a rift in public and political support, especially when the soldiers in Uruzgan would publicly express their frustrations about the nature of the mission. It issued guidelines for the use of internet to ensure that no specific combat information would be accessible to the enemy. In trying to control dissent and emotional outbursts of dissatisfaction, the ministry also set up a centrally controlled condolence register on which personal messages could be posted when a soldier was killed. In addition, the media agreed upon a code of conduct, which specified the media should exercise great caution when using Web 2.0 information in reporting on wounded or killed soldiers. Additionally the ministry launched a monthly survey to monitor public support for ‘our boys’ in Afghanistan.

Media

Traditional and news media played a supporting role in various mobilization processes. On the one hand, the Ministry attempted to win the hearts and minds of the military, the general public and politicians by using ‘embedded journalism’. In 2008, the ministry issued stricter rules for these embedded journalists prohibiting ‘off the record’ interviews.

On a micro level, individual soldiers used Web 2.0 technologies to voice their opinions and experiences. Hyves, YouTube, Live Leak and similar sites became important channels for distributing photographs and video images in order to show the ‘real Afghanistan’. The weblog ‘Where are you now?’ (www.waarbenjij.nu) is visited by many soldiers and their families. These new media provided soldiers with a platform for expressing their experiences, sharing and showing their stories (discursive power) – a platform easily accessible for them and the general

public (access power). Ironically, the material infrastructure for these Web 2.0 facilities was provided by the Ministry.

To manage the experiences of soldiers, the Ministry started incorporating Web 2.0 elements in their communications with soldiers and the general public. It set up an interactive but centrally controlled website, which is also used as a condolence register (www.defensieforum.nl). It also launched several media campaigns involving interviews with the minister, the commander in chief and the commanding officers in Afghanistan. These interviews were published in newspapers and magazines and broadcast on television talk shows in order to show, despite the increase in fighting, everything was under control, morale was good and the Dutch forces were working on the reconstruction of Uruzgan. The ministry thus uses the close relationships between the vested traditional media and the communication department to manage public and political opinion.

Coping

By using the strategy of embedded journalism, the Ministry attempted to mobilize public support for the Uruzgan mission. The micro-mobilization efforts of the soldiers, however, caused irritation because they were telling the general public another story. The ministry was not aware of these dissident voices and the popularity of web 2.0 social networks at first. Only when the first soldier died, the traditional media used Hyves information on the private life of the killed soldier. This was perceived as a danger to the ministry's original media campaign, because these dissent voices could create a focussing event which was considered as a possible danger to legitimacy of the mission.

In terms of coping, the ministry first opted to 'move against'. The ministry first reaction focused on trying to regain control over media coverage by imposing stricter rules regarding embedded journalists, developing a code of conduct for journalists using information on the internet and imposing stricter rules for soldiers placing information on the web. This reaction

can be understood as a first order learning process in which new instruments are developed and exiting rules and routines were sharpened in order to regain control. However, the second reaction was based on the idea that the fight against these new, interactive media was futile and that attempts should be directed towards monitoring, managing and channelling the communication of expressions and reactions. The ministry therefore set up its own platform, fulfilling the same function and having the same interactive capacities as did all of the YouTube, Hyves and LiveLeak and blog sites. The latter reaction can be viewed as the outcome of coping processes in which the communication strategy was adopted to a new communication environment by locking in the new media as well to lock in the possible uncontrolled effects of the media logic. Policy makers opted to 'move with' the possibility to use new communication instrument, but the assumptions behind the goals of the mission were not being reconsidered. In doing so we see that the ministry opted for a coping strategy in which the strategy of 'moving against' was combined with a 'moving with' strategy leading to a accommodation of the existing policies.

In February 2010 the Dutch cabinet and parliament discussed the issue of a continued stay in Uruzgan, although the public and political support was decreasing. In the end the Dutch cabinet resigned over the issue. However, in this discussion the opinions of the soldiers themselves did not play a significant role in the discussion. In doing so policy makers at the ministry were successful of preventing that a focussing event would emerge. However, policy makers could not prevent that the national mood was changing.

6.3 Protest against late closing times

Background

In the Netherlands, it is customary for young people to visit clubs and bars relatively late at night. In February 2007, two mothers in the Dutch province of Friesland decided they would not accept this any longer. They mobilized other parents to share their concerns. They hoped bars and clubs would close at 2:00 a.m., thereby ensuring young people to visit bars earlier, and subsequently be home at a reasonable hour. They named their protest group 'Party Early' (in Dutch: *Vroeg op stap*).

Mobilization and issue expansion

Under the umbrella of 'Party Early', these two mothers managed to mobilize a large group of people for their issue, which was unique and simple, and which appealed to thousands of parents who were concerned about where the children were hanging out. 'Party Early' was considered as an appealing frame that could be communicated easy. The two mothers started a website enabling parents to express their support and to send an e-mail messages to the Minister for Youth and Families. The idea was to start a 'citizens initiative', in which it is possible under Dutch law for citizens to place an issue on the agenda by gathering enough signatures. The two mothers first asked their friends and family to visit the website and sign the petition which set a snowball effect in motion: more parents found their way to the website. This attracted the attention of the regional radio station and newspaper, both of which interviewed the two mothers. These interviews were picked up by several national radio and television stations. This media attention transformed the issue from a regional issue into a national issue. Supporters from other regions joined.

In May 2007, the mothers spoke with several policy advisers from the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports, and with several members of the House of Representatives. Further meetings with these national policy-makers and politicians, however, disappointed the initiators. Although much was said about preventing alcohol abuse among young people, little was said

about the closing times of bars and clubs. We observe that a process of re-framing took place during the frame-alignment process, partly in relation to a number of ‘triggering events’ that occurred in the meantime. These events involved several incidents when young people were hospitalized for alcohol poisoning.

In January 2008, the protest group had obtained the 100,000 signatures needed to file the ‘citizens initiative’. The House of Representatives, however, decided that digital signatures were not acceptable for this. However, the Christian Democrats took over and asked the House to discuss the issue anyway.

In reaction to the successful mobilization of the issue, several counter-mobilization actors appeared. These counter mobilizations were mostly done by a group named ‘Free to Party’ (in Dutch, *vrij-uitgaan*), an initiative of several political youth organizations, including the liberal party (VVD) and socialist parties (SP, PvdA and GroenLinks). The members of this group focused their attack on the perceived paternalistic nature of the initiative. They also tried to file a petition, and they were able to obtain 72,000 signatures in two months. This initiative was discontinued halfway, since the petition presented by ‘Party Early’ was formally rejected. Several other opponents of ‘Party Early’ organized themselves on Hyves pages, including groups named ‘Anti-Party Early’ (in Dutch, *anti-vroegopstap*) and ‘Anti-Curfew’ (in Dutch, *anti-avondklok*). These sites offered links to the petition of the political youth organizations, but their bulletin boards and forums also contained disrespectful posts concerning the two mothers. A third opponent of ‘Party Early’ was the interest organization of restaurants, hotels, bars and clubs (Koninklijke Horeca Nederland). Although they acknowledged the problem of alcohol abuse among youngsters, they argued earlier closing times were not an appropriate way to combat this problem. They also argued closing times of bars and clubs were primarily the responsibility of municipalities, and the national government should not intervene.

Media

The media had a major impact on the expansion of the issue and the content of the issue. Originally, the two mothers started a website – a ‘traditional’ Web 1.0 application. They notified other parents of its existence by mobilizing their friends and family. The website did not function as a platform for discussion; it was an instrument for collecting signatures (in terms of access power), thereby creating a virtual centre within the protest.

Nevertheless, the website played a vital role in the beginning of the mobilization process, as it attracted the attention of the traditional media, which contributed significantly to the expansion of the issue. Once the initiators had collected a considerable number of signatures, it was very easy for them to gain access to the traditional media, and thus to other platforms. After one newspaper reported on the issue, others followed. The fact that two mothers who ‘appeared from nowhere’ were able to draw so much attention to a very concrete and simple issue had created a situation worth reporting. Their use of the appealing frame of ‘Party Early’ was another source of interest, as it made the nature of the claims made by the two mothers quite easy to understand.

Whereas ‘Party Early’ relied on traditional media, its opponents relied on the new media. In particular, young people on Hyves called for signatures for the counter petition, and they discussed the issue on blogs and forums. The issue was discussed on at least 843 Hyves pages, 1364 forums, 1020 blogs and 9550 discussions on news sites. Opponents of Party Early were nearly absent from the traditional media.

Both traditional and new media were involved in framing and reframing the issue. Coverage in the traditional media varied from connecting the issue to the already leading issue of preventing alcohol abuse among young people to branding the issue as being belittling. In the new media, the issue was branded as a violation of freedom, reinforcing this claim with the word ‘curfew’.

Coping

Policy-makers at the Ministry of Health were not completely surprised by the protest of the mothers, because they anticipated the issue. Firstly, because mobilization started locally, before it became national. Secondly, in the regional and nationwide expansion of the issue the slower operation of than web 2.0 played an important role. Thirdly, the issue fitted the national mood. It can be noted policy-makers reacted quickly, showing some level of sympathy for the grass roots initiative. In doing so the attention was shifted to another element in the frame namely alcohol abuse by youngsters. Policy-makers used the mother's claim to create a policy window for promoting an active alcohol abuse policy. Hence, we see that policy makers opted for a coping strategy in they moved with the two mothers in relation to one aspect of the issue. This was the alcohol abuse aspect. In relation to another aspect, shortening the closing hours as a possible solution, policy makers coped with this aspect by moved away.

In June 2008, the House of Representatives issued an official reaction to the protest group. The politicians pointed out that, although it was sympathetic towards the grass-roots initiative, closing times for bars and discotheques are a local matter and not the responsibility of the national government. The Christian parties supported the ideas of 'Party Early', whereas the Liberal Party was very strongly opposed. All other parties agreed young people should start partying earlier, but this was not the responsibility of the national government. They were apparently afraid to take a firm stand on the issue, thereby running a risk of being perceived as paternalistic. The ministry also investigated the existence of support for earlier closing times among municipalities, bar owners, young people and parents. This investigation showed, in general, there was little support for earlier closing times. The solutions that were proposed by the mothers were considered as too controversial.

In the next section we try to answer the central research question, by comparing the three case studies.

7. Conclusions

The central question of this paper is to understand how policy-makers in Dutch government organizations cope with focussing events that emerge when new media, especially social network technology (web 2.0), are used by micro-mobilizing individuals in order to gain political and public attention. In order to answer this question two sub questions have to be answered.

First, how do micro-mobilizing individuals create a focussing event by using social media? If we compare the three cases we notice that five factors have contributed to the creation of a focussing event. The first factor is the power structure web 2.0 provides to mobilize actors and the generated effects. Looking at the 1040 hours norm and the Uruzgan case, web 2.0 has contributed to three mobilization effects: a) the speed of the mobilization process; b) the scale of the mobilization, and c) the hidden nature of the mobilization process. The reason for this can be found in the social network character of web 2.0 applications like Hyves, FaceBook, and YouTube, this allowed the protesting students and the dissident soldiers to exchange and to align frames, contributing to a shared understanding of the events and the claims based on them. Hence, the discursive potential of web 2.0 technologies played an important role in the articulation and expansion of the issue, thereby aligning frames, especially by sharing and visualization of experiences. Moreover, the ability of the mobilized group to organize collective action was facilitated by the access power web 2.0 technologies provided for, in combination with the resource power. The access power of web 2.0 as used by the students and soldiers relies on its open, flexible and connective character, which does not require heavy investments (in terms of resource power). Social network sites as well as instant messengers facilitate real-time and many-to-many communication opening up. This adds to the large scale, the swiftness and hidden character of the mobilization process. Hence, the access and resource power of the web 2.0 adds to massiveness and speed of the strategic surprise as experienced by policy-makers.

The second factor which explains the emergence of a focussing event in the 1040 hours and the Uruzgan case is the crossover between web 2.0 driven media and the traditional media. In this crossover, the existence of the media logic (1040 hours) or the perception of the possible danger that the media logic will be set in motion (Uruzgan) plays a vital role, because it challenges the management capacities of the responsible policy-makers. Media logic facilitates the expansion of the issue, thereby contributing to an uncontrolled, fast and cascading course of media events. In the 1040 hours case, the traditional media picked up the frame pupils used, the image of the LAKS chairman, and the organizing of frames through the use of web 2.0 technologies generated so much additional attention; the claims of pupils could not be denied. The massive attention in traditional media contributed to the irritation that policy makers in the Department of Education felt. Furthermore, the way the traditional media reported on the pupils' protests was perceived by the students and the policy-makers as enhancing the credibility of the claims of the students. In the Uruzgan case the Ministry faced a surprise when traditional media picked up the critical voices of soldiers. Hence, for the ministry it was important to prevent the media logic from doing so in order to prevent that a focussing event would occur, especially when a soldier would die. Additionally, through these crossovers from web 2.0 media towards the traditional media, policy-makers became aware of the hidden character of these digital policy discussions, which previously were unheard because policy-makers, focussing on the vested consultation and negotiation arrangements, were unaware of their existence and their potential relevance for the political debate. The sheer awareness of these discussions also surprised them.

If we compare these findings with the Party Early case we see some striking differences which help us even more to understand how the use of web 2.0 in micro-mobilization processes facilitate the emergence of focussing events. In the Party Early case, the two mothers used the internet in a moderate way (web 1.0): as a digital flyer to inform on their protest as well as to efficiently collect signatures. They did not use the internet in an interactive and mobilizing way. Instead they relied on and used their presence in the traditional media to put forward their claim.

However, their reliance on the rather 'slow' traditional media and the local nature of their protest did not contribute to the creation of a focussing event, because the issue gradually emerged so policy-makers at the Health Department anticipated the issue.

In the Party Early case, media logic has been present but there are no substantial crossovers in reporting between the internet driven media and the traditional media. Moreover, their strong reliance on the traditional media also contributed to a reframing of the issue. The original frame of was translated into the already present frame in the national mood, namely alcohol abuse of youngsters, which was favoured by policy-makers.

Thirdly, the age of the mobilizing pupils and soldiers – as it refers to the knowledge dimension of resource power – should also be mentioned because it creates a mobilization advantage in terms of mobilization capacities in order to create a focussing event. Both mobilized groups are rather young people who tend to be very familiar with these social and interactive web technologies because these technologies are an essential part of their daily life culture, in contrast to the mobilized group in the Party Early. These are relatively older men and women; a generation for whom internet communication is not a vital or inherent but an additional way of communication (De Haan et al., 2006). In terms of access power, the 1040 hours case shows that an always on-generation can mobilize itself very quickly through the wide range of relatively open internet applications. Kevin's message was picked up by others and passed along to other groups. In terms of resource power, the students' access to the internet and mobile phones enabled them to be always on.

Fourthly, the crossover between micro and meso-mobilization, which adds to the expansion of the issue and to its political significance, can also be mentioned as an explanation for the emergence of a focussing event. In the case of the 1040 hours norm we see micro-mobilization occurred in the context of a meso-mobilizing process led by LAKS. The success of the micro-mobilizing activities of Kevin worked as catalyst, fuelled the protests with new energy but completely surprised LAKS and policy-makers. In the Uruzgan case, the micro-mobilizing

activities of soldiers can be seen as a counter-mobilizing reaction to the one-sidedness of the meso-mobilization strategy of the Ministry, creating a surprise that might turn into a focussing event. It provoked a counter/counter mobilizing strategy, again at the meso-mobilizing level. In the Party Early case we saw the movement of the two mothers in general continued to exist as a micro-mobilizing activity. The mothers were unable to establish significant alliances with relevant interest groups or political parties who were able to promote the issue politically.

Fifthly, the surprise element of the focusing events in the 1040 hours and Uruzgan case refers also to lack of attention the involved policy makers have paid to the national mood which resembles a smouldering powder keg. These described micro-mobilizing activities are not isolated activities, but they can be seen as the expression of longer lasting concerns that are formulated in another public but virtual realm, which is only visible if policy-makers are aware and willing to see and hear them. The public access to web 2.0 social networks give citizens the possibility to express their concerns, to align themselves with each other and to generate a shared understanding over political and public affairs. Web 2.0 networks as such do not create triggering events. However, these technologies function as a digital fuse in this smouldering powder keg.

Now that we have analyzed the nature of these internet driven focusing events , the next step is to analyze the reaction pattern of policy-makers in terms of coping. Dominant in these cases is that the first reaction of the involved policy makers is that they move away or move against the claims that were put forward by these micro-mobilizing individuals. This obvious in all three cases. In all the three cases policy makers are surprised by the massive attention that these micro mobilizing individuals are able to gain. This creates political pressure. However, this pressure is not channelled through the established policy consultation and negotiation platforms, procedures and routines that exist between the ministry and the most important stakeholders within a specific sector. Moreover the claims that are voiced by these micro mobilizing individuals are not been expressed in these platforms. Especially in the 1040 hours case and the Uruzgan case we

see that the unfamiliarity of policy makers with these new media and the potential of these new media to accelerate the expansion of an issue on a very large scale, has strengthened this reaction of denunciation (moving against or moving away). They were taken by surprise. This is a striking difference with the Party Early case, in which the internet (web 1.0) did not play a decisive role in the massive expansion of the issue, due to its coverage in the national media. This might also explain why, amongst other factors, policy makers first were more sympathetic towards the issue. Due to the rather slow character of the traditional media, they had more time to anticipate.

However, a short time later, this coping strategy is being adjusted, because policy makers especially accept the political relevance of these social media, although they question the one-sidedness of the arguments that are being exchanged. We see that policy makers opt for another coping strategy. Policy makers try to 'move with' these media, by locking them into their communication policies without questioning the goals of the programs at stake. Two options can be discerned. The first option is a locking in process in which the social media environment is monitored in order to anticipate possible focussing events. This can be considered as passive way of locking in social media. Scanning is the safest mode of action, which does not fundamentally challenge existing organizational routines. This present in the 1040 hours case and the Uruzgan case. The second option has a more active character, in which the interactive elements of the social media are locked into communication policies and platforms in order to control them. This can be noticed in the Uruzgan case. In this coping strategy a new instrument is added but the goals of the program are not questioned. A new layer of instruments is added upon the existing instruments. However, in both options, we see that the interactive elements of these social media are not actively used to discuss the content of the existing policies (or new policies) with relevant, weakly organized target groups. This can be explained because the development of more interactive, citizen-oriented communication and policy development strategies would imply a fundamental reconsideration of the existing advisory and negotiations routines and procedures which goes beyond the 'iron triangle of vested interests'; certainly if one looks at the 'national

mood' concerning the issues at stake. Policy-makers do not perceive these media as possible chance or opportunity.

There is also another reason for concern. A more positive orientation on these mobilization patterns is needed, because it can be expected that, due to the rapid adoption of these new web 2.0 technologies in our daily life, the omnipresent penetration of mass media and the cross over between new and traditional media and the decline in trust in the institutions of our representative democracy, social network based forms of micro-mobilization will become more important in the creation of focussing events to which governments have respond to them. The way in which they are able to handle these focussing events, in which micro mobilizing individuals use social media, might ultimately influence the legitimacy of government and politics. Hence, it is important to understand even more how policy makers cope with these new practices and why they choose for specific coping strategies.

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