

# Abstracts

***Tineke A. Abma***

## **Narrative structure and fixations in policy dialogues**

Recently many experiments with policy dialogues and other interactive forms of policymaking have been undertaken. One of the assumptions is that the inclusion and engagement of other actors than the government will increase the commitment for and creativity of policy plans. Quite often, however, inherited policy solutions and controversies remain in tact. An analysis of the 'narrative infrastructure' that informs and constraints the actions of stakeholders is helpful to gain a deep understanding of the stories dominating a certain practice. Interventions based on the notion that 'narrative fixations' do not imply a shortage of consensus but a lack of variety, focus on the introduction of 'other-point multiplicity'. These diagnostic and methodological instruments will be illustrated by an extreme and therefore insightful case: it concerns the organised policy dialogue about the future of the Dutch aviation infrastructure, known by the public as the Schiphol-discussion. With findings from a responsive evaluation this article shows how a narrative

fixation between proponents and opponents of the expansion of the airport, established by two competing stories, can be explained and opened-up, and what kind of effects that has had in the eyes of participants in the dialogue.

***Kees Aarts***

## **Thirty years later: The empirical tenability of arguments**

Three decades after the abolishment of compulsory voting in the Netherlands, a renewed interest in the (re-)introduction of this instrument can be observed both in the Netherlands and abroad. This article highlights the various empirical propositions that were made in the debate in the Dutch parliament in 1970 for and against compulsory voting, adds some recent propositions by Lijphart and others to this, and then examines the evidence for these twelve propositions in the year 1998. Most of the empirical propositions forwarded in support of the abolishment of compulsory voting have proven to be unfounded, whereas most of the arguments against the abolishment of com-

pulsory voting, or in favor of its re-introduction, prove to be true.

**Tjitske Akkerman**  
**Consensus and social policy**

The restructuring of the Dutch welfare state has been relatively successful. This has brought about a revaluation of consensual politics. While consensusdemocracy was not so long predominantly associated with undecisiveness, it has now become a 'hurray-word'. The one thing that has not changed, however, is the notion that Dutch politics is first and foremost about consensus.

This thesis is put to the test here. To begin with, the concept itself is scrutinised. After sketching the prevailing approaches, the author proposes to develop a broader approach. It is argued that an institutional approach should be combined with an analysis of ideas. Moreover, the range of relevant actors should be extended from political and social elites to the public at large. Starting from this approach the author then examines the consensual strengths and weaknesses of social policy during the past two decades. Her main conclusions are that the Dutch consensus has been weakened in institutional respects, but with regard to ideas a new consensus has emerged.

**Frank Hendriks en Pieter W. Tops**  
**Interactive policy-making and sensemaking**

The logic of interactive policy-making hooks on to the long tradition of consensus democracy in the Netherlands, but that is not to say that there is general consensus on the value of interactive policy-making. Heroic and critical interpretations of interactive policy-making stand opposite to each other. None of these interpretations can claim general validity. For that, the practice of interactive policy-making in the Netherlands is too pluriform and multi-interpretable. The meaning rendered to interactive policy-making is not only dependent upon the case at hand, but also dependent upon the democratic perspective that is used, often implicitly. If one prefers consensus democracy than one is likely to appreciate interactive policy-making more positively than if one prefers pendulum democracy, plebiscitary democracy or basis democracy. In addition it makes a difference how one approaches public policy-making: from an instrumental or an interactionist perspective. These perspectives give rise to different approaches of interactive policy-making. In the current practice of interactive policy-making the instrumental approach dominates at the expense of the interactionist approach. One of the main challenges for the future is to better balance these two types of approaches.