Shifting frames: mobilizing policy attention for landscape values in a Dutch urban–rural fringe

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ABSTRACT
Despite framing being a powerful mechanism in policy agenda setting, the planning and policy science literature does not yet devote much attention to the analysis of interactional framing processes in policy change processes. We analyse the framing processes that preceded tipping points in the mobilization of policy attention in a Dutch peri-urban region that over time managed to position the development of landscape values on the agendas of local and regional governments, despite various institutional barriers and blockages. After identifying tipping points in the agenda-setting process, and shifts in frames and coalitions, the paper discusses why these shifts occurred. Two framing mechanisms are identified: (1) framing issues, relationships, and interaction processes in conjunction with one another and (2) resemiotizing original frames to establish a fit to the self-referential frames of targeted supporters within and outside government. The conclusion is that a research focus on human interactions at the grassroots level and on the processes of meaning construction over time reveals detailed insights about why and how structural change and transitions come about. The paper concludes with some lessons for policy-makers and planners with regard to developing a more adaptive attitude to emerging initiatives in civil society.

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Introduction
At the beginning of the 1990s, as a reaction to government plans for new infrastructure and urbanization, a small group of citizens from the city of Gouda, the Netherlands, started an initiative to attract policy attention to the landscape values in the southern urban–rural fringe. They tried to convince local and regional authorities that an integrated plan for the fringe area should be designed to prevent further congestion. Although the various authorities all had some sectoral interest in this area (e.g. constructing a road bypass, redevelopment of riversides, rural redevelopment), none had taken the initiative to develop an integrated spatial vision. The challenge for the civic initiative seemed immense. And indeed, it would take 25 years to mobilize the attention and support of local and regional governments that in the end resulted in an investment of several million euros in landscape development.

This story about the efforts of a civic initiative to position landscape development on local and regional policy agendas raises the question of how we can understand the processes towards shifts in policy attention, especially when the initiative for agenda change is bottom-up. Policy agenda setting is often analysed from the idea that stable policy systems are punctuated by shock events or focusing events (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005; Kingdon, 2003). In the policy science literature, much attention is focused on the moments where shifts
occur, on the people (policy entrepreneurs) who seize windows of opportunity to connect societal problems to politicians’ debates about the prioritization of issues on the policy agenda, and on the work of policy-makers and planners who develop solutions to problems (Huitema & Meijerink, 2010; Mintrom, 1997; Zahariadis, 2007). Less attention is paid to what happens before visible shifts in policy agendas take place. Although it is acknowledged that issue framing is a very important agenda-setting strategy (Dearing & Rogers, 1996; McCombs & Shaw, 1993; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Weaver, 2007), there is little literature or empirical analysis on the interaction processes between people involved in the agenda-setting process that result in a shift in issue frames. The central question of this paper therefore is: How can policy agenda setting be understood from the framing processes that precede shifts in policy agendas?

The case study in this paper concerns several consecutive but related civic initiatives in the peri-urban region, Gouda–Krimpenerwaard. Over time, these initiatives managed to position the development of landscape values on the agendas of local and regional governments, despite various institutional barriers and blockages. With an analytic framework that combines agenda-setting theory and framing theory, we identify tipping points in the agenda-setting process, including shifts in issue framings and coalitions. Next, we analyse the framing processes that preceded the tipping points. We end the paper by drawing conclusions about the role of interactional framing processes in agenda setting, and we discuss the implications for policy agenda-setting research and policy and planning practice.

Theoretical framework

Agenda setting

Agenda setting is generally defined as an ongoing competition among issue proponents to gain the attention of media professionals, the public, and policy elites (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). In policy studies, the focus is on the way information is prioritized for action and attention is allocated to some problems rather than others (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005; Kingdon, 2003).

A major challenge for issue proponents who seek policy attention is overcoming inevitable institutional resistance to change. Established governance processes and practices are produced and reproduced through a strong self-referentiality that hinders innovation from arising in new ways and in sites not recognized by those practices. Government organizations are inclined to reproduce traditional concepts and structures, and to filter out bits of information that are judged irrelevant to the dominant policy paradigm (Van Assche & Verschraegen, 2008; Van Herzele & Aarts, 2013; Wagemans, 2002). In other words, the government is only receptive to what is meaningful and relevant within its formal perspectives, or frames, on society. This way, policy-makers may miss competing-information or information that does not correspond with their view on policy practice, their ideas, and their goals. Consequently, prevailing arrangements are continuously reproduced, but new information gets blocked or gets interpreted in ways that are acceptable according to prevailing ideas (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005).

The policy science literature (Kingdon, 2003; Mintrom, 1997; Zahariadis, 2007) has addressed several strategies of policy entrepreneurs to overcome this institutional resistance to change and become noticed as relevant and meaningful within policy-makers’ perceptions of social reality. The strategies frequently addressed in the literature are building coalitions and networking to influence policy communities; recognizing and exploiting windows of opportunity; recognizing, exploiting, and creating multiple venues for agenda setting; and framing issues as important and urgent problems (e.g. Huitema & Meijerink, 2010; Jones & Baumgartner, 2005; Kingdon, 2003; Mintrom, 1997).

Issue framing is considered a very powerful agenda-setting mechanism (Dearing & Rogers, 1996; McCombs & Shaw, 1993; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Weaver, 2007) and an important precursor to policy-making (Hajer, 1995; Schön & Rein, 1994). Essentially, if we want to understand the prioritization of information and the allocation of attention, we need to address how issues become framed as problems, how information becomes ‘coloured’ and dramatized to attract the attention of decision-makers, and how information becomes interpreted (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005; Kingdon, 2003; Zahariadis, 2007). It is argued that the analysis of the
dynamics of agenda setting should focus more on micro-level, everyday interactions between people (Dearing & Rogers, 1996), and on how they interactively frame a situation (Hajer & Laws, 2005). Therefore, we focus on interactional framing as an agenda-setting strategy, starting from the idea that realities are constructed and changed in conversations (Ford, 1999).

Framing as an agenda-setting strategy

The essence of framing is the notion that individuals constantly struggle to make sense of the world around them and subconsciously or consciously use cognitive frames (schemata) to decide on actions (Goffman, 1974; Gray, 2002). People give meaning to the world around them by selecting pieces of information and interpreting some aspects as more important or relevant than other aspects. ‘Framing essentially involves selection and salience’ (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Framing is accomplished largely through the use of language, that is, written or spoken words (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Language-in-action is not just about words that represent certain views on reality. Language is performative in the sense that it can provoke the frames of listeners who may mobilize to undertake some form of (collective) action (Drake & Donohue, 1996).

Dewulf et al. (2009) argue that it is important to distinguish what it is that gets framed. Framing concerns not only the (policy) issues or problems in the relevant context under study (issue frames) but also the social relationships between stakeholders (relationship frames), as well as the interpretations stakeholders assign to their interactions (process frames). Framing the social relationships that people employ to achieve their ambitions may, for example, concern emphasizing a strong role of a particular government actor as a condition for success or constructing one’s identity as trustworthy. Relationship framing concerns talk about the actors, coalitions, and relationships that are considered necessary or undesirable. In this process, identities of ‘self’ and ‘others’ are socially constructed. Process framing concerns the framing of interaction processes relating to certain problems and issues. Through, stakeholders try to make sense of the way they communicate with one another. In an agenda-setting context, one could think of talk about the formal and informal communication for mobilizing attention from targeted supporters. Process framing may include a perspective on how to connect to specific planning and policy procedures that will result in desired actions, as well as informal communication strategies to engage influential politicians in the ambitions that are being pursued.

Methods

The case

Between 2004 and 2006, we were involved in a project to develop a plan for the southern urban–rural fringe of the city of Gouda together with civic initiators, government representatives, and experts. Our ‘way of knowing’ (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 25) is to a large extent related to our activities in that period. The case concerns the efforts of civic initiatives to protect and strengthen landscape values in the southern urban–rural fringe of the city of Gouda in the province of Zuid-Holland in the western part of the Netherlands (see Figure 1).

The fringe area is separated from the city centre by a river (the Hollandsche IJssel river) and is part of the Krimpenerwaard polder, which is generally characterized as an open wet meadow landscape. In contrast, the part that borders the river and the city centre is characterized by urban development with industrial activity, a wastewater plant, and the Stolwijkersluis neighbourhood, which stretches along the dike. The fringe area can be
considered a typical urban–rural area characterized by complicated multi-level governance processes and the resulting institutional barriers to civic initiatives attracting policy attention for their proposals.

Our study covers the period from the mid-1980s to 2010. Consecutive civic initiatives in the fringe started emerging about 1985 and concerned the protection and rehabilitation of landscape values and cultural heritage. The case study ends in 2010 when landscape values in the fringe were successfully positioned on local and regional policy agendas, and plans were implemented for the restoration of a historical canal lock.

We describe the case in a narrative that tells how civic initiatives constructed their own spatial proposals for local/regional development and how they tried to connect to the various local and regional governments, resulting in varying outcomes in terms of achievement of their ambitions and government agendas for regional (spatial) development.

**Data collection**

The civic initiative that first emerged is named Werkgroep Gouda <—> Krimpenerwaard (WGK: Working Group Gouda <—> Krimpenerwaard). We tracked the activities and issues raised by WGK over time by reading its proposals and pamphlets and analysing 130 articles from the regional daily newspapers Rijn & Gouwe (1994–2005) and AD Groene Hart (2005–2009) that mentioned the WGK and a related interest group called Beraad Stadsrand Gouda-Krimpenerwaard (Consultation Group Gouda-Krimpenerwaard Fringe). Additionally, relevant policy documents and spatial plans concerning local and regional development were analysed. To analyse framing in interaction, we used materials from the project in which we were involved ourselves (Van der Stoep & Van den Brink, 2006). These concerned minutes of participants’ meetings, letter correspondence between initiatives and government representatives, and reports of meetings of local and regional

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**Figure 1.** The Gouda–Krimpenerwaard urban–rural fringe. Source: Landscape Architecture Group, Wageningen University.
government councils in which important decisions were taken about the urban–rural fringe. Moreover, we had access to e-mail correspondence covering the period 2004–2010 concerning conversations about the progress of the civic initiatives for the urban–rural fringe and related topics. These e-mails gave unique insight into the informal and formal interactions that took place over time (Friedman, Olekalns, & Oh, 2007; Landry, 2000). In their e-mails, members of civic initiatives discussed and prepared interaction strategies for formal and informal negotiations, tried to make sense of what had happened during meetings and encounters with targets of mobilization, and discussed future action.

All these data sources contained text fragments that represented framings of issues, relationships, interaction processes, meaningful events, and strategies. We derived these framings by coding the text fragments and identifying issue framings, relationship framings, process framings, and events. Table 1 lists the main categories of codes, which were further subcategorized through in vivo coding.

In an early phase, we started constructing a timetable of events that actors themselves considered important in the agenda-setting process. This table contained a chronological overview of events in governmental decision-making and political events (like elections), shifts in policy agendas, shifts in the coalitions of actors, as well as activities of citizen initiatives and important formal and informal meetings (as derived from utterances in talk and text). New information was continuously added. Our understanding of important junctures in the process and shifts in coalitions and the framing of situations grew through reflection on the timetable.

In the period November 2009 to the summer of 2011, we conducted nine semi-structured interviews with representatives of both civic initiatives and the local governments with whom the citizens interacted the most. The interviews consisted of questions about why initiatives had emerged in the first place, how and why ambitions developed and were framed in a certain way, and why certain events were considered decisive. They served to clarify and obtain contextualized and detailed understanding of the relationships between certain events, and the strategies and relationships between actors that made a difference. They also provided more in-depth information about how issues were framed and ‘storied’ over time. Essentially, the interviews provided feedback on our interpretations of important patterns in the process and pointed to other patterns that were meaningful in understanding the agenda-setting process. The transcripts of the interviews were coded using the same strategy as mentioned above.

Finally, findings and conclusions were written down in a case narrative (see Van der Stoep, 2014, for an extended narrative). The backbone of the case narrative is formed by the tipping points that we identified from our conclusions about shifting frames and shifting coalitions. From the timetable and the coded text fragments, we generated a thick description with a contextualized account of what had happened.

### Table 1. Coding categories for events and IF, RF, and PF.

| Code | Concept | Description |
|------|---------|-------------|
| Event | Events | Text fragments containing information on events in relation to issues that were framed as relevant and important by the actors involved. Events concerned, for example, formal government decisions or social events. |
| IF | Issue framing | Text fragments reflecting the framing of issues by the civic initiatives as well as other involved actors. They reflect the way problems and issues are framed and reframed over time. |
| RF | Relationship framing | Text fragments reflecting the framing of social relationships over time by the involved actors. The fragments contain various utterances concerning relationships and cooperation between civic initiatives, governmental actors, and other relevant actors. |
| PF | Interaction process framing | Text fragments reflecting informal and formal interactions between members of civic initiatives and government representatives. Includes talk between civic initiatives’ members about the way connections could be established with ongoing planning and policy processes to get the support of local and regional governments. |

### Shifting frames and coalitions

In this section, the case is narrated, followed by two sections in which the findings are discussed. An overview of relevant events, coalitions, and shifting frames concerning the urban–rural fringe Gouda–Krimpenerwaard is provided in the timeline in Figure 2.
From Gouda port city to fringe naturally

In 1985, a small group of citizens established the *Initiatiefgroep Gouda Havenstad* (IGH: Initiative Group Gouda Port City) with the aim of restoring the historical connection between the inner-city port and the river Hollandsche IJssel (which had been closed off in the 1950s) for recreational purposes and to initiate a vision of the urban development of the riverfront. They called this vision *Gouda Havenstad*? (Gouda Port City), framing the port as important for the future development of the city centre and the Gouda riverfront (*Initiatiefgroep Gouda Havenstad, 1987, 1988*). The riverfront included not only the city centre side but also the opposite bank that marked a sharp change from city to countryside. Although still part of the municipal territory of the city, the opposite side of the river had mostly been neglected by the municipality. It became part of the territory of the city in 1964 when it was obtained for potential urban expansion and utilities (wastewater plant, power plant, and so forth).

IGH organized a competition to invite people to come up with a design for the area (*Initiatiefgroep Gouda Havenstad, 1988*). Some designs emphasized the sharp border between city and countryside, including conservation of the green and open character of the polder. In such plans, the ‘window to the Krimpenerwaard’, i.e. the open view to the Krimpenerwaard polder from the southern dike, would be conserved. Other plans aimed to improve the relationship between the city centre and the river by planning new urban development on both sides. This included a marina, tower blocks, and urban villas. The ideas about urban development inspired public authorities to design a marina and residential area on the polder side of the river (*Projectteam Hollandsche IJssel, 1999*).

![Figure 2](image-url). Overview of the shifts of civic initiatives’ frames of the urban–rural fringe Gouda–Krimpenerwaard in the period 1985–2010.
This prompted a number of members of the IGH to organize themselves in another group, Werkgroep Gouda <--- Krimpenerwaard [WGK]. A leading member of both IGH and WGK explains:

We nominated the most talked-about designs for the Gouda Havenstad [Gouda Port City] competition, among which a green [nature-oriented] and a red [urban development] design. There were also designs that would not be my choice. But it is a way of attracting attention to that place. And then one discovers later on that, after letting it go for five years, a number of people from the municipal department of town planning had been very inspired by that red model. That 'Manhattan at the IJssel' … Then I thought 'Hey! That is not our choice! We should start yet another group'.

So initially, all ideas or frames for a spatial design for the river bank were accepted as long as attention was generated for this more or less forgotten part of town. Later on, when government bodies' attention was mobilized, the group of citizens focused on framing the future of the fringe in ways that suited their visions best. The WGK designed an alternative plan for the southern fringe, Oeverplan Hollandse IJssel. Alternatieve inrichtingsvoorstellen (copy available from corresponding author on request), stating that the working group was brought into being 'to preserve and strengthen the unique and special relation between the historical inner city of Gouda with the bordering open green space of the Krimpenerwaard'. Conserving the 'window to the Krimpenerwaard' and conserving landscape values in the urban–rural fringe were the main goals of this alternative plan.

A few years later, the southern fringe of Gouda was subject of another design competition, called Fringe Naturally (Stadsrand Natuurlijk). The organizers, a collective of seven local and regional environmental organizations, argued that the various sectoral government plans for the area might lead to deprivation of landscape qualities and that an integrated vision was required to preserve landscape values. Apart from residential development, the government's sectoral plans particularly concerned the construction of a bypass road through, and the development of an industrial area in, the southern fringe. The goal of the competition was to 'design a fringe area that forms an attractive and recreational link between city and countryside, and that serves as a buffer for the advancing urbanization' (Consept, 1998, p. 9).

The WGK participated and won the competition with their story and visualizations of a future for the fringe. WGK counterframed the intended urban development by emphasizing the unique 'window to the Krimpenerwaard' and calling for preservation of the sharp contrast between the city and the open green space of the Krimpenerwaard. The ideal picture that WGK sketched for the urban–rural fringe entailed 'bridging the city of Gouda and its rural environment', meaning that the fringe should be used to enhance the liveability of the area for urban dwellers, country people, and visitors.

Although the competition did not succeed in getting the integrated development of the fringe onto local and provincial policy agendas, WGK still considered it an important step in the agenda-setting process. At this stage, the problem of the preservation of landscape values in the fringe was framed into an attractive and coherent story, supported by visualizations. Once printed, the plan was continuously used by WGK to direct attention to the area. The extension of the Gouda Port City frame to the Fringe Naturally frame formed the beginning of coalition building around spatial proposals for the urban–rural fringe.

From fringe naturally to restoration of the Stolwijkersluis lock

WGK's plans and proposals for the fringe included the restoration of a 200-year-old canal lock that had fallen into disrepair in the Stolwijkersluis neighbourhood (Werkgroep Gouda <--- Krimpenerwaard, 1999). The lock was blocked off in 1986 because it was no longer used to transport agricultural products between the city of Gouda and the Krimpenerwaard. In 1990, with the help of the local history association, the status of National Monument (NM) was legally assigned to the lock. Nevertheless, the NM status did not warrant conservation of the lock because the arrangement did not oblige the owner, i.e. the Hoogheemraadschap Krimpenerwaard water board, to invest in repair and maintenance. The historical lock formed a vital link in the WGK’s ideas about pleasure cruising between Gouda city centre and the Krimpenerwaard polder. However, the lock risked demolition because the water board perceived it merely as an unwanted rupture in the dike.

In 2003, a history association board member together with a landscape architect sketched some scenarios for the future development of the lock. The public presentation of these design scenarios (Van Dam & Van den
Brink, 2004) attracted substantial attention from both governmental and non-governmental stakeholders. This formed a window of opportunity to push restoration onto the policy agendas of Gouda municipality and the water board.

A spatial design project was set up by experts from Wageningen University at the request of the history association. The project emphasized the meaning of the historical lock and other historical landscape values for the spatial quality of the wider area. National Belvedere funding was obtained on the condition that spatial development and heritage management would be integrated in the plan, and that various forms of knowledge on spatial planning and design as well as on heritage management would be included. Gouda municipality, the water board, and the provincial government contributed time and funding, because water safety regulations required fast decision-making on the future of the Stolwijkersluis lock. The coordinators convinced these governmental participants that a broad range of local and regional stakeholders, including representatives of grassroots organizations, residents in the Stolwijkersluis neighbourhood, the history association, and local environmental organizations, like WGK, should be involved. The coordinators argued that this would improve the quality of the plan as well as the quality of the planning process in terms of building social and political support. The participatory nature of the project represented a breakthrough in coalition building: previously Gouda municipality, the water board, and the provincial government previously were not inclined to discuss spatial development of the urban–rural fringe with civic initiatives, now they were collectively developing a plan. The project resulted in the Stolwijkersluis Masterplan (Van der Stoep & Van den Brink, 2006). Figure 3 presents the map of the Stolwijkersluis Masterplan.

The two major elements of the Stolwijkersluis Masterplan were the restoration of the lock and development a city garden in the polder directly behind the lock. The proposed restoration of the lock to facilitate boating between the river and the Krimpenerwaard would contribute greatly to enhancing its recreational amenities.

Figure 3. Masterplan Stolwijkersluis (Van der Stoep & Van den Brink, 2006). Source: authors.
The city garden would offer additional green infrastructure to Gouda, which compared to other Dutch cities ranks very low in terms of green square metres per inhabitant. Gouda municipality agreed that urban development in the southern fringe was no longer an option. In March 2006, just before that year's municipal elections, the Stolwijkersluis Masterplan was presented. The elections formed a window of opportunity that facilitated influencing the political agenda of the newly elected Municipal Executive. The Masterplan was mentioned in the Municipal Executive’s policy programme, where it was stated that the Executive, together with other involved governments, would investigate the feasibility of implementing the Masterplan. A joint Memorandum of Understanding was signed in July 2006.

From restoration of the Stolwijkersluis lock to rural redevelopment of the Krimpenerwaard

The coalition of governments soon faced a number of serious financial setbacks. They did not manage to acquire a national subsidy for the restoration of the lock, in spite of its NM status. Moreover, as a consequence of substantial changes in national rural planning policies, the proposed landscape development, including the city garden, was no longer eligible for funding. A year after the presentation of the Stolwijkersluis Masterplan, there was still almost no financial prospect for implementation, and the coalition of governments fell apart. Gouda municipality, for example, prioritized other policy goals in its budget plans, leaving it to the water board and the provincial government to find other ways to implement the Masterplan. The province in particular was considered the key player for providing solutions, both as a funder and as the responsible government for various relevant policy domains at the regional level.

Meanwhile, citizen groups and interest organizations had become impatient because of all the delay and the 'black box' of the negotiation process between the involved governments. WGK believed that the provincial government could only be convinced to actively participate in the implementation of the Stolwijkersluis Masterplan if it would consider the Masterplan a regional rather than a local matter. WGK’s framing strategies changed to link up their interests with those of the province.

To attract the province’s attention, WGK emphasized the importance of social support from the Krimpenerwaard. If stakeholders in the Krimpenerwaard somehow demonstrated interest in the Masterplan, then the plan would be relevant for regional development and therefore provincial support. However, authorities and other stakeholders in the Krimpenerwaard were suspicious about any meddling that came from Gouda municipality. Therefore, WGK expected support only if their ideas could be connected to the initiatives developed by stakeholders from the Krimpenerwaard. One such civic initiative that soon proved to be of great importance was the so-called Veenvaren (peat boating) initiative. Its name refers to the possibility of exploring the typical wet (or peat) meadow polder by boat as well as using the historical waterways of a 200-year-old peat cultivation plan that had never been implemented. In the words of the WGK spokesman:

Although all the time people from the city of Gouda were willing to write letters, I thought that would not make sense any-more … The people from the Krimpenerwaard have to say it! … It began with helping the idea of Veenvaren, the initiator of which was completely crazy about wooden scows, and he had a boating route in mind of about 25 km provided the Stolwijkersluis lock would be restored. I loved those ideas! And then we helped him because this was what we needed to get the lock restored. The voice of the Krimpenerwaard!

Veenvaren would present recreational opportunities to country people, urban dwellers, and tourists. See Figure 4 for a map of the Veenvaren Plan. WGK was convinced that connecting the Stolwijkersluis Masterplan to Veenvaren, emphasizing the potential for recreational connections between the city of Gouda and the Krimpenerwaard countryside through the water infrastructure, would exemplify the regional relevance of the Stolwijkersluis Masterplan.

However, Veenvaren was not an idea to which farmers, authorities, and nature organizations in the Krimpenerwaard responded and contributed easily. Boating in the Krimpenerwaard had been heavily debated some 10 years before. It was framed as a destructive activity for nature and farmland, as illustrated by the following statement by the Veenvaren leader:
Farmers are against boating because they associate it with noise pollution and damage to the banks of the canals as a result of the beating of the waves … It is difficult to enforce boating restrictions. In the past, a lack of enforcement caused a lot of nuisance. People will sit on the ground and leave their rubbish behind … The farmers have been taken by surprise by the plan to restore the lock. They are afraid that this will bring back the yachts of past days … When the canal shipping trade ended, the farmers pressed for the lock to be blocked off. They absolutely did not want any more pleasure cruising.

In reaction to this opposition to boating, WGK and Veenvaren constructed a counter-frame in which the small scale and nature friendliness of boating were emphasized; only electric engines would be allowed. Besides that, they argued that the boating target group would be nature lovers and seekers of peace and quiet, people who would be respectful of farmers’ land and nature organizations and to the Sunday’s rest that is highly valued by the Krimpenerwaard inhabitants.

Another strategy was to frame the Veenvaren initiative as a leisure and tourism option that would provide farmers with alternative economic activities and enhance the liveability of the area. The Veenvaren initiative and WGK emphasized the economic benefits that could come from visitors to the city of Gouda, who would make excursions ‘from the cheese market [downtown Gouda] to the land of the cheese’. This economic prospect would appeal not only to entrepreneurs in the Krimpenerwaard but also to stakeholders in Gouda. In this extended framing of the Gouda–Krimpenerwaard urban–rural fringe, the urban dweller was no longer the centre of interest, but rather country people, and the entrepreneurs in the Krimpenerwaard who could increase their income with pleasure cruisers. An alderman of one of the Krimpenerwaard municipalities took the lead in aligning this frame with the plans for rural renewal of the Krimpenerwaard developed by local and regional authorities. By emphasizing the economic benefits, he succeeded in raising the interest of entrepreneurs and local governors in this topic and, in doing so, substantially contributed to making the province receptive to the restoration of the lock and boating in the polder.

At the end of 2009, a new and unexpected window of opportunity occurred. An economic crisis spurred the national government to create a Crisis Fund for the funding of employment projects, including cultural heritage
restoration projects. Supported by the Krimpenerwaard municipalities, the water board, and Gouda municipality, the province successfully applied for funding for the restoration of the Stolwijkersluis lock. An important advantage for this project compared with other applications was the fact that the plans for the Stolwijkersluis lock were already finished and waiting to be executed. In September 2012, the festive inauguration ceremony for the restored lock took place.

**Resemiotization to get policy attention**

Overall, the case narrative manifests two main tipping points in the agenda setting, that is, visible shifts in policy agendas: (1) the reference to the Masterplan for the southern urban–rural fringe in the policy programme of the new Municipal Executive in 2006 and (2) the decision of the province and the water board to fund restoration of the lock in 2010. These tipping points were preceded by various framing and coalition-building processes.

Our case study shows that not only the framing of issues but also the framing of relationships and interaction processes were important agenda-setting strategies. First, the opportunity to acquire *Belvedere* funding for a planning project that integrated heritage management and spatial development prompted a shift from framing the fringe’s spatial problems in terms of Fringe Naturally to a central focus on the restoration of the historical lock. Moreover, the *Belvedere* funding agency made the participation of public and private stakeholders conditional on the inclusion of spatial planning and design issues as well as heritage management issues. Therefore, the intended participation process and relationships between participating actors were framed such that they met the conditions of the *Belvedere* funding. Thus, a coalition of citizen groups, interest groups, and governmental organizations was constructed, first on paper, and later in reality. Subsequently, the resulting project, Stolwijkersluis Masterplan, offered a new way for social groups like the WGK and the neighbourhood residents to discuss other spatial problems in the fringe with government representatives. Thus, to attract attention and (financial and political) support, the framing of issues in the case study was highly intertwined with the framing of relationship and interaction processes.

The intertwined framing of issues, relationships, and procedures is also visible in the shift from framing the fringe area as an urban concern to framing it as a rural concern for the redevelopment of the Krimpenerwaard polder. The narrative shows that this shift resulted from an alternative strategy whereby the civic initiatives in Gouda focused on establishing a partnership with the provincial government to change the policy agenda and to access financial resources. The provincial government was framed by the WGK and the Gouda municipality representatives as the leading change agent that could solve financial problems and coordinate collective action. To attract attention from the provincial government, the WGK reframed the fringe’s spatial problems as a concern of interest groups in the Krimpenerwaard. The WGK also emphasized its good relationship with initiative groups in the Krimpenerwaard, like the *Veenvaren* initiative. As a result, the restoration of the lock was reframed as part of the *Veenvaren* initiative, and the *Veenvaren* initiative was framed as contributing to rural development in the Krimpenerwaard. Much of the talk was about how to establish a fit with the ongoing planning process for rural development, i.e. which interaction processes and which social and professional relations were required to achieve goals. The goals and issues in the fringe area did not change; rather, they were framed differently on the basis of required relationships and interaction processes. Thus, issues, relationships, and interaction processes were dynamically reconstructed in conjunction with one another to mobilize attention and support for alternative proposals.

The interplay between the framing of issues, relationships, and processes can be described as a circular relationship without a beginning and an end, or causes and effects in the context of agenda-setting processes (see Figure 5). Our study shows that it was exactly the smart aligning of issue framings, relationships framings, and process framings from which persuasive stories emerged that mobilized people into action.

While issue, relationship, and interaction process frames were being connected, original frames were ‘re-semiotized’ to become noticed and considered relevant by targeted supporters. The resemiotization concept (Iedema, 2001) points to the phenomenon that people, while talking and listening to one another, subtly reframe their own perspectives on the basis of an understanding of one another’s frames (Van Herzele & Aarts, 2013). Civic initiatives and their coalition partners gradually secured governments’ attention and support
by incorporating governmental ambitions, concerns, and policy frames into the story about the spatial future of the fringe area. For example, resemiotizing the spatial proposals for the fringe in terms of small-scale water tourism, the peace and quiet in the area, its history and culture, and the economic potential for farmers increased credibility and salience from the perspective of stakeholders in the Krimpenerwaard, and therefore, the province. Resemiotization also involved the framing of scale (Van Lieshout, Dewulf, Aarts, & Termeer, 2014). Although initially civic initiatives were primarily concerned with local issues in the fringe in relation to Gouda’s urban development, they scaled up the discussion to the regional level, i.e. rural redevelopment of the Krimpenerwaard, to secure the province’s policy attention.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper tries to elucidate how policy agenda setting can be understood from the framing processes that precede shifts in policy agendas. Our study shows that tipping points in agenda setting were marked by particular political events, shifts in coalitions, and shifts in issue, relationship, and interaction process frames. We found that continuous and everyday interactions between stakeholders were essential, as these interactions enabled continuous framing and reframing to align with targeted supporters in their specific contexts and make them receptive to alternative proposals. The civic initiatives’ ambitions and proposals for the spatial development of the fringe were relatively stable, but they were framed differently over time to fit relevant policy stories. The civic actors involved were constantly searching for opportunities that would make potential supporters consider their proposals credible, relevant, and meaningful within their self-referential frames of the situation.

From our study, it can be concluded that two framing mechanisms were decisive for mobilizing policy attention on the civic initiatives’ plans for the fringe area: (1) a constant tuning of issue framing, relationship framing, and interaction process framing and (2) a constant resemiotization to connect to the concerns of targeted supporters in ever-changing contexts.

Our study has a number of scientific and practical implications that we now address. First, this paper supports the argument that a focus on the process of meaning construction between people is critical to understanding and dealing with complexity, that is, the dynamics and unpredictability in policy systems that result from the multiplicity of interactions between people and organizations. We have added a strong emphasis on the social construction of meaning through framing and how this mobilizes ideas, coalitions, and agenda change. Our study helps to elucidate why innovations initiated by civic actors are adopted or not. Hence, it contributes to debates among planners and policy scientists about the way meaningful connections between government and civil society come about.

Second, our study demonstrates the significance of windows of opportunity, but we challenge the inclination to focus on events in terms of linear cause-and-effect relationships. The analysis shows that, although political opportunities and events triggered action, they cannot in themselves explain change. More is needed to carry a subject onto a policy agenda (Cheney & Christensen, 2001; Hudalah, Winarso, & Woltjer, 2010; Kingdon, 2003; Van Woerkum, Aarts, & Van Herzele, 2011). Tipping points were rather the result of a concurrence of events,
past negotiations, and framing processes than of isolated focusing events. It was a matter of gradually, ‘softening up’ (Kingdon, 2003) prospective adherents in a myriad of conversations. Apparently, shifts that initially seem sudden are actually the result of gradual and step-by-step change. This paper has demonstrated the crucial role of framing dynamics as a precursor to tipping points and how framing resulted in decision-makers being effectively softened up to civic initiatives’ proposals.

Third, and related to the previous argument about gradual change, the case demonstrates that the introduction of new ideas and proposals does not radically transform policies. By listening to, telling, sharing, and aligning frames, promoters of proposals navigate targeted supporters’ existing frames. Every new proposal is interpreted and given meaning by listeners in a context of existing policy stories. Agency thus concerns meaningfully connecting one’s own frame to existing modes of thinking, to create room to manoeuvre within the structure presented by these dominant modes of thinking. This way, dominant policy frames are subtly and more or less imperceptibly stretched to include new ideas. Framing is thus considered an important form of action that constitutes, reconfirms, and subtly transforms structural forces. Using a historical and holistic perspective, focusing on the construction of meaning, our research has indicated that transformative change may be explained by factors such as patience, timing, serendipity, listening, and sharing stories, while tuning in to the more structural forces at the macro level. A focus on human interactions at the micro level and on the processes of meaning construction can reveal more detailed insights into why and how more structural change and transitions come about.

Finally, civic initiatives appear to be very important policy entrepreneurs. In fact, it is their framing and coalition-building efforts that result in connections between separate government departments. Whereas civic initiatives were challenged to create bridges and connect different frames in their storytelling about the future of the urban–rural Gouda–Krimpenerwaard fringe, government actors were more inclined to stick to their own policy stories. Here, lessons can be learned for policy-makers and planners who aim to develop a more adaptive attitude to changing circumstances and to emerging initiatives and seeds of change in civil society. To manage change meaningfully, a ‘will to order’ that seems to prevail within policy-making organizations could take the shape of a ‘will to connect’ (Hagens, 2010). A will to connect implies paying attention to, and engaging in, everyday interactions and meaning construction at the grassroots level.

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