



Faculteit Sociale Wetenschappen  
Departement Politieke Wetenschappen

## **How policy conflict escalates**

### The case of the Oosterweel highway in Antwerp

Proefschrift voorgelegd tot het behalen van de graad van doctor in de sociale wetenschappen aan  
de Universiteit Antwerpen  
te verdedigen door

**E.E.A. Wolf**

Members of the doctoral committee:

Prof. dr. Cathy Berx

Prof. dr. Tom Coppens

Prof. dr. Imrat Verhoeven

Members of the doctoral jury:

Prof. dr. Tamara Metze-Burghouts

Prof. dr. Tina Nabatchi

Cover photograph: Dnorton. A picture of the statue “fearless girl” by Kristen Visbal on Wallstreet, New York. The fearless girl depicts strength, braveness and pride –but not belligerence or violence- in voicing one’s opinion and claiming one’s place in the world.

**Copyright © Eva Wolf, 2018**

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print, photoprint, microfilm or any other means, without permission from the author.

# Table of contents

Table of contents .....	3
Figures and tables .....	7
Preface .....	9
1. Introduction .....	13
The many meanings of one highway plan.....	13
Making sense of the escalation of public policy conflicts .....	14
Dealing with conflict.....	19
Studying Oosterweel interpretively.....	21
Final thoughts.....	26
2. How policies become contested: A spiral of imagination and evidence in a large infrastructure project.....	29
Abstract.....	29
Introduction .....	30
Framing through imagination and evidence .....	31
Case description: A short history of the Oosterweelconnection.....	34
Methods .....	36
Imaginative framing and framing through evidence in Oosterweel.....	38
Framing dynamics: How imagination and evidence reinforce each other .....	44
Discussion and conclusion .....	49
3. “Time to move on” or “taking more time”? How disregarding multiple perspectives on time can increase policy-making conflict .....	51
Abstract.....	51
Introduction .....	52
The management of multiple time perspectives in spatial policy-making.....	53
Methods .....	56
Temporal arguments in the public debate over Oosterweel.....	58
How a binary debate on tempo increased policy-making conflict.....	63

Conclusion and discussion .....	68
4. Dismissing the “vocal minority”: How policy conflict escalates when policy-makers label resisting citizens .....	71
Abstract.....	71
Introduction .....	72
The feed-forward effects of policy design and labelling in policy conflicts.....	73
Methods .....	76
From public discussion to systemic distrust in the conflict over Oosterweel.....	78
Conflict escalation: separating “vocal minority” from “silent majority” .....	83
Conclusion and discussion .....	87
5. Conflict reconsidered: The boomerang effect of depoliticization in the policy process.....	91
Abstract.....	91
Introduction .....	92
Steering clear of conflict in policy-making?.....	92
Methods .....	96
Opening up and closing off the Oosterweel debate .....	99
The boomerang effect of depoliticization.....	105
Conclusion and discussion .....	110
6. Conflict as troubling the waters? How steering for results can impede the public administrator as conflict arbiter .....	113
Introduction .....	113
Steering for results: the administrator as manager .....	114
The Oosterweelconnection conflict .....	117
The failed attempts to manage away conflict .....	120
Arriving at better conflicts .....	124
7. Conclusion .....	127
Answering the research question.....	127
Future academic research .....	130
Policy practice .....	133
Final thoughts.....	143

References.....	145
Appendix 1: List of respondents .....	163
Appendix 2: Topic-list for second part of interview.....	165
Abstract .....	167



# Figures and tables

## Figures:

2.1:	Articles found on the Oosterweelconnection, 2000–2014	37
2.2:	The imagination-evidence spiral: Pleading for Oosterweel	47
2.3:	The imagination-evidence spiral: Pleading against Oosterweel	47
3.1:	Articles on the Oosterweelconnection	56
3.2:	The Antwerp ring road showing the planned Oosterweelconnection in dotted lines	59
3.3:	How the procedural and impact-based time perspectives further diverged	67
4.1:	Summary of most important events in Oosterweelconnection conflict	84
4.2:	Othering by policy-makers through increased labeling of self as serving “silent majority” and increased labeling of action groups as serving “vocal minority”	87
5.1:	Articles on the Oosterweelconnection	96
5.2:	Depoliticization and politicization in the Oosterweel policy process	105
6.1:	Approaches to conflict in PA literature	116

## Tables:

1.1:	Overview of how the chapters have been presented for publication	27
2.1:	Years and months analysed	37
3.1:	Years and months analysed	57
3.2:	Perspectives on time in the Oosterweel debate	65
5.1:	Years and months analysed	97
5.2:	Arguments of depoliticization	107
5.3:	Arguments of politicization	108



# Preface

Alles is eindig. Als ik iets heb gemerkt nu mijn doctoraat op zijn einde loopt, is het dat loslaten niet altijd makkelijk is. Maar het tikken van de tijd kan ook ik niet afremmen, hoe hard ik het ook probeer (zie ook hoofdstuk 3 ;)). Wel kan ik dankbaar zijn. En als er naast voorbarige weemoed één gevoel overheerst, nu, de afgelopen maanden en, ik weet het al zeker, de aankomende weken, is het heel veel dankbaarheid. Hoe al die gevoelens die ik voel in geschrift om te zetten? En waar te beginnen? Misschien maar gewoon helemaal bij het begin.

Niet om te stoefen, maar dit is verre van mijn eerste boek. De impact factor zal onmeetbaar zijn en de boekenwinkels hebben ze nooit bereikt, maar als kind heb ik veel, heel veel, verhalen geschreven. Telkens creatief geïllustreerd en tot boek bij elkaar gebonden met gekleurd garen. Op de vraag wat ik later wilde worden, antwoordde ik stevast plastisch chirurg overdag en in mijn vrije tijd kapster en schrijfster. **Mam**, bedankt dat u me altijd, altijd, heeft laten dromen en mijn kinderambities nooit geremd heeft. Dat u mij en mijn broertjes heeft aangespoord te tekenen en te schrijven en te creëren en met eindeloos enthousiasme op onze zeer hoge output gereageerd heeft.

Dan die broertjes van me. **Thomas en Lukas**, jullie zijn jonger dan mij en ik heb de laatste jaren gemerkt dat dat verschil onze herinneringen kleurt. Jullie herinneren je veel minder van de zomers samen, eindeloos zwerfend door de Limburgse bossen, de avonturen, de coca-cola club met lidmaatschapspasje en toetredingsproef, de ondergrondse - en boomhutten, de houten slingers aan bomen die telkens weer afbraken, het opjutten en uitdagen van elkaar, altijd maar bewijzen dat je de stoerste was en de sterkste, waarbij ik natuurlijk een competitief voordeel had vanwege mijn leeftijd, die overigens tot een einde kwam toen ik na mijn 12<sup>e</sup> niet meer bleek te groeien. Bedankt voor alle avonturen. Ik ben zo blij we samen geleerd hebben om dapper en met opgeheven hoofd het leven tegenmoet te treden en ik weet niet of ik hier had gestaan zonder die gezamenlijke lessen. **Jesse**, ook jij bedankt voor de herinneringen, ik hoop dat dat er de aankomende jaren nog veel meer worden. **Christian**, alhoewel ik het niet altijd goed weet te verwoorden ben ik zo ontzettend trots op je. Je bent de grootste kanjer die ik ken!

Met sommige familie word je geboren. Met andere familie word je opgezadeld. Maar hoe zoet kan het opzadelen zijn. Bedankt allerliefste **schoonfamilie** dat het woord schoon door de jaren heen is gaan verbleken. 11 jaar geleden werd ik door jullie met open armen ontvangen en welkom geheten in een veilig nest. Jullie hebben me ouder zien worden en zien veranderen en me altijd het gevoel gegeven dat ik er mocht zijn en dat wat ik deed er mocht zijn zonder dat ik me ooit moest bewijzen. En ook als ik er de afgelopen vier jaar doorheen zat, en dat gebeurde met enige regelmaat, kon ik mijn zorgen achterlaten bij jullie voordeur en gewoon “zijn.” Een speciale

vermelding voor **Anouk en Thijs**, die ik inmiddels naast familie ook tot mijn meest dierbare vrienden reken.

Geboren, opgezaeld. Je zou bijna vergeten dat er keuze is in het leven. Maar wat ben ik blij met de vrienden die ik gekozen heb en die warempel ook met mij vriendjes wilden zijn. **Cynthia**, je bent inmiddels mijn oudste vriendin. Ook al zien we elkaar niet vaak, ik weet dat ik altijd bij je terecht kan en dat we maanden moeizaam overbruggen als we elkaar weer zien. Bedankt voor die vele jaren van lachen, drinken, mopperen, roddelen, reizen en trash-tv kijken met elkaar. Ook de **Uptown Girls** en de **Boerenjongens** (ik ben een kind van mijn tijd dat ik jullie identificeer op basis van groeps-whatsapp-namen) ken ik inmiddels heel wat jaren en heb ik met de jaren steeds beter leren kennen. Ik kan onwijs met jullie lachen, zingen en dansen en ook al vinden jullie mij soms wat fel in discussies, en ik zou mezelf niet zijn als ik dat dan niet weer zou tegenspreken, dank dat jullie het desalniettemin met me uithouden. Dan mijn allerliefste **Sweaterboys**. Wat had ik zonder jullie moeten deze laatste vier jaar? Jullie zijn zoveel meer dan mijn feestvriendinnen, maar tegelijk ook het bewijs dat samen dansen allesbehalve oppervlakkig is. Als ik er doorheen zit kan ik kracht en inspiratie uit jullie putten, of dat nou op professioneel vlak is, want jullie zijn stuk voor stuk superslimme topchicks, of op het gebied van lifestyle of op het gebied van hoe een zinvol leven te leiden. **Alieke, Joyce, Rosanne en Tamarah**, love you to the moon and back!

Doctoreren is wel degelijk werken en daarbij heb ik de nodige hulp gehad. **Wouter**, bedankt voor de vrijheid die je me als promotor gaf om zelf het pad van mijn doctoraat te bewandelen op de manier die mij het meeste aansprak. Ik kijk met name met veel plezier terug op de samenwerking voor ons “pop-science” boek: “De waarde van weerstand.” Mening promotor zou het hebben afgeraden om zo’n project nog aan het einde van het laatste jaar te ondernemen, maar jij hebt je er samen met mij volledig ingestort en ik ben ontzettend trots op en dankbaar voor het resultaat. Ook veel dank aan de leden van mijn doctoraatscommissie. **Imrat**, als ik jou niet was tegengekomen in Salamanca in mijn eerste jaar had dit doctoraat er niet gelegen zoals het er nu ligt. Oneindig veel dank dat je me vanaf het begin het vertrouwen hebt gegeven dat mijn ideeën de moeite waard waren om uit te werken. **Cathy**, dank voor steun, je waardevolle inzichten als het aankwam op Oosterweel en je onmisbare hulp bij het leggen van contact met respondenten. Bedankt ook **Tom** voor je nuttige feedback tijdens elke doctoraatscommissie en je bemoedigende enthousiasme als het aankwam op de plannen voor het doctoraat. Dankbaar ben ik ook mijn externe juryleden. **Tina**, thank you for having me in Syracuse and for the many interesting talks we had during my stay there. Your enthusiasm is contagious and truly helped to lighten the burden of finishing up my Phd. **Tamara**, bedankt voor de inspiratie die je me gaf op congressen. Het is fijn om vrouwelijke rolmodellen te hebben in het toch vaak door mannen gedomineerde wereldje, en jij was er zeker een voor mij. De **Provincie Antwerpen** wil ik graag bedanken voor

de financiering, en dus het mogelijk maken van, dit onderzoek. Ook dank aan mijn vele **respondenten**, die uit vrije wil een significant deel van hun tijd op aarde hebben opgeofferd om met mij te praten over Oosterweel. Dit doctoraat heeft maar tot stand kunnen komen vanwege jullie engagement. Tot slot een woord van dank aan mijn **jobstudenten**, die de vele uren van interviews geduldig en nauwkeurig hebben getranscribeerd- toch niet het meest inspirerende klusje van de wereld.

Ik had ook nog collega's. En wat voor collega's. Jullie zijn belangrijker voor mij geweest dan velen van jullie waarschijnlijk beseffen, want ergens tussen Utrecht en Antwerpen in waren het de mooie momenten met jullie waar ik ten Zuiden van Rozendaal veel geluk uit kon putten. Allereerst dank aan mijn collega's uit de **Public Administration & Management** onderzoeksgroep, die geduldig veel presentaties van mij hebben moeten aanhoren, veel papers van mij hebben gelezen en me altijd van onmisbare feedback hebben voorzien Als rasechte Landschap veteraan (waar blijft die medaille?) moet ik natuurlijk ook **Landschap 2013** bedanken. De Alcoholic Thursday was voor mij het begin van wat ik mijn tweede studentenperiode zou kunnen noemen, en deze was vele malen wilder dan mijn originele. Dank ook aan de **Bende van Flachau** voor de mooie momenten in de sneeuw en in de sauna, op de Blob en op café. Ik hoop dat we elkaar niet helemaal uit het oog zullen verliezen. **Vidar**, bedankt voor je eindeloze optimisme en je bereidheid om altijd even een praatje te maken waarin je me ook bijna altijd laat lachen, of dat nou je intentie is of niet. **Jannen**, bedankt voor het warme welkom op jullie bureau toen ik eindelijk, eindelijk, Landschap-af was. Jullie zijn voor mij de nexus tussen humor en goed professioneel advies. **Iskander**, bedankt voor je academische tips & tricks, je droge enthousiasme en je extreme relativiseringsvermogen for all things academia. **Evelien**, bedankt voor je empathie en je passie. **Patrick**, bedankt voor je geduld en dat je altijd voor elk avontuur in was, of het nou ging om Kerstmarkt-crashen, Last Thursdays of de Bonaparte. **Matti**, bedankt voor het vele dansen. **Shirley**, ik ken niemand die zo oprecht begaan is met zoveel verschillende mensen, of je ze nou goed of minder goed kent, en zo beschermend is over de mensen die je dierbaar zijn. Bedankt dat je mij het gevoel hebt gegeven dat ik bij die categorie mag horen. Frederik, **Fre**, of mag ik je ook nog Roofie noemen? The original deskmate. Ik weet niet of in het handvest staat wat de procedure is in het geval dat een van beide deskmates Dr. wordt, maar gelukkig wordt de boel snel gelijkgetrokken wanneer ook jij tot het Dr.-schap gaat toetreden. Ik hoop dat ik nog veel jaren met je kan lachen en babbelen. **Kirsten en Sarah** jullie zijn echte vriendinnen geworden en mijn kick-ass powerchicks in Antwerpen. Ik kan enorm met jullie lachen, zweten, zingen en dansen. Bedankt dat ik jullie deze vier jaar, vanaf het prille begin, door alle crazy plotwendingen heen, tot het bitterzoete einde (maar afscheid nemen bestaat niet) aan mijn zijde heb mogen hebben.

**Ivo.** Waar ik moet ik zelfs beginnen met jou, de persoon die op mijn 18<sup>e</sup>, toen ik nog een verlegen meisje was met een zachte “g”, in je fluo-gele trui als een ridder uit het Oosten (niet het Midden-Oosten maar het minstens even exotische Twente) mijn leven kwam binnenrijden en niet meer van mijn zijde is geweken. Ik kan alleen maar zeggen dat ik ontzettend veel van je hou. Dat gegeven is een van de grootste zekerheden gebleken op de woelige wateren van mijn volwassenheid. Jou wil ik nog veel meer dan iemand anders bedanken. Voor de kopjes koffie, voor de sambal, voor de ongetwijfeld duizelingwekkend gesprekken over mijn papers en je hulp bij het omzetten van mijn intellectuele gedachtenspinsels in behapbare journal-ready illustraties. Voor de grote dingen. Voor de kleine dingen. Voor alles. Voor jou. Voor ons.

Promoveren en doctoreren, Antwerpen, opnieuw beginnen, afscheid nemen, huilen en wenen, vooral heel veel lachen en zingen en dansen... Voor mij zijn al deze dingen intens met elkaar verbonden. Ik heb de afgelopen 4 jaar zoveel beleefd dat het een afkicken wordt voor mij om straks een “gewone” baan te hebben met “gewone” werkzaamheden en “gewone” collega’s. Want “gewoon”, dat waren de afgelopen 4 jaar doctoreren zeker niet. En wat ben ik er blij om.

# 1. Introduction

## **The many meanings of one highway plan**

If you were to ask someone in Flanders their opinion of the Oosterweelconnection, a planned highway to address the daily traffic jams in Antwerp, you would be hard-pressed to predict their answer. As I have come to find out over the course of four years, the Oosterweelconnection means many different things to many different people. And although it seems that the parties are finally seeing eye-to-eye, as they signed and presented an agreement regarding the Oosterweelconnection on 15 March 2017, this agreement came about only after two years of negotiation, more than a decade of conflict, and more than two decades of policy-making on the Oosterweelconnection. With the radically different meanings people have ascribed to this planned highway, this hardly seems surprising.

To some, the Oosterweelconnection (often shortened to Oosterweel) is the long-awaited solution for the daily traffic congestion haunting Antwerp, a solution that would instantly boost the Flemish economy. Others might talk about Oosterweel not in terms of boosting anything, but as threatening Antwerp's livability. The latter could allege that Oosterweel might inflict damage on the urban development of Antwerp's poorest neighborhoods or the respiratory health of Antwerp's residents. Pressed for their opinion, both proponents and opponents of the Oosterweelconnection would probably give an exasperated sigh. The exasperation may come from the slowness of decision-making: why did it have to take more than a decade to finally reach what seems to be a solution to this policy impasse? Or it may come from the decision-making process in Flanders. Decision-making on the Oosterweelconnection is often claimed to have been fraught with political scheming from "fraudulent decision-makers." Others blame a "vocal minority" for the slow pace of decision-making, obstructing the public interest for selfish reasons. Finally, the exasperation may come from the democratic system of Flanders and Belgium. In this broken system, they might say, important things no longer get done.

This dissertation takes as its point of departure the many different meanings that Oosterweel has come to hold. It asks how to understand these different meanings and, more specifically, how they came to be. The Oosterweel conflict did not start out as a conflict over how to make democratic decisions or as a fight between a "selfish vocal minority" and "fraudulent decision-makers." Nor could any of the parties involved in the early discussions on the project have known that what initially seemed like an entirely uncontested project would become one of the most stubborn public policy issues in the recent history of Flemish decision-making. What happened? How did we get from a discussion over highway proposals to what until recently

seemed like a conflict that would never be solved? This dissertation aims to shed light on the mechanisms of conflict escalation in the Oosterweel conflict. However, while the empirical focus is on Oosterweel, the aim is also to generate insights that are relevant beyond this single case. Oosterweel is hardly the only example of a public policy whose many contested meanings have resulted in heated discussions. Whether the issue is construction projects (Coppens, 2011; Durnova, 2013; Novy & Peters, 2012), municipal restructuring (I. Verhoeven, 2009), fracking (Metze, 2014), migration (Ostaijen, 2017), or the management of community centers (Verloof, 2015), conflicts over policies abound. Each chapter of this dissertation attempts to uncover theoretical mechanisms of escalation that may be used to better understand the becoming of public policy conflict more broadly. The research question that guides this dissertation, and upon which the subsequent chapters will further elaborate, is as follows:

*How can we make sense of the dynamics of conflict escalation in public policy conflicts and how should governments deal with these dynamics?*

As reflected in the research question, the aim of this dissertation is twofold: to make sense of conflict dynamics on the one hand, and to reflect on how governments should handle conflict on the other. The remainder of this chapter will further discuss both aspects and situate the various chapters of the dissertation within the wider academic literature, while also reflecting on my methodological approach.

## **Making sense of the escalation of public policy conflicts**

Each of the chapters in this dissertation studies conflict. Let me therefore start with defining what I mean by conflict. Although various definitions exist, I use that provided by Kriesberg and Dayton, who define conflict as the process that arises “when two or more persons or groups manifest the belief that they have incompatible objectives” (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2017, p. 2). While Kriesberg and Dayton are interested in social conflicts in general, my interest lies in conflicts that arise over public policies. This dissertation aims to make sense of such conflicts, in particular the way in which these conflicts escalate. The escalation of conflict has been studied in various ways. It has, for example, been characterized as a ladder: when one goes up a rung on the ladder, conflict escalates; when one goes down a rung, conflict de-escalates (Glasl, 1982). Authors have also differentiated the aspects of escalation, such as an increase in conflict intensity (conflict escalates when parties use more damaging strategies to fight the other party), an increase in the number of people involved (conflict escalates when more people are drawn into the conflict), and an increase in the number of topics people fight about (conflict escalates when more topics are drawn into the conflict) (Pruitt., Rubin & Kim, 2003, p. 70). My interest is in what Oosterweel has come to mean for those involved. This dissertation therefore focuses on the topics

of conflict rather than the strategies that people use or the number of people drawn into the conflict.<sup>i</sup>

Combining this interest in the topics of conflict with the earlier definition of conflict, conflict escalation is defined as an increase in the number of objectives that parties manifestly believe are incompatible with the objectives of the other parties in the conflict. In the case of the Oosterweelconnection, conflict started out as mainly about different infrastructure proposals. However, over the course of time parties also came to believe that the policy-process should be altered (and that other parties held incompatible objectives in structuring the policy process) and that the voices of some people were illegitimate (because these persons were thought to serve their own selfish objectives rather than the public interest). Conflict thus escalated from a substantive level to a procedural level and, finally, to a relational level.

While literature from the fields of policy studies and public administration provides clues, discussed in detail in the upcoming sections, regarding how substantive, procedural and relational conflicts progress, the focus is usually not on these conflicts as such, let alone on conflict escalation. As a result, we know little about the theoretical mechanisms behind the phenomenon in which, as policy conflict becomes more protracted, the number of objectives that parties have and believe are incompatible with the objectives of other parties often increases. Nor do works on conflict mediation from the field of urban planning (i.e.: Forester, 2009; Laws & Forester, 2007; Susskind & Ozawa, 1984), to my knowledge, provide concrete theoretical mechanisms that can be used as heuristics to better understand the escalation process. To be sure, this is not their aim: most of these works focus on bettering mediation practices rather than on theory-building. Works from the field of conflict studies do provide clues on the dynamics of conflict escalation, but these insights, often borne from studying military situations, cannot be copy-pasted into the policy-making process. Much of this literature, for example, sees truly destructive conflict as involving sanctions that inflict physical or economic harm on the other party. Furthermore, while the literature does provide important clues on escalation, such as that cooperative behavior tends to elicit more cooperative behavior while competitive behavior elicits more competitive behavior (Deutsch, 2011; Kriesberg & Dayton, 2017, pp. 317–327), it remains unclear how in a policy process such a transformation comes about in the first place. How does a minor debate between generally well-meaning policy actors cross over into a fight between parties that regard the “other” in hostile ways?

Meanwhile, as noted above, policy conflicts abound. Gaining a better understanding of how such conflicts escalate may be useful not just to improve our theories but also to help improve governmental practices. This dissertation aims to contribute to that endeavor. In what follows, I

briefly touch upon the various previous works that my dissertation uses to study the escalation of policy conflict, and I explain the contribution of my dissertation to these bodies of literature.<sup>ii</sup>

### **Substantive conflict: How policy positions become polarized in the framing process**

Let us begin with substantive conflict. One popular way to study substantive conflicts over public policies is to investigate the different “frames” that parties in a policy debate reason from. Frames can be defined as “strong and generic narratives that guide both analysis and action in practical situations. Such narratives are diagnostic/prescriptive stories that tell, within a given issue terrain, what needs fixing and how it might be fixed” (Rein & Schön, 1996, p. 89). Parties often frame the same policy issue in radically different ways. As we will see in chapter three, the Oosterweelconnection was framed by some as the “medicine” for a looming “traffic infarct,” while others thought of it as a “scar” that would damage the “urban tissue” of Antwerp. These ways of framing have consequences for Oosterweel’s evaluation: a medicine is welcomed, a scar is feared. If parties do not recognize that different frames underlie a public debate, conflict may arise. After all, if a party is seen to stand in the way of curing traffic jams, or seems careless towards the make-up of the urban environment, others may see the objectives of this party as incompatible with their own. Not only may conflict ensue as a result of these opposing frames, but as long as the different frames that lie at the root of a conflict remain unaddressed, conflict remains intractable.

The academic literature describes many cases in which frames are at the heart of policy-making conflicts (i.e.: Art Dewulf, Craps, & Dercon, 2004; B. Gray, 2003; Hisschemöller & Hoppe, 1995; Laws & Rein, 2003; Schön & Rein, 1994). However, as also argued by van Hulst and Yanow (Merlijn van Hulst & Yanow, 2016), frames are often treated as static. By static I mean that, while many works analyze frames that determine the course of public policy conflicts, they give far less attention to the becoming of these frames. The study of frames thus seems to have come at the expense of studying framing as a dynamic process. Chapter 3 adds to our knowledge of framing, exploring how parties come to frame the same issue in increasingly different ways. It argues that imaginative framing (appeals to emotions via symbolic language) and framing through evidence (appeals to rationality via factual language) mutually reinforce each other. When evidence backs up appeals to the imagination, such as when facts gathered through research back up metaphors like Oosterweel being a scar on the urban tissue of Antwerp, these appeals are endowed with authority. While this strengthens appeals that have been “proven” to be true, it also makes actors backing these appeals increasingly frustrated with other parties that still refuse to accept them. The former are then spurred to launch new imaginative appeals conveying their anger, as in the case of decision-makers using research as a “smokescreen” to conceal their lies, and to seek new evidence to substantiate these appeals. Going back and forth in the process of policy-making between imaginative appeals and appeals to evidence, all parties in a

conflict develop their own vision of the contested issue. Over time, their tolerance for ambiguity decreases and the debate becomes polarized.

The conflict dynamics explored in this first chapter mainly have to do with substantive conflict. As research becomes a weapon to prove one's own position, policy positions grow further apart. The question of how a substantive conflict transforms into a procedural or a relational one, however, remains unanswered. Chapters 3 and 4, respectively, explore this escalation to procedural and to relational conflict.

### **Procedural conflict: How structuring time becomes contested**

Policies are made in policy processes. When public policies meet resistance, choices need to be made, either explicitly or implicitly, about how to move forward in the process. Is the policy process paused in order to further reflect on controversial policy choices, or does the policy move forward in the planning procedure? The second chapter explores the different perspectives that may exist in a public debate on how to structure time. Conflicting time perspectives may ultimately contribute to the policy procedure itself becoming increasingly contested.

The fact that time may be experienced differently by different actors in a policy process is an insight that has only recently begun to receive attention from scholars in the field of policy studies and public administration. More often, time is conceived as a constraint, a scarce resource that needs to be used wisely. The literature on so called "planning failures" of large spatial projects even defines failure in temporal terms with success typically defined as projects "being delivered on budget, time, and benefits" (Flyvbjerg, 2014, p. 11; for empirical applications, see also: Hall, 1982; Morris & Hough, 1987). However, chapter 3 explains how prioritizing demands for quick decision-making can ultimately result in a substantive conflict escalating to a procedural conflict. In the policy process of the Oosterweelconnection, administrative actors reasoned mainly from a procedural time perspective and saw time as scarce, while citizens reasoned mostly from an impact-based time perspective and saw time as abundant. A binary debate on policy-making tempo (high versus low) ensued. As the debate on the tempo of Oosterweel policy-making became increasingly binary, the parties also increasingly believed that their objectives for structuring the policy process were incompatible. Demands for keeping up the decision-making tempo were cast as leading to bad and irreversible decisions, while demands for decreasing the tempo became equally suspicious, as they were cast in terms of obstruction. The public debate became splintered not only over the question of how to order space (substantive conflict) but also over how to structure the policy process (procedural conflict). A substantive conflict escalated into a procedural conflict.

### **Relational conflict: How the other party becomes the enemy**

The fourth chapter explores the way in which the actors increasingly came to view other parties in the Oosterweel conflict as the enemy, serving only selfish objectives. For conflicts to turn relational, parties must first differentiate between “us” and “them,” a process the conflict literature also calls “othering” (Wu & Laws, 2003). When parties engage in othering, they ascribe negative personal characteristics to these other groups that stand in direct opposition to their own perceived characteristics. For example: “they” are liars, while “we” tell the truth. In the Oosterweel conflict, policy-makers became increasingly convinced that action groups were serving their own objectives at the expense of the public interest that the policy-makers themselves were supposedly serving. The reverse is also true: as the conflict dragged on, members of action groups became increasingly convinced that policy-makers were only out to push through their own preferred policies at all costs, and were therefore not to be trusted.

Chapter 4 uses the social construction and policy design (SCPD) theory to study the escalation to relational conflict (Ingram & Schneider, 2015; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Schneider & Sidney, 2009). SCPD theory is used mainly to explain socio-economic differences between various groups in society. I argue that it can also teach us more about the turn to relational conflict. SCPD argues that policy-making is not a neutral process of distributing costs and benefits, but a process that significantly shapes the make-up of populations. Policies, the theory claims, send messages to their recipients that have feed-forward effects. When the target population is labelled as deserving or undeserving of benefits and as powerful or powerless, citizens are taught what is expected from them in terms of democratic participation.

By foregrounding the messages that policies send to the “other” parties and their feed-forward effects, SCPD theory enhances our knowledge of the othering process in policy conflicts. Because chapter 4 extensively explores the understudied aspect of feed-forward effects, and questions the premise that policy-makers necessarily act as strategic agents, SCPD theory is also enhanced by studying policy conflict. The main conclusion of chapter 4 is that policy-makers became increasingly hostile towards action groups, who were labeled a selfish “vocal minority,” as the latter moved outside of the conventional policy-making procedure to resist the Oosterweelconnection. Meanwhile, seeing themselves as just the opposite of action groups and as victimized by them, policy-makers portrayed the Oosterweel policy that they defended as representing an increasingly powerless but deserving “silent majority.” However, labelling action groups as powerful but undeserving, and consequently dismissing them, only triggered the latter to take up arms more vigorously. As the conflict dragged on, parties were increasingly fighting each other rather than merely fighting over policies, and the conflict became relational.

Each of the first three chapters then, explores different dimensions of the escalation of policy conflict and contributes to different fields of academic literature. What the chapters share is an interest in how conflicts transform, first from a minor debate to a deep substantive conflict (chapter 2) and then from a substantive conflict to a procedural one (chapter 3) and a relational one (chapter 4). Three theoretical mechanisms are presented that help make sense of these dynamics of escalation. Together, they answer the first part of my research question. However, this dissertation aims to do more than simply make sense conflict escalation; it also intends to explore ways for governments to deal with policy-conflicts. Chapters 5 and 6 address this second part of my research question.

## **Dealing with conflict**

Policy conflict is not all bad. On the positive side, conflicts means engagement (M. Hajer, 2003; Laws, Hogendoorn, & Karl, 2014; I. Verhoeven, 2009; Verloo, 2015). When people bother to voice complaints about an issue, this means that they care about it. If political apathy truly worries us, would it not make sense to welcome the democratic engagement that conflicts elicit? Not only does conflict equal engagement, but it can also promote creativity (Carnevale, 2006; Coppens, 2014; Coser, 1956; Cuppen, 2011). As captured in the notion of “creative destruction,” new insights can arrive only after old ones are called into question. At the same time, conflict also has negative sides. Most importantly, it can foster distrust between people. Growing distrust can eventually lead parties to either cease communication altogether or only communicate with each other by attacking the other party. If parties no longer communicate with each other by listening to what the other has to say, the positive sides of a conflict cannot be taken advantage of and conflict takes a turn for the worse.

Conflict thus has positive and negative aspects. What stands out in chapters 2-4, however, is that policy-makers had little patience for conflict. Civic resistance was seen by them as a problem standing in the way of implementation. That policy-makers hold such a negative view of conflict is not surprising. As chapters 5 and 6 explain, a negative view of conflict permeates theories of policy-making. If we already have troubles celebrating conflict theoretically, policy-makers can hardly be blamed for wanting to disengage from civic contestation in practice.

In exploring how governments should deal with conflict, I take inspiration from academic works that celebrate political conflict and critically scrutinize contemporary policy practices. This pertains first and foremost to works that are situated in what can be termed the critical-philosophical field of political science. Chantal Mouffe (2009), for example, criticizes the lack of conflict in contemporary politics. This lack, she argues, damages democracies because organizing political difference and conflict lies at the heart of our democratic systems. If we take away the choice between real political alternatives that contradict each other, why would citizens still

participate in politics? If there is no real choice, why bother choosing at all? Authors such as Pierre Rosanvallon (2008) and John Keane (2009), too, stress the benefits that political friction has for democracies. The latter explains that, rather than seeing as problematic the multiplicity of institutions that scrutinize the conduct of governments, these institutions should be celebrated for strengthening our democracies. Works such as those mentioned above offer interesting perspectives on contemporary policy-making practices, but usually do not subject these perspectives to rigorous empirical analysis, nor is this their purpose. This dissertation takes the insights these works offer as inspiration for evaluating the conduct of governments through systematic empirical analysis.

A second stream of literature that chapters 5 and 6 build on comes from authors working on the border of urban planning, policy studies and conflict resolution. Authors such as Maarten Hajer (2003), David Laws (2014), Imrat Verhoeven (2009) and Nanke Verloo (2015), whose works in turn draw inspiration from authors working in the field of mediation (Forester, 2009; Susskind & Ozawa, 1984) and conflict studies (Deutsch, 2011; Kriesberg & Dayton, 2017), have explored the productive aspects of policy conflicts. This dissertation adds to their work by explicitly focusing on the role of public administrators and their motivations in analyzing how they handled conflict. Chapters 5 and 6 explore not only how conflict is dealt with and its consequences, but also why public administrators dealt with conflict in the way that they did, and which “theories-in-use,” as we might call them, guided their actions.

### **The boomerang effect of closing down the space for conflict**

The fifth chapter uses the theoretical perspective of (de)politicization to explore how policy-makers in the Oosterweel case dealt with this conflict. An issue is depoliticized when it moves from the political arena of deliberation and contingency, where action is possible, to the non-political arenas of fate and necessity, where nothing can be done (Beveridge & Naumann, 2014; Gamble, 2000; Hay, 2007; Jenkins, 2011; Wood & Flinders, 2014). When policy-makers depoliticize an issue, they can disengage from conflict by presenting the contested issue as unmalleable and outside their control.

Through the conceptual lens of (de)politicization, chapter 5 empirically assesses whether policy-makers engage or disengage with conflict by allowing or closing off deliberation. In addition to furthering our knowledge of how and why policy-makers deal with conflict in the way that they do, chapter 5 also contributes to the depoliticization literature in two ways. Firstly, the chapter engages in much-needed empirical investigation in a field dominated by theoretical work. Secondly, it answers a call for studies on not only depoliticization, but also the dynamic interplay of depoliticization and politicization. The main conclusion of the chapter is that efforts to end public debate through depoliticization can have a boomerang effect, in which the conflict

disappears only temporarily, and that these efforts can ultimately increase the destructive aspects of conflict while wasting the engagement and creativity that conflict over policies can activate.

### **Steering for results? The administrator as manager**

Chapter 6 brings together the various insights presented in the previous chapters. I argue that in the Oosterweel conflict administrators mostly saw conflict as troubling the waters of a good project. With their eyes focused on the finish line, more debate on a policy they had already decided on was considered a threat to project completion. They tried to deal with conflict not by re-opening the discussion over Oosterweel, but by disengaging from conflict. Rather than operating as conflict arbiters themselves, they used evidence as the arbiter of conflict (chapter 2). Rather than pausing decision-making, they stressed that there was no time for further deliberation (chapter 3). Rather than inviting angry protesters to the decision-making table, they were hesitant to include them for fear of policy obstruction (chapter 4). There does not seem to have been a malicious intent behind these efforts to close down further debate, as there is nothing to indicate that policy-makers purposely tried to silence the voices of protesters. Instead, it seems that policy-makers saw conflict as something that would unnecessarily complicate the policy process, and that they should therefore steer clear from as much as possible. These efforts, however, only contributed to conflict escalation and the burgeoning distrust between parties, ultimately making the conflict much harder to settle. More evidence decreased the tolerance for ambiguity, steering for deadlines made the policy process suspect, and equating the Oosterweelconnection with serving the public interest made enemies out of opponents.

### **Studying Oosterweel interpretively**

To this point I have discussed the various chapters of this dissertation, which, taken together, provide an answer to the overarching research question. I have also situated these chapters in the academic literature. Let us now turn to the process of research: how did I obtain the data necessary to answer my research question? Chapters 2-5 each contain their own methods sections explaining how the results presented in those chapters were obtained. Here, however, I would like to briefly reflect on my research methodology and discuss how I tried to satisfy the quality criteria for sound scientific research.

While the terms are often used interchangeably, the methodology one uses is different from the methods one uses. Methods can be defined as “all of those tools and techniques that are used to carry out research: surveys, questionnaires, interviews, observation, participation, and the like” (Haverland & Yanow, 2012, p. 401). The methods of research are informed by the methodology of the researcher, by which I mean: “the applied philosophical positions that underpin and inform those tools and techniques” (Haverland & Yanow, 2012, p. 401).

This dissertation's research question explicitly states its aim to make sense of the Oosterweel conflict. Together with my interest in the many meanings of the Oosterweelconnection, this may have already hinted to the informed reader that I am employing an interpretive research methodology. In other words, I am doing what is called "interpretive research." As Wagenaar, drawing on Bevir & Rhodes (2004), states: interpretive research is a broad label for the type of research that "focus[es] on meanings that shape actions and institutions, and the ways in which they do so" (Hendruik Wagenaar, 2011, p. 3). Under the broad label of interpretive research one can find many subfields, each with their own assumptions, language and methods of data analysis and presentation. My aim is not to summarize all these different subfields, nor to present an extensive philosophical underpinning for employing an interpretive methodology. This has already been done at length by others, and more extensively than I could hope to do in this introduction (Schwartz-Sea & Yanow, 2012; Hendruik Wagenaar, 2011; Yanow & Schwartz-Sea (ed.), 2006). Rather, I will explain specifically what it means to study the Oosterweel conflict interpretively.

A common way to explain interpretive methodology is to contrast it with positivist-informed<sup>iii</sup> methodology. The common denominator in more conventional, positivist-informed policy-analysis is the desire to explain the world of policy-making "objectively." The word objective refers to a description of the world independent of the observer, thus without any "subjective" bias. This may seem like a noble ambition. However, philosophers of science have argued that it is impossible to describe the world independently of the observer (Putnam, 2001). Humans have no "pure," unbiased access to the world out there. This "makes all talk of likeness or distortion particularly problematic" (Hendrik Wagenaar, 2011, p. 59). If policies cannot be understood independently of the observer, then the idea that truth is obtained when there is exact correspondence between the representation of the research-object by the researcher, and the research-object itself, goes out the door.<sup>iv</sup> The philosophical view stating that whatever we perceive as facts are always facts "under a particular description" (Hendrik Wagenaar, 2011, p. 19) is called "perspectivism" (Fay, 1996).

The implication of philosophical perspectivism is that there can never be an "ultimate" foundation on which to base our truth claims. We cannot say definitely that our scientific truth corresponds better with reality than any other truth. We can certainly argue that it does, but there is no ultimate, observer-independent foundation on which to stake our claim. Every observation, every interpretation, is pre-informed by concepts, and so the way in which humans make sense of the world they live in, the way in which they explain and act upon it, consists of interpretations "all the way down" (Yanow, 2006, p. 21). I want to emphasize that I do not mean to say that it cannot be useful to, for example, employ statistical analysis when explaining policy problems. Although it may be impossible to represent the social world in exact correspondence to reality,

one may be able to provide good reasons to examine the object of study in positivist-informed ways.<sup>v</sup> What I am saying is that the truth produced through such analysis is always a truth under a particular description. There is no ultimate and universal foundation on which truth claims can be based.<sup>vi</sup>

If this is the case, then the truth claims of positivist-informed research can obviously be called into question. They, too, are unable to explain social phenomena objectively. In contrast to a positivist-informed methodology, an interpretive methodology does “not deal in truth and falsity, but in plausibility—always under the provision that this particular explanation is not exhaustive and that at any time a better one might come up” (Hendrik Wagenaar, 2011, p. 47). Hence, an interpretive researcher does not strive to produce objective explanations of social phenomena, as a positivist-informed researcher does. Rather, an interpretive policy analyst aims to investigate the different interpretations of public problems and their solutions, how people act on those interpretations, and how these actions are in turn interpreted. Meanwhile, the researcher herself is also, inevitably, in the business of interpreting.<sup>vii</sup>

The different stances towards objectivity mean that interpretive researchers treat biases very different from positivist-informed researchers. While a positivist-informed methodology aims to eliminate any biases when a researcher interprets her research object, an interpretive methodology rejects the idea that we can entirely nullify these biases and does not necessarily view them as a problem.<sup>viii</sup> The reason that we want to explain our social world in the first place is because of our biases. Biases make us human, and make us curious. Without them, if we were merely “blank slates,” why would we be interested in better understanding particular social phenomena?<sup>ix</sup>

Interpretive research, then, explains social phenomena by unravelling what they mean, how people act on those meanings and how meanings come into being. Its aim is not to explain phenomena by first immersing oneself in theories and then testing these theories in the field. If we allow ourselves to see only what theories tell us to see, an interpretive methodology contends, many things vital to explaining a phenomenon may be obscured. Rather, interpretive research usually<sup>x</sup> departs from meanings in the field and aims to build up explanations that “make sense of” or “understand” social phenomena while remaining firmly grounded in empirical data. Interpretive research is often conducted through qualitative methods, but this does not necessarily need to be the case. As stated above, one can separate methods from methodology. However, according to an interpretive methodology, “correlations between variables never do any explanatory work; they merely point to a conjuncture that might inspire us to adopt a particular narrative to explain something” (Bevir, 2006, p. 284). In other words, to explain social

phenomena satisfactorily to the interpretive researcher, quantitative methods alone usually do not suffice.

Elucidating the different, contradictory meanings of the Oosterweelconnection can enable us to understand the becoming of this policy conflict in ways that an approach that forgoes meaning-making would probably be unable to do. Moreover, by rendering audible the many voices in the Oosterweel conflict, and by telling the different stories that may be told about this controversial highway plan, this dissertation may help the different parties understand each other better. This last reason for studying the Oosterweelconnection conflict interpretively fits with the normative agenda of much interpretive research: by laying bare the constructed nature of social reality, the researcher also makes a different reality imaginable and can hence serve practical and emancipatory ends.<sup>xi</sup>

The fact that positivist-informed ideas about objectivity are rejected by interpretive researchers does not mean that anything goes, however. Interpretive researchers, too, must be able to demonstrate convincingly that their conclusions are not arbitrary. Chapters 2 to 5 explain the procedures through which the conclusions presented in those chapters came about. Here, however, I would like to summarize how I have tried to prevent arbitrariness in my dissertation as a whole. Although various authors in the epistemic community of interpretive research have put forward different evaluative criteria, I will use those developed by Miles & Huberman (1994, pp. 277–280): confirmability, dependability, credibility, transferability and application. I choose these criteria over others because the first four closely correspond to the positivist-informed criteria of objectivity, reliability, internal validity and external validity. They may therefore make more sense to readers who are familiar only with positivist-informed methodology.

The first criterion, that of *confirmability*, is the alternative to the positivist-informed objectivity. As noted above, interpretive researchers do not believe that biases can or should be eliminated. Therefore, objectivity is not something to strive for. Confirmability, then, mainly has to do with being transparent about how you have conducted your research. Chapters 1 to 4 contain methods sections to inform the reader of the details of the research procedure. Here I have delineated my stance towards methodology, so that the reader knows what to expect when embarking on the various chapters of my dissertation.

*Dependability* is the alternative to reliability and has to do with the quality of “measurement,” to use the positivist-informed term. In interpretive research, repeatability of the research is not an aim, but the researcher should still be systematic in how she does research so that errors are minimized. The selection of respondents to interview (for a list, see appendix 1) was initially based on expert consulting and was updated after each interview through the snowball method.

For the selection of newspapers, I chose to analyze all paid Flemish newspapers and one free newspaper that is widely read, and to focus on the peaks in media attention concerning the Oosterweelconnection. I took care to transcribe all my interviews and to code the empirical material (both the interviews and the newspaper articles) in the Nvivo software program. Although the interviews were narrative interviews, and thus mostly open-ended, I concluded each interview with a set of topics. This enabled me to get systematic feedback on these topics from all respondents (see appendix 2).

The third criteria is that of *credibility*, which is the alternative to the traditional internal validity. Research high on credibility paints an authentic portrait of the research object. This dissertation has tried to paint an authentic portrait by, firstly, triangulating the data collection. Before embarking on the media analysis (of 739 articles) and the interviews (of 32 stakeholders with an average interview-time of 1h 44m), I became acquainted with the Oosterweel case by reading books on this conflict (Claeys, 2013; Verelst, 2009a) and by collecting and reading various policy documents. This process is referred to as desk research. Furthermore, by combining media analysis with the analysis of interview data I was able to investigate both the structure of the public debate on Oosterweel and the lived experience of the actors in the process, and to compare each to the other. Performing the media analysis before embarking on the interviews also helped me become a better interviewer: I was more informed about the case and could more critically assess the answers that I was given by respondents. In addition to triangulating my data, I tried to stay as close as possible to the way in which actors made sense of the Oosterweel conflict themselves. I analyzed the media articles as a whole, rather than analyzing text excerpts out of context, and conducted narrative interviews. The latter left it up to the respondents to reconstruct the history of their involvement in the Oosterweel case on their own terms. To maintain the connection between data and theory so that my analysis would remain grounded in my empirical data, I coded the data in an abductive fashion. This means that I started with open coding but went back and forth between data and theory in the course of the coding process. In the newspaper articles, I began by focusing on specific discursive elements (metaphors, evidence claims and numbers), but linked these codes to theoretical concepts later in the coding process. The interviews were coded thematically but openly from the start and were similarly only linked to theoretical concepts further along in the coding process.

*Transferability* is the alternative to external validity, and concerns the extent to which the research findings hold beyond the specific case that was studied. By constructing theoretical mechanisms of conflict escalation, this dissertation contributes to mid-level theorizing that can function as a heuristic to better understand other cases of policy conflict. These theoretical mechanisms can teach us more about how substantive positions become polarized; how conflicts can transform

from substantive, to procedural, to relational; and how the constructive and destructive aspects of conflict may be amplified.

The final criteria is that of *application*. Because the Oosterweelconnection conflict is one of the most stubborn policy conflicts in the recent history of Flemish decision-making, and is well-known throughout Flanders, I found it important to spread my research findings beyond the circles of academia. To this end I have written a book, together with my advisor, on the lessons to be learned from the Oosterweelconnection case for decision-making in Flanders (E. Wolf & Van Dooren, 2017). The book was based on my research findings, but written for a general audience.

## **Final thoughts**

This introduction has presented my overarching research question and situated the various chapters of the dissertation in the wider academic literature. It is my hope that at the end of this work the reader will know more about how policy conflicts escalate and about how governments can deal with them in order to foster their productive aspects and minimize their destructive qualities. Although the chapters tell a bigger story when taken together, they were originally written, and thus also read, as separate papers. Some have been published or accepted for publication, while others are still in the process of being published. The table below provides an overview.

It is also important to keep in mind that the ensuing chapters generally cover the Oosterweel conflict through 2014, as most of my data was gathered in 2014 and 2015. Since 2014, there have been considerable developments. Most importantly, under the auspice of a so-called “intendant,” whose function was to mediate between the various parties, action groups and governmental actors, an agreement on the Oosterweelconnection project was reached in the spring of 2017. In the conclusion I briefly reflect on this agreement and on how this dissertation’s insights on conflict escalation hold up in the context of this obvious de-escalation of conflict. The conclusion also presents the answer to the main research question.

Before rushing to conclusions, however, the subsequent chapters first analyze the escalation of policy conflict in the case of the Oosterweelconnection (chapters 2-4) and the way in which the conflict was dealt with by governmental actors (chapter 5-6).

**Table 1.1: overview of how the chapters have been presented for publication**

Chapter	Output	Status
Introduction	Only for dissertation	-
2. How policies become contested: a spiral of imagination and evidence in a large infrastructure project	Paper	Published in <i>Policy Sciences</i>
3. “Time to move on” or “taking more time”? How disregarding multiple perspectives on time can increase policy-making conflict	Paper	Published in <i>Environment &amp; Planning C: Politics and Space</i>
4. Dismissing the “vocal minority”: How policy conflict escalates when policy-makers label resisting citizens	Paper (single authored)	Revise & Resubmit for <i>Policy Studies</i>
5. Conflict reconsidered: The boomerang effect of depoliticization in the policy process	Paper	Forthcoming in: <i>Public Administration</i>
6. Conflict as troubling the waters? How steering for results can impede the public administrator as conflict arbiter	Book chapter (single authored)	Forthcoming in: <i>Better or worse relations: Essays in conflict and collaboration</i> (ed. C. Gerard & L. Kriesberg)
7. Conclusion	Only for dissertation	

<sup>i</sup> At the same time, the number of participants and their actions do affect how Oosterweel has been made sense of. Chapter 5 explains, for example, that as more people came to resist Oosterweel and their strategies became more

---

aggressive, policy-makers increasingly felt victimized and became more convinced of the malicious intent of protesters. Still, my focus lies on the meanings of Oosterweel, not on strategies or participants-numbers in and of themselves.

<sup>ii</sup> Further elaboration on the academic contributions of the various chapters can be found in the chapters themselves.

<sup>iii</sup> I use the word “positivist-informed” because the term “positivism” is widely used in contrast to “interpretivism.” I am, however, aware that positivism is a crude term, which is why I use “positivist-informed.” Other might use “empiricism” or “realism” to connote the same kind of methodologic assumptions that I use in contrast to the interpretive methodology.

<sup>iv</sup> The idea that truth is obtained in exact correspondence between object and representation is also called “the correspondence theory of truth” (Allen, 1993; Wagenaar, 2011).

<sup>v</sup> Statistical analysis does, of course, not need to be positivist-informed, but it usually is.

<sup>vi</sup> This may seem like a platitude to some readers, but much positivist-informed research to this day still reads as though the author’s belief in a universal scientific truth remains alive and well.

<sup>vii</sup> This predicament of the researcher interpreting interpretations is also called the “double hermeneutic.”

<sup>viii</sup> This does not mean that research results can come about arbitrarily; a point which I tackle later on in this section

<sup>ix</sup> Gadamer introduces us to the productive force of human biases when he explains that even though each human has a limited perspective on the past (a limited “horizion”), these perspectives condition our interest in the past and enable what he calls as “fusion of horizons.” As Wagenaar explains Gadamer: “Preconceived notions make certain things stand out in the world as interesting, important, urgent, or valuable. But we do not helplessly surrender to the constraints of perspective; our preconceptions can also be used to obtain a better understanding of others (and thereby of ourselves).”

<sup>x</sup> Not always. As mentioned earlier, there are many subfields to be found within the broader label of “interpretive research”

<sup>xi</sup> To be fair, there is in fact nothing special about having a normative agenda in studying policy-making: both the disciplines of policy studies and public administration were born as sciences with normative agendas. The goal was to further democracy and to improve the functioning of democratic governments. This is, however, often ignored by positivist-informed researchers, while it takes front-and-center in much interpretive policy-analysis.

## 2. How policies become contested: A spiral of imagination and evidence in a large infrastructure project

*E.E.A. Wolf & Wouter Van Dooren*

*Published in Policy Sciences (2017)*

### **Abstract**

This article investigates how framing processes lead to polarization in the public debate on a large infrastructure project. Drawing on an analysis of newspaper articles about the “Oosterweelconnection” in Antwerp (Belgium), it concludes that framing through imaginative appeals and framing through evidence mutually reinforce each other in a spiralling pattern. When evidence backs up appeals to the imagination, such as when facts back up metaphors, these appeals are endowed with authority and hence legitimacy. While this strengthens appeals that have been “proven” to be true, it also makes actors backing these appeals increasingly frustrated with other parties that still refuse to accept them. Because of their frustration, the former are spurred to launch new imaginative appeals conveying their anger and to seek new evidence to substantiate these new appeals. Over time, as parties in a conflict grapple with evidence and imagination, their tolerance for ambiguity decreases and the debate polarizes.

## Introduction

Few policy issues are able to cause the broad and intense civil unrest that infrastructure projects can. Whether the issue is the construction of a train station (Durnova, 2013), the enlargement of an airport (Michel J. G. van Eeten, 2001), or a railway development project (Novy & Peters, 2012), controversies over infrastructure are able to engage many people – and at a deep level. An attempt to implement an infrastructure project can therefore trigger years of controversy and negotiation, resulting in a public discourse that is only more divided than ever. This article presents an example of such an entrenched policy conflict (namely the “Oosterweelconnection” case) which we use to demonstrate how the interaction between imaginative framing and framing through evidence contributes to the polarization of meaning in the public debate.

The Oosterweelconnection is a planned highway that would connect two hitherto unconnected parts of the Antwerp (Belgium) ring road. The Belgian government first developed plans for the project in 1995. Action groups started to oppose these plans in 2005. While this opposition started small, it gained traction over the years. In 2009, the Oosterweelconnection project was voted down in a local referendum. In the meantime, both action groups and the government proposed various alternatives for dealing with issues relating to traffic congestion, health, and quality of life, which all actors at least discursively acknowledged as important. At present, a revised project (which is estimated to cost EUR 3 billion) is still in a planning phase and remains highly contested. It is not clear why this policy controversy remains. Why is it that the meanings attached to the same construction project have not eventually converged, despite all of the energy devoted by the parties involved in it to moving beyond conflict?

One potential reason is the presence of different “frames” (F. Fischer, 2003; Hisschemöller & Hoppe, 1995; Schön & Rein, 1994; Stone, 2002; H. Wagenaar & Hajer, 2003). When people attach divergent meanings to a situation, they frame it differently, without this difference being overtly apparent. Frames structure communication on an issue, but they are seldom explicitly addressed. One could say that, in the case of policy conflicts such as over the Oosterweelconnection, different meanings covertly underlie the public debate. As long as they are not explicitly addressed, the conflict endures. However, this article attempts to identify *how* meanings become polarized in the first place. How do actors in a public debate come to see and express the same situation differently over time? We study the mechanisms of conflict development by focusing on the dynamics of framing (M. van Hulst & Yanow, 2014). We concentrate on two dynamics: imaginative framing (which entails appealing to the public’s imagination by producing symbolic language) and framing through evidence (which involves appealing to the rationality of one’s vision by producing facts).

The structure of this article is as follows. The first section discusses the two conceptualizations of framing noted above; thereafter we provide a short history of the Oosterweel conflict and present our methods. After discussing the empirical results of our analysis, we then present our main argument. We assert that to gain an advantage in a public debate, actors involved in an infrastructure policy conflict alternate between imaginative framing and framing through evidence. These ways of framing seem to reinforce each other: imaginative appeals spur the production of evidence to claim legitimacy, but this evidence fuels anger when policy contenders do not accept alleged “truths”; the result is then new imaginative appeals. The debate will polarize over time as each party further develops its own vision of the contested issue and their tolerance for ambiguity decreases.

## **Framing through imagination and evidence**

### **The framing activity**

The concept of framing first appears in the work of Bateson, who uses it to denote the “metacommunication” (Bateson, 1955/1987, p. 185; van Hulst & Yanow, 2014, p. 3) between monkeys that signals whether behaviour is playing or fighting. To the untrained observer, these activities may look similar; however, Bateson reasoned that monkeys somehow frame their actions such that other monkeys can differentiate between them. The concept of framing was later embraced in the field of social psychology, where it inspired scholars from social movement studies (Goffman, 1986; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986), dispute resolution studies (A. Dewulf et al., 2009; B. Gray, 2003), and communication studies (Entman, 1993; Vliegenthart & van Zoonen, 2011). The concept also became popular in the field of public policy analysis. As scholars began to study framing by humans, they increasingly focused on how actors use language to represent reality. They argued that actors can influence how a situation is interpreted by highlighting specific aspects of that situation while downplaying others; this is how actors frame a situation when talking or writing about it. The same situation can thus be framed in multiple – and possibly conflicting – ways. Despite a common commitment to studying framing through language, however, scholars from different (sub)disciplines engaged with the concept of framing in various ways.<sup>1</sup> We follow the framing approach promoted in public policy literature, as introduced by Rein and Schön (1996; 1994; see also van Hulst & Yanow (2014)). This approach:

(...) treats frames as strong and generic narratives that guide both analysis and action in practical situations. Such narratives are diagnostic/prescriptive stories that tell, within a given issue terrain, what needs fixing and how it might be fixed. (Rein & Schön, 1996, p. 89)

The literature describes many cases in which frames are at the heart of policy-making conflicts (e.g., Art Dewulf, Craps, & Dercon, 2004; B. Gray, 2003; Hisschemöller & Hoppe, 1995; Laws & Rein, 2003; Schön & Rein, 1994; M.J.G. van Eeten, 1999a). For instance, Lieshout, Dewulf, Aarts, and Termeer (2011) analyse the debate on so-called “mega-farms”<sup>ii</sup>; in doing so, they show that controversy developed because actors used different scales (namely local, national, and global) as their points of departure when making sense of this phenomenon. As long as such scale frames remain implicit, as they did in the case of mega-farms, conflict endures and remains intractable.

Nevertheless, frames do not materialize on their own. As they are constructed by people, the frames change over time as actors interpret new events. Yanow and van Hulst (2014) have recently argued that this dynamic view of framing remains underexplored in the literature. The current paper sets out to analyse how actors discursively construct perspectives on policy issues over time and thus in effect develop different ways of seeing. We focus on two framing dynamics that are often at play in the planning of large infrastructure projects: appeals to the public’s imagination and appeals to evidence as produced by research.

### **Imaginative framing**

Spatial policy-making, concerned as it is with shaping what is not yet there, relies heavily on its ability to communicate visions of the future (M. Van Eeten & Roe, 2000; Healey, 2007; Throgmorton, 2003). These visions are meant to shape our imagination by telling us stories of how the current use of the spaces we live and travel in falls short and could be improved. While such transformations may rely on technological and architectural operations that we do not comprehend, we should still be able to grasp the end result (which must be convincing). Spatial visions, which depend on our ability to imagine, are transmitted in various ways. Visual representations (such as sketches, movies, and models) are obviously important; however, the language that policy-makers use to communicate with the public also plays a major role.

Language can move people by appealing to their imagination. It can make them excited about the construction of, say, a bridge, but it can also fail completely in doing so and result in either indifference or opposition. As Gusfield notes (1981, p. 7), “what we cannot imagine we cannot desire.” This does not imply that the way in which something is communicated necessarily determines our reactions in some deterministic way, but language certainly shapes how we feel about issues. Edelman (1977) has highlighted how political language can “both arouse and assuage anxiety” (p. 4) through the pictures that policy-makers paint of social problems and their solutions. Policy-makers can make people care about a situation by arousing anxiety. Thereafter they can present and gain public support for a specific policy that they are presenting as a solution to the threat. Whether a threat is really as significant as is being conveyed does not necessarily

have a bearing on the public's anxiety. An example from our case (which is later addressed in more detail) is the description of congestion as a "traffic infarct": a lethal and sudden event that is damaging the entire Belgian economy. This language creates a sense of anxiousness while simultaneously presenting the decision to build new infrastructure as logical (and even necessary). Recent work in the field of policy analysis has highlighted the importance of harnessing the public's emotions as a discursive practice in policy conflicts (Durnova, 2013; Gottweis, 2007; I. Verhoeven & Duyvendak, 2015). Appealing to emotions via symbolic language that taps into people's ability to reimagine their future is what we refer to as "imaginative framing".

### **Framing through evidence**

Along with visions that appeal to the imagination, appeals to evidence are also omnipresent in spatial policy-making. Instead of stressing the role of imagination, appeals to evidence present policy-making as a rational process of balancing evidence and interests (Throgmorton, 2003). Even though it has been demonstrated that policy-making is not a linear-rational process (F. Fischer, 2003; Stone, 2002; H. Wagenaar & Hajer, 2003), many administrative entities in Western democracies today claim to operate in "evidence-based" ways. The desire for more evidence is not necessarily a bad thing, as evidence can provide means to both judge the viability of policy proposals and counter arbitrary decision-making. However, evidence can also be used for political ends: by asserting that they are acting rationally, policy-makers can claim legitimacy. In infrastructure projects, citizens who resist these projects are often given the NIMBY ("not in my backyard") label by policy-makers. This label presents their claims as fuelled by selfish emotions rather than by sound evidence. The claim that NIMBYs are selfish and irrational presents policy-making as a linear process that is wrongfully impeded by local interests (Burningham, 2000; McAvoy, 1998; Wolsink, 2000).

Appeals to evidence are not devoid of emotion, as numbers and scientific studies can indeed arouse anxiety in the same way as words (Stone, 2002). Nonetheless, emotions are often denied legitimacy as soon as the language of evidence is used. Wielding the authority associated with scientific research, evidence can transform what was once an imaginative vision into an apparent truth, while simultaneously delegitimizing claims that cannot provide such evidence. Appealing to the rationality of one's vision via language that provides evidence for policy positions is what we refer to as "framing through evidence".

### **Imagination and evidence in the institutions of spatial planning**

Meanings do not float freely. They are instead constructed by actors who are institutionally embedded (Campbell, 1998; M. A. Hajer, 2005; Schmidt, 2008). Both the re-imagination of space and the interpretation of evidence are nested in Western spatial planning institutions. Firstly, as

to the re-imagination of space, the practice of spatial planning is by definition deeply concerned with the activity of making plans. As various authors have argued, the making of spatial plans can best be viewed as an activity of re-imagining space and subsequently communicating the results through stories and images (Healey, 2007; Throgmorton, 2003; van Dijk, 2011). Spatial plans also wield power (Flyvbjerg, 2004), as the imaginative stories that they communicate can shape how the public sees what spaces are and should be. Planners thus attempt to influence how people view space through the power-laden act of making plans. Even if the original plans are resisted by the public or result in counter-plans, they define the terms of the conversation. Secondly, as to the production and interpretation of evidence, we have already argued that the institutions of policy-making are often geared towards making policy that is “evidence based”. As a result, governmental procedures aim at filtering out ideas that cannot satisfy the same burden of proof as others. For example, the need to conduct an environmental impact assessment (EIA) structures spatial policy-making, given that a policy must comply with its terms in order to move forward in the planning process.

In the process of spatial planning, we can thus recognize practices that are intended to both move the public through imaginative appeals and appear rational and wholly un-emotional. Although an increasing body of literature explains how evidence is created in policy-making (Broto, 2013; Frank Fischer, 2000; Moran & Rau, 2014; Pellizzoni, 2011); and although studies clarify that evidence does not “speak for itself” (Wesselink, Colebatch, & Pearce, 2014, p. 341) and instead interacts with the context of policy-making (Boswell, 2014; Nedlund & Garpenby, 2014; van Herzele & Aarts, 2013), few deal explicitly with *how* evidence interacts with other forms of meaning-making. Moreover, although the literature acknowledges that the institutions of spatial planning are concerned with constructing convincing stories about spaces (Healey, 2007; Throgmorton, 2003; van Dijk, 2011), to our knowledge researchers have not yet investigated how appeals to imagination and evidence interact to make stories more or less convincing. This article analyses how imaginative framing and framing through evidence interact over time to create the (various) perspectives that actors have on a spatial policy intervention.

### **Case description: A short history of the Oosterweelconnection**

To understand the context of the Oosterweelconnection case, it is first important to know that the Antwerp region has long dealt with traffic congestion. Many feel that the proximity of the Antwerp ring to the city is responsible for this problem. Although governmental agencies originally envisaged two ring roads (i.e. a smaller inner ring for local traffic and a larger outer ring for through traffic), in the 1960s they eventually chose to build only the smaller inner-city option. Although this ring was meant for local use, it soon became one of Europe’s busiest

motorways. Moreover, it was never an actual “ring”; it was instead more of a semi-circle, which forced traffic to drive right through Antwerp without being able to bypass it.

In 1995, the Flemish<sup>iii</sup> road agency made the construction of a new highway for improving the flow of traffic on the ring road a priority (Verelst, 2009a). In the following years, the government located the trajectory for the new highway close to the city in the Oosterweel area. They therefore dubbed the project the Oosterweelconnection, or “Oosterweel” for short. The proposed infrastructure consisted of a tunnel under the Scheldt River and an overpass over largely non-operational docks close to the inner city, thus linking two hitherto unconnected parts of the ring road. The Flemish government presented a scale model of the Oosterweelconnection to political actors from both the Flemish parliament and the Antwerp city council in 2005, and public debate began not long thereafter.

The scale model revealed Oosterweel’s possible impact on Antwerp’s city centre. In response, the municipality of Antwerp ordered additional research into the possibility of replacing the overpass with a tunnel. However, when it turned out that a tunnel would be more expensive, the municipal council backed down and began speaking in favour of constructing the Oosterweelconnection as originally planned. A few months later, however, an action group called “Straten-Generaal” organized a press conference during which they seriously scrutinized Oosterweel’s utility. Using much the same argumentation as the city had before, they asserted that the highway would halt urban development due to its proximity to the city centre. Straten-Generaal proposed an alternative trajectory further from town. Claiming that years of research had already proven the superiority of the Oosterweelconnection, the Flemish government was undeterred and continued moving the planning processes forward.

In 2008, the “Ademloos” (literally, “Breathless”) action group joined the growing civic opposition to the Oosterweelconnection. Ademloos focused on the danger of fine particles in cars’ exhaust fumes, arguing that the higher number of cars that would be brought into the city would increase air pollution. The pressure on the Flemish government to give in to the various action groups’ pleas for additional research into other trajectories mounted, and that summer it commissioned a “final” independent study from the “Arup/Sum” engineering company. In the meantime, Ademloos began collecting signatures to call for a municipal referendum on the Oosterweelconnection.

The next year (2009) saw both the presentation of the Arup/Sum study and the Antwerp municipal referendum. The study concluded that no existing plan adequately balanced costs and benefits and instead proposed a new trajectory that strongly resembled the option favoured by action groups. On 18 October, the Antwerp public voted the Oosterweelconnection down by

59.24%. The results were deemed to be legitimate given that 35% of the city's residents had voted (a threshold of 10% needed to be met). Nonetheless, the referendum was not binding; in legal terms, it merely advised the city on how to judge the existing planning permit for the Oosterweelconnection. Those in favour of the project had stressed this non-binding nature all along, also questioning the referendum's legitimacy. They stressed that only a fraction of municipal residents had voted, and that the Oosterweelconnection concerned more than just the people living in Antwerp. Although the city advised against the planning permit, the Oosterweelconnection project was eventually not cancelled; instead, a decision was taken to replace the much-contested overpass with a tunnel. The Flemish government presented the revision as a compromise, but the action groups objected and claimed that they had always protested the trajectory (and not the overpass as such). The alterations to the proposal forced the government to redo its planning processes, which included conducting a new EIA. In the meantime, the action groups continued to protest.

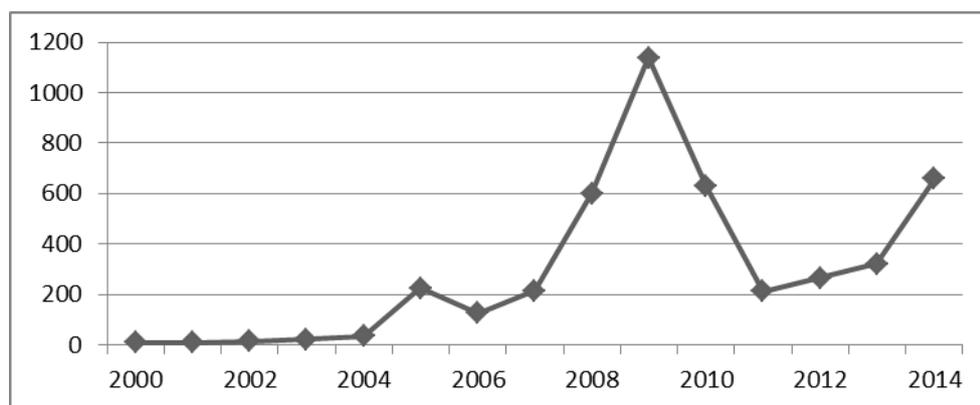
In 2014, the controversy continued with little change in the discussion. In February, the results of the new EIA yet again led to a conflict over how to interpret the results. In the lead-up to the Flemish elections that year, however, the debate started to shift. A new action group, "Ringland", joined the protest. Instead of taking sides on the Oosterweelconnection, Ringland attempted to shift the focus of the discussion. The group argued that before *any* new infrastructure was built, the current ring road in the inner city should be converted to a tunnel – which would enable the land currently used for the ring road to be reclaimed for urban use (hence the name "Ringland"). Both the proponents and opponents of Oosterweel supported the idea of tunnelling the ring road in some way.

Today, both the government's intention to build the Oosterweelconnection and the idea of tunnelling the ring road remain in place. Those opposing the Oosterweelconnection claim that tunnelling is technically impossible if Oosterweel is realized, while those in favour continue to claim otherwise.

## Methods

To analyse the public debate on Oosterweel, we studied media articles pertaining to the Oosterweelconnection from 2005, 2009, and 2014. These years were chosen as they represent the "peaks" in media attention and are hence assumed to have been important years for the case. The peaks were identified by searching for articles containing the word "Oosterweelconnection" in the period from 2000 to 2014;<sup>iv</sup> Figure 2.1 depicts the number of articles found for various years.

**Figure 2.1: Articles found on the Oosterweelconnection, 2000–2014**



We analysed multiple years because we were interested in how the framings have developed over time. For each year, we first scanned through the article titles; thereafter we chose several months in each year to analyse in greater depth. These months were tied to key moments and scored highest in terms of media attention. We analysed a total of 739 articles; Table 2.1 presents the number of articles, months analysed, and key moments for the three years considered.

**Table 2.1: Years and months analysed**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of articles</i>	<i>Month</i>	<i>Key moment(s)</i>
2005	80	March	Presentation of the Oosterweel scale-model
		April	Discussion of the merits of the bridge/tunnel swap
		October	Emergence of the Straten-Generaal action group
2009	470	March	Publication of the results of the independent study
		October	Antwerp municipal referendum on Oosterweel
2014	189	February	Release of the EIA; emergence of the Ringland action group
		May	Flemish government elections

We inductively coded the peak months for each year for symbolic language use and evidence claims utilizing the “Nvivo” software program. In this coding, we focussed on identifying

discursive elements in the argumentation for and against Oosterweel (rather than on tracing the position of individual actors). Symbolic language consisted mostly of metaphors, which reveal the way in which one thing is understood in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and thus attuned us to how the actors imaginatively constructed specific images of Oosterweel. For example, by likening Oosterweel to a “scar” in the “urban tissue” of Antwerp, actors revealed that they understood Antwerp as an organism and Oosterweel as an alien element. Actors sometimes also used symbolic language other than metaphors; examples include proverbs and the comparison of Oosterweel to other infrastructure projects or to events in the distant past. We coded for both symbolic language relating to the Oosterweelconnection and symbolic language pertaining to the policy-making process. Evidence claims consisted of presented facts that supported specific interpretations of the Oosterweelconnection; these facts often arose from reports, but not always. An example would be using numbers (as in “x” people support the Oosterweelconnection) to prove the support or lack thereof for Oosterweel. We also divided the various symbolic and knowledge claims into 43 themes, such as health, environment, and spatial impact.

After a first round of coding, we regrouped smaller codes under larger labels. In this second coding round, we also recoded pieces of text that in retrospect fit better under different labels. This coding scheme enabled us to distinguish between imaginative framing and framing through evidence. The former relied on the use of symbolic language to reimagine Oosterweel, while the latter depended on providing evidence to claim facticity. This evidence consisted of numbers, references to specific research, claims made by scientific experts, and references to specific parts of codified law.

## **Imaginative framing and framing through evidence in Oosterweel**

In this section we describe the main imaginative appeals and appeals to evidence present in the Oosterweel debate in 2005, 2009, and 2014. The metaphors we cite are not our own, but rather the metaphors used in the debate.

### **2005: Sickness, scars, and claimed expertise**

The public debate over Oosterweel started in 2005. The first media peak we studied followed the presentation of the scale model and the municipal decision to order additional research on the project, while the second followed the founding of Straten-Generaal and this group’s subsequent engagement in the public debate.

#### ***Imaginative framing***

*“The traffic infarct”*: In 2005, Oosterweel was predominantly depicted as a project to solve traffic congestion problems. This perspective was put forward by governmental advocates (both

administrative actors and political actors from the Flemish coalition parties), but it was also adopted by the news media more generally. An especially pervasive metaphor reflected Belgium suffering from a traffic infarct, for which Oosterweel was said to be the cure. The medical metaphors for congestion symbolized an organic entity (Belgium) with a sick “heart” (Antwerp) – note that the harbour of Antwerp represents 149,714 direct and indirect jobs (2016: *Feiten en cijfers*, 2016) which is why inter alia actors could depict it as the heart of Belgium. In line with this metaphor of sickness, the governor of the Antwerp province replied as follows to the municipality’s decision to order additional research: “it endangers the whole Master Plan [the Oosterweelconnection is embedded in a broader plan] to cure the traffic infarct. This is a historical opportunity for Antwerp, but everyone is suddenly speaking ill” (as cited in “‘Stad speelt met vuur,’” 2005, p. 20). This quotation shows how the traffic infarct metaphor worked to create a sense of urgency: swift action is necessary, as disaster can strike any moment.

*“The tissue of the city”*: Another important metaphor involved Oosterweel damaging the city’s tissue. Oosterweel would be a “scar”, because it would “slice” the “city-tissue” into parts; in doing so it would hinder opportunities for urban development. This metaphor was first used in the media around the time the municipality decided to call for additional research into the possibility of building a tunnel. A few months later, Straten-Generaal re-used it. The group also voiced disappointment over the municipal decision to support Oosterweel after the additional costs of a tunnel had been revealed. Straten-Generaal portrayed this decision as an example of short-sighted policy-making, as illustrated by the following comparison that the group made:

At the end of the nineteenth century, wharfs of the Scheldt in the city of Antwerp were straightened to safeguard the ambitions of the harbor. Over a thousand houses were destroyed. Not long thereafter the harbor made a definitive move to the north of the city. But the medieval heart of the city had disappeared. A similar lack of vision characterizes the planned Oosterweel overpass. (Claeys, 2005, p. 36)

This re-characterized the city of Antwerp as a deeply historic place, rather than as being “sick”. By referring to a bygone past, Straten-Generaal likened the current affair to previous urban planning efforts. The comparison alluded to the very real consequences any decision now would have on the long-term future of Antwerp, and as such lent urgency to the need to reconsider Oosterweel.

### ***Framing through evidence***

*Research and expertise*: From the start, the governmental advocates of Oosterweel claimed that they were acting rationally while the protesters were not. The following quotation from an actor from the governmental agency responsible for executing Oosterweel (BAM) clearly illustrates this

assertion: “it [the trajectory proposed by Straten-Generaal] was investigated and rejected a long time ago. People sometimes forget that we have been working on this for seven to eight years already” (as cited in Falter, 2005, p. 13). Alongside various metaphors, the government’s alleged possession of superior knowledge that was built on prior research thus played a role in setting the terms of the Oosterweel conversation from the very start of the debate.

### **2009: Losing patience but claiming reason**

The first peak of media attention in 2009 followed the publication of the Arup/Sum study results, while the second followed the period surrounding the October municipal referendum on the Oosterweelconnection. It is also important to keep in mind that the Ademloos action group (whose main claim was that Oosterweel would damage the health of Antwerp residents) had joined the debate by this point.

#### ***Imaginative framing***

*“Out of time”*: A very important symbol in the debate of 2009 was that of time running out. While connected to the traffic infarct metaphor (as time was running out due inter alia to the alleged infarct), it stressed that the delay and related costs were problems in and of themselves. The metaphor of time running out was pervasive in the debate following the publication of the Arup/Sum study and was primarily used by both administrative actors and political actors from Flemish coalition parties. These groups claimed that the results showed the need to find a solution for traffic congestion quickly, which they asserted meant going ahead with the Oosterweelconnection (given that the Oosterweel option would need less study and procedural work than alternative options). Moreover, they argued that building Oosterweel quickly was all the more necessary because of the economic crisis in Belgium, as they claimed that large infrastructure projects would boost the economy.

*“Standstill”*: Some politicians from Flemish coalition parties plus a few journalists and politicians from parties generally hesitant towards referenda contested the legitimacy of the Oosterweel referendum. They claimed that a municipal referendum was uncalled for seeing as the Oosterweelconnection was not just an issue for Antwerp, but rather for Belgium at large. In other words, Antwerp was acting selfishly by not taking the larger public interest of battling congestion quickly into consideration. Their reasoning was similar to the NIMBY allegation discussed previously, albeit applied to a whole city rather than to individuals. The argument was that taking the referendum too seriously could set a precedent for cities all over Flanders to block projects that were necessary for Flanders and Belgium at large (including refugee centres and airport expansions), which would ultimately result in a complete construction and development standstill.

*“Poison”*: By 2009, the opposition to the Oosterweelconnection had come to resist Oosterweel not only due to its alleged spatial impacts, but also as a result of its alleged effects on the respiratory health of Antwerp residents. Poison was used as a metaphor for the latter. Protesters characterized cars as poisonous – even deadly – to those living in close proximity to roads due to the fine particles in the exhaust fumes. The image of cars as poisonous was also connected to the city’s industrial history. In the past, residents had been exposed to various chemicals that were generally claimed to be innocuous at the time but later turned out to cause serious illnesses. As one protester interviewed by a newspaper illustratively explained:

I remember that, as a teacher, I took my students to the sea 30 years ago. For one week, as a treatment. Because the lungs of all were poisoned by the Metallurgie [a factory in the neighborhood] (...). The Lange Wapper [name given to the Oosterweel overpass] evokes painful memories, I see very strong parallels. Not lead this time, but fine particles. (As cited in Verelst, 2009b, p. 26)

As this quotation demonstrates, the image of Oosterweel as poisonous captured the imagination of many and was a powerful image in the public debate in 2009. Nonetheless, this did not mean that protesters stopped using metaphors related to Oosterweel damaging the urban tissue; the project’s alleged damage was simply expanded to include both the damage done to the city itself and the harm caused to its citizens.

*“Smokescreen”*: Finally, action groups not only took on the infrastructure as such; they also voiced anger over the way in which the government had handled the decision-making process. They claimed that the government had repeatedly responded to criticisms raised against the Oosterweelconnection in a deceitful way. For example by lying about European rules and about safety regulations. More importantly, they asserted that the mere fact that the government had ordered an independent review (i.e. the Arup/Sum study) but then resisted its conclusions proved that it was not taking alternatives to Oosterweel seriously. Action groups claimed that the government was using research as a mere smokescreen, both at the moment and in the past. As a member of Straten-Generaal noted in an interview:

It [the 2005 municipal study] was completely adapted to BAM. A worthless piece of work. Nevertheless, the city of Antwerp has used that rubbish for years as a smokescreen to not have to act against the Oosterweelconnection. (As cited in De Baere, 2009, p. 26)

### ***Framing through evidence***

*The unreasonable other*. In 2009, like in 2005, metaphors mobilized by actors were coupled with evidence to substantiate them. In the public debate of 2009, the very existence of something other than “pure” rationality in the discussion over Oosterweel was denounced. Shaming others as

being emotional rather than rational was used to depict the other in a bad light. Thus both sides claimed that they were acting rationally while the other side was not. Consider the following quotation from a political actor from the BAM's governing board:

At first it was about fine particles, then about noise, then about residential areas and schools, then about the junction at Schijnpoort and, lastly, about the fact that the ring is too close to the city... Or: how feelings of anxiety from the people of Antwerp have been abused. (Demeester-De meyer, 2009, p. 26)

It is thus unsurprising that assorted actors stepped up the production of various kinds of facts in 2009, which they then used to delegitimize those holding different positions towards Oosterweel. We first saw this with regard to facts concerning the poisonous nature of fine particles and the number of illnesses and deaths these particles were believed to cause. These were brought forward by protesters and publicly confirmed by medical experts. In the meantime, a group of experts on tunnel safety spoke out on behalf of those supporting the Oosterweel overpass. While the Arup/Sum study claimed that the tunnel option would be perfectly safe, both administrative actors and political actors from the Flemish coalition cited the tunnel experts who had stated that alternatives to Oosterweel were not feasible. Finally, 2009 was a year of arguments using numbers and arguments about numbers. The most striking debate over numbers erupted after the referendum. While Oosterweel opponents interpreted the outcome as a clear vote against the connection, some in favour of it thought differently. In an interview just after the referendum, the chairman of BAM's board reasoned: "You have to put the outcome in the right context. A turnout of 35 per cent is particularly low, especially for a megaproject such as the Oosterweelconnection" (as cited in Verelst, 2009c, p. 2). He further noted that "Besides, 40% voted yes. That must mean something. There is support for our project too. It comes down to a difference of just over 20,000 people, in a city of half a million residents" (as cited in Verelst, 2009c, p. 2). Clearly, the same numbers could be mobilized in very different ways.

#### **2014: Imagining together?**

The Oosterweel debate was still on-going in 2014. The results of the new EIA were presented in February, which is the first media peak we studied. With the Flemish elections approaching, the debate in May (the second media peak we analysed) then centred on the Ringland action group's proposition to tunnel the existing ring road before building new infrastructure.

#### ***Imaginative framing***

*"Moving forward"*: In February 2014, the media seemed tired of the never-ending discussion on Oosterweel and would rather end it. When the EIA stated that the Oosterweelconnection would be the most beneficial trajectory for improving mobility, many media articles thus applauded the

possible conclusion. Administrative actors and political actors from Flemish coalition parties echoed this sentiment when they declared the Oosterweelconnection the unambiguous winner of the EIA and voiced their desire to move the planning procedure forward with full force. Interestingly, they presented the tedious nature of the continuing process as the main reason to move forward, rather than the imagined prospect of an impending traffic infarct. They stressed that too much time had already been lost to talk and research and that the time had truly come to decide. This image of having to move forward was immediately coupled with the possibility of further – and supposedly unjustified – delay as a consequence of possible actions from Oosterweel opponents, who were literally being asked to stop their protest for the common good.

*“Bread for the hungry”*: In 2009, the image of research being used as a smokescreen had depicted the government as deceitful and as hiding its true intentions. This devious image was appealed to again in 2014, when Straten-Generaal and Ademloos claimed that the government wanted to push Oosterweel through at any cost. They cast the changes the government had made to the project over the years as nothing more than “bread for the hungry”: minor concessions to appease the public. This image added the notion of the government distorting its actions to the existing notion of the government manipulating research. The action groups claimed that this was true vis-à-vis both the government’s post-referendum decision to do away with the overpass and its newly emerging interest in tunnelling parts of the ring road. Protesters asserted that the government was merely paying lip service to the idea of tunnelling in order to harness public support in the upcoming elections, arguing that it made no sense at all to combine Oosterweel with tunnelling. Why bring more cars into the city and then build tunnels, rather than just keeping the cars away from the city to begin with?

*“Putting a roof on it”: the sanitation of the ring”*: Despite the fact that action groups distrusted governmental intentions, in 2014 the parties shared a desire to literally put a roof on the Antwerp ring road. In other words: transforming the ring road into a tunnel. The metaphor of sanitation captures what the tunnelling of the ring road meant for those both for and against Oosterweel. The metaphor, which refers to the process of keeping places free from dirt by removing waste, was presented as way of doing away with adverse effects of the city’s infrastructure. Through tunnelling, cars would be removed from sight and smell so that infrastructure would serve residents as well as cars.

### ***Framing through evidence***

*The EIA as contested evidence*: As demonstrated earlier, administrative actors and political actors from coalition parties claimed the EIA as the ultimate evidence of Oosterweel’s superiority and used it as grounds for pushing the planning process forward with full force. This argumentation was further reinforced with a cost-benefit analysis that quantitatively demonstrated the

Oosterweelconnection's benefits for the Belgian economy. The reaction of the project's opponents was twofold: they objected to how the EIA treated non-Oosterweel trajectories, but also claimed that even with this flawed treatment their own favoured trajectory was still superior. These groups provided evidence to support the image of governmental deceit in at least two ways. Firstly, they provided evidence for their trajectory being superior in the form of various numbers taken from the EIA; as noted by an actor from Straten-Generaal: "For those who want to see it, the EIA states the choice clearly: will we go for a few minutes of time gain for traffic or for the improved health of 70,000 people in seven parts of the city?" (as cited in Brillouet, 2014, p. 16). Secondly, Oosterweel opponents attempted to discredit the validity of the evidence provided in the EIA. They especially criticized the EIA for treating the Oosterweel trajectory differently from other trajectories; for example, they claimed that much more elaborate calculations were used for Oosterweel in investigating how different toll options could best be combined with infrastructure to maximize mobility gains.

*The possibilities of tunnelling:* As mentioned earlier, those both for and against Oosterweel publicly supported the tunnelling project. However, the problem was that various actors had different interpretations of what this tunnelling meant, which resulted in conflicting knowledge claims. Straten-Generaal, Ademloos, and political actors from opposition parties viewed the tunnelling as an alternative to the Oosterweel trajectory and claimed that combining the two not only made no sense but was also technically impossible. In contrast, administrative actors and political actors from coalition parties claimed that the two could indeed be combined; many of them also stated that doing so was a good idea. Each side used its own sources of evidence, which consisted of either specific extracts from the EIA or excerpts from earlier research into possibilities for tunnelling parts of the Antwerp ring road. Meanwhile, the action group Ringland, which had launched the tunnelling idea, refused to speak out for or against Oosterweel and merely pushed the priority of tunnelling. This situation of various actors making opposing factual claims led to much confusion in the newspapers, as well as to back-and-forth accusations of "lying" between proponents and opponents of Oosterweel.

### **Framing dynamics: How imagination and evidence reinforce each other**

The above discussion of some of the more important appeals to imagination and evidence in the Oosterweel debate presents a rather static description of the framing process. In this section, we discuss how the dynamic interaction between imaginative framing and framing through evidence has contributed to policy contestation. We first elaborate how the public debate on Oosterweel alternated between imagination and evidence, thereafter showing how the two types of framing reinforced each other and thus resulted in a spiralling dynamic. We end the section by discussing the consequences this dynamic has had on the polarization of the public debate.

### **From imagination to evidence and back again**

In the section “Framing through imagination and evidence”, we discussed how using symbolic language in policy-making captures the public’s imagination. This is important, because people must be made to care about public issues before they will support policies. In the debate over Oosterweel, it is clear that actors repeatedly appealed to the imagination. Symbols such as a traffic infarct, the urban tissue, and a smokescreen are not material, but rather narrative images of what could be. They capture our attention due to their emotional character and the sense of urgency they convey. The image of a traffic infarct clearly appealed to feelings of anxiety and the sense that disaster was impending. The same was true of the images of Oosterweel as damaging the urban tissue and the lungs of current and future generations. In addition, the smokescreen metaphor and the image of protesters creating a standstill highlighted the unjust course of events and added appeals to anger over the policy-making process to the existing anxiety over an insecure future.

However, it has also been illustrated that the emotional and essentially imaginative nature of these appeals was denied legitimacy in the open dialogue. Moreover, actors were eager to deny that emotions played any part whatsoever in their take on Oosterweel. To deny the imaginative nature of their appeals, actors both for and against the project produced many facts to support their positions in the course of the policy-making process. Substantiating their positions in this way enabled them to claim that their stories were representative of the truth, and consequently that other stories – which they labelled as emotional rather than rational – were not.

Importantly, the institutional context influenced both the imaginative appeals and the appeals to evidence that actors produced over the years. Oosterweel was initially conceptualized as primarily a solution to the so-called traffic infarct in Flanders. The traffic infarct was an imaginative vision that had been both developed in the spatial planning process over the course of years and substantiated through research. When the debate began in 2005, governmental actors thus had an edge over protesters given that they had already constructed an imaginative story about Oosterweel and could claim that years of research substantiated the need for new infrastructure. Nevertheless, protesters immediately mobilized an opposing story by using imaginative visions of Antwerp’s past and future. By dubbing Oosterweel a scar in the urban tissue, they could mobilize the public to imagine Oosterweel as alien and undesirable rather than highly urgent. Over time, this more negative story was joined by other hostile visions, such as that Oosterweel was poisonous and its proponents were devious. Protesters also attempted to mobilize evidence to substantiate their perspective on Oosterweel, for example by requesting additional research and rallying the expertise of medical professionals. While governmental actors had stories and evidence that opponents did not at the beginning of the conflict, this imbalance was redressed over time. Protesters succeeded in both getting Oosterweel onto the

political agenda and offsetting the governmental actors' initial edge due to the government's embeddedness in the institutions of spatial policy-making. Moreover, protesters actively tried to use such institutions to their own benefit, most notably through their request for research (but also *inter alia* by calling for a municipal referendum). The case illustrates how, as Healey (2007) aptly puts it, "those involved in spatial strategy-making for urban regions may imagine futures, but what evolves through time is continuously escaping their grasp and their power to define in advance" (Healey, 2007, p. 10).

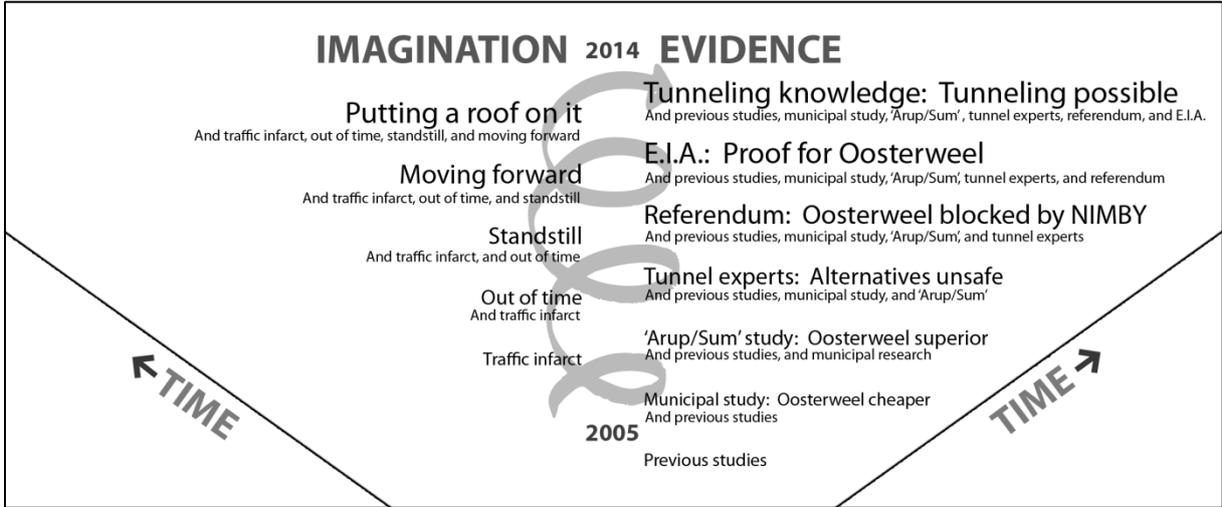
The proponents and opponents of Oosterweel both continued to alternate between imaginative framing and framing through evidence over time, which resulted in an increasingly rich repertoire of imagination and evidence being constructed. For example, the image of a traffic infarct never completely disappeared from the debate and instead became the point of reference for subsequent images; likewise, the research from 2005 still contributed to the image of research being a smokescreen many years later.

### **How imagination and evidence reinforce each other**

As the repertoire of appeals continued to grow, imagination and evidence also reinforced each other; this is why we use the image of a spiral. The arguments for and against Oosterweel not only displayed an alternation between imagination and evidence, but new evidence also inspired new imaginative visions and vice versa. Once Oosterweel opponents had research to back up their metaphors, the fact that Oosterweel supporters would not accept this knowledge seems to have made them angrier, at least discursively, throughout the decision-making process. This led the opponents to creating new symbols – and hence new imaginative visions – to communicate their anger. These visions were in turn substantiated through the production of new evidence, which then inspired new imaginative appeals. This mutually reinforcing cycle of imagination and evidence can be found among both proponents and opponents of Oosterweel.

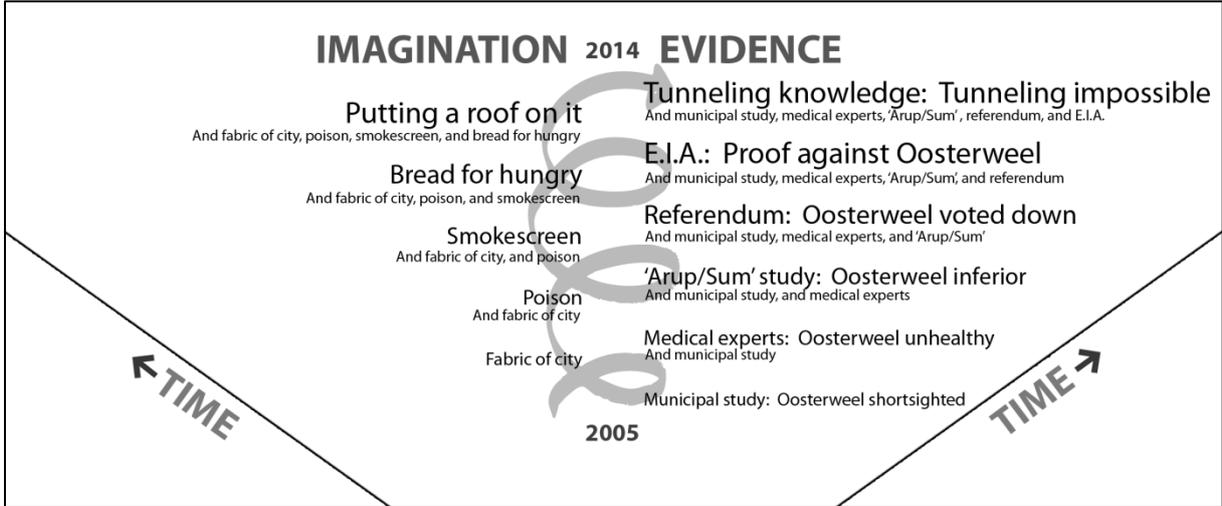
For Oosterweel proponents, the image of an impending traffic infarct was substantiated in various pieces of research. The fact that, nevertheless, the resistance to Oosterweel remained then triggered these actors to create the image of time running out, as well as the image of reaching a standstill as a consequence of selfish behaviour by opponents. When the EIA allegedly confirmed what the proponents had been saying all along, those in favour of Oosterweel made a strong plea for finally moving forward for the common good. This was coupled with a desire to combine Oosterweel with putting a roof on the existing ring road, which was backed up with claimed expertise on tunnelling. Figure 2.2 illustrates how Oosterweel proponents alternated between imagination and evidence.

**Figure 2.2: The imagination-evidence spiral: Pleading for Oosterweel**



A similar process can be observed for Oosterweel opponents. The metaphors of Oosterweel damaging the city’s tissue and being poisonous were also substantiated over time through various research, while this production of facts simultaneously made protesters angry about not being listened to and hence provided input for the smokescreen metaphor and the bread for the hungry image. In the end, the idea of putting a roof on top of the ring road was embraced by opponents, although it was also presented as technically incompatible with Oosterweel. The very fact that those in favour of Oosterweel claimed that combining the project with a tunnel would be possible was interpreted by Oosterweel opponents as yet another example of governmental deceit. Figure 2.3 depicts how Oosterweel opponents alternated between imagination and evidence.

**Figure 2.3: The imagination-evidence spiral: Pleading against Oosterweel**



When facts back up imaginative appeals, these appeals are endowed with authority and hence legitimacy. While this bolsters appeals that have been “proven” to be true, it also seems to

produce additional frustration with the “other”, a new surge of visions concerning the “other’s” devious nature, and new facts to confirm these bad intentions.

### **Polarization of the debate**

Thus far we have discussed the dynamics of framing *within* the discourse of Oosterweel proponents and opponents. However, the mutual reinforcement of imaginative framing and framing through evidence also yields consequences for the interaction *between* the two sides. As actors alternate between imagination and evidence, they get more deeply entrenched in their own visions and become more frustrated that what is obvious to them is denied by the other group. In the case of Oosterweel, over time both sides of the debate began referring to their opponents in increasingly antagonistic ways in their argumentation, criticizing each other for not accepting manifest “truths”. In other words, the ambiguous nature of the issue at hand became increasingly less ambiguous in the eyes of those participating in the public debate. Each side continued to amass a growing arsenal of evidence to prove that beyond simply having a different vision of the contested issue, their opponents were in fact lying.

We hence argue that the way in which actors articulated their positions on Oosterweel, namely by alternating between imaginative framing and framing through evidence, contributed to the polarization of the public debate on the project. This polarization was illustrated by the protesters’ reactions to the government’s post-referendum decision to do away with the contested overpass but keep the Oosterweel trajectory. While the overpass had been at the heart of the initial Oosterweel conflict, the imaginative framing of Oosterweel as a negative force, which was bolstered by evidence concerning Oosterweel’s impact and the possibilities for alternative trajectories, led protesters to opt for an entirely different trajectory. After the referendum, they became upset when “merely” the overpass was done away with. The polarization in the debate was also illustrated in the move from what might be called framing merely the “issue” at hand to framing the “process” and “identity” as well (M. van Hulst & Yanow, 2014). Over time, and through the alternation between imagination and evidence, the debate expanded from being just about infrastructure to also include decision-making and even how democracy works. In the public discourse both for and against Oosterweel, the portrayal of the other side as acting selfishly and being intent on pushing its own vision through no matter the consequences developed over time.

Of course, this observation does not mean that actors are somehow locked inside this spiral. As we have seen in the Oosterweel case, the idea of tunnelling the ring road reintroduced ambiguity into the debate, which might function as way to “re-frame” (Rein & Schön, 1993) the different perspectives on the project. Nonetheless, we again saw that although the Oosterweel proponents and opponents used similar language, they clearly did not trust each other. The concept of a

spiral thus enables us to better grasp the dynamics behind the curious phenomenon that discursive positions often deepen and grow more antagonistic over time in public conflicts, despite the fact that actors put so much energy into resolving the issue at hand. Their very enthusiasm to conclude the discussion through evidence might actually lead to further polarization.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

We have analysed how the framing process leads to a polarization of meanings in the public debate on an infrastructure project, with a specific focus on the interaction between imaginative framing and framing through evidence. While imaginative appeals move people emotionally by encouraging them to reimagine better spatial environments, the process of producing evidence denies the imaginative nature of spatial policy-making and often denounces the very presence of emotions in a debate.

The empirical analysis consisted of an in-depth study of newspaper articles about the contested Oosterweelconnection in Antwerp that were published at key moments in 2005, 2009, and 2014. Both proponents and opponents of Oosterweel vied for public support by alternating between imaginative appeals and appeals to evidence, both of which were enabled by the institutionally embedded positions of the actors involved. Due to their institutional embeddedness, governmental actors in favour of Oosterweel initially had an edge in the debate; through years of planning, they had already constructed a persuasive story about the Oosterweelconnection and had the evidence to back that story up. However, protesters succeeded in overcoming this imbalance by reimagining Oosterweel and mobilizing their own evidence. Over time, and by alternating between imagination and evidence, both sides of the debate created an increasingly large repertoire of symbolic images and facts. Moreover, imaginative framing and framing through evidence mutually reinforced each other, which is why we speak of a spiral-like pattern. Imaginative suggestions on the benefits or harms of Oosterweel were substantiated with evidence to prove that the actors' positions were rational. This evidence in turn fuelled anger over the other party's non-acceptance of the manifest "truths" and hence inspired new symbols. The public debate thus polarized as each party further developed its own vision of the issue and the mutual tolerance for ambiguity decreased.

This article offers various contributions to the literature. First and foremost, it provides those who are interested in the dynamics of framing (M. van Hulst & Yanow, 2014) with a new focus (on imagination and evidence) for analysing how different ways of seeing develop. It hence could help researchers to further develop specific frame types in relation to time. Why do actors over time come to emphasize "conflict" (Brummans et al., 2008), "risk" (Elliott, 2003), or "scale" (Kurtz, 2003; Lieshout et al., 2011) in their arguments, rather than other dimensions of an issue?

This might be due to the imagination and evidence interacting in specific ways to produce these foci. Secondly, for scholars who study evidence-based policy-making (Boswell, 2014; Nedlund & Garpenby, 2014; Wesselink et al., 2014), our analysis not only confirms that evidence interacts with the context in which it is operationalized, but it also stresses the mutual reinforcement of “evidenced” and “non-evidenced” meaning-making. Thirdly, for the field of spatial planning (Healey, 2007; Throgmorton, 2003; van Dijk, 2011), our analysis demonstrates how institutionally embedded actors combine imaginative appeals and appeals to evidence in crafting persuasive stories and specifically illustrates how these appeals can interact. The imagination-evidence spiral can also be of interest to scholars who study policy conflicts. For example, this study confirms that in policy conflicts that seem intractable, also referred to in the literature as “dialogues of the deaf” (M. J. van Eeten, 1999), additional research alone will not help to resolve an issue. Research can even contribute to escalation, as beyond bolstering existing images new research may also fuel additional – and more adverse – meaning-making. Finally, our analysis shows how detrimental it can be not to acknowledge the imaginative side of policy processes, especially when conflicts arise. By denying the very existence of emotions in related debates, the conversation over different ways to imagine space is halted while the production of facts to legitimize each side’s position is triggered – which can escalate a conflict rather than bring it to an end

---

<sup>i</sup> For a more elaborate history of the framing concept, see: van Hulst and Yanow (2014)

<sup>ii</sup> Mega-farms are very large scale farms for intensive animal husbandry

<sup>iii</sup> In Belgium, spatial planning is not governed on a federal level, but rather on a regional level by the separate regional governments of Flanders, Walloon, and Brussels.

<sup>iv</sup> We used the online database “GoPress”, which contains all Flemish newspapers. We included the following newspapers in the search: “De Standaard”; “De Morgen”; “De Gazet van Antwerpen”; “Het Laatste Nieuws”; “De Tijd”; “Het Nieuwsblad”; “Metro”; and “Het Belang van Limburg”. These eight represent all Flemish subscription newspapers, along with a free newspaper (“Metro”) with a wide readership. The Flemish edition of each newspaper was used. If only regional editions existed, we chose the Antwerp edition, as Antwerp is where the Oosterweelconnection is planned.

<sup>v</sup> “putting a roof on the ring road” was the slogan of action group Ringland for their campaign to tunnel the ring road. The idea was that by building a roof over what was now an open road, the open ring road would be transformed into a tunnel.

### 3. “Time to move on” or “taking more time”?

## How disregarding multiple perspectives on time can increase policy-making conflict

*E.E.A. Wolf & Wouter Van Dooren*

*Published in Environmental Policy C: Politics & Space*

#### **Abstract**

This article argues that when different perspectives on time remain disregarded in a public policy debate, policy-making conflict can increase. We present an in-depth qualitative analysis of media articles from 2005, 2009, and 2014 in the debate surrounding the contested ‘Oosterweelconnection,’ a multibillion-euro infrastructure project in Antwerp (Belgium). Although concerns of time management motivated arguments to speed up the policy-process, the insensitivity of policy-makers to multiple perspectives on time increased conflict. Firstly, while administrative actors reasoned mainly from a procedural time perspective and saw time as scarce, citizens reasoned mostly from an impact-based time perspective and saw time as abundant. A binary debate on policy-making tempo (high versus low) ensued. Secondly, political actors often reasoned from political perspectives on time. Their actions, which were intended to appease, did not end the binary debate and sometimes reinforced it. As the debate on the Oosterweelconnection persisted, parties increasingly believed that not only were their infrastructure goals incompatible, but so too were their goals for time management. This increased conflict.

## Introduction

Time is of the essence in the policy-making process for spatial projects. After all, a widely shared belief is that successful spatial projects are those that finish on time, with project success typically defined as projects “being delivered on budget, time, and benefits” (Flyvbjerg, 2014b p. 11). However, actors in spatial projects do not necessarily think of time in the same way. Whether a project is advancing quickly or slowly depends on whom you ask. The literature on spatial projects and spatial policy-making, however, has not fully recognised the existence and interaction of different perspectives on time. Much of this literature focuses on explaining and countering delay (e.g.: Flyvbjerg, 2014a; Hall, 1982; Morris & Hough, 1987). Time is treated here as a measure for project success (being “on time”) rather than as a research subject in its own right. A different strand of literature, on decision-making “lock-in,” does address time as an explicit research subject (Arthur, 1989; Cantarelli, Flyvbjerg, van Wee, & Molin, 2010). However, in this work time is still treated as an objective point of reference for all actors involved.

We argue that different actors within one spatial project may have different perspectives on time, and that recognizing these perspectives helps to explain policy conflict. The idea that different actors can experience time differently has been presented by various sociologists (Adam, 1990, 2008; Nowotny, 1996), urban theorists (Graham & Healey, 1999, p. 627; Harvey, 1996, pp. 210–247) and scenario planners (Frame, 2008; Rickards, Ison, Fünfgeld, & Wiseman, 2014). It has also received increasing attention in the field of policy analysis (Bressers, van Twist, & ten Heuvelhof, 2013; Eshuis & van Buuren, 2014; Pollitt, 2008, pp. 59–63). The impact of time perspectives on policy-processes, however, still remains understudied (see also: Bressers et al., 2013, p. 26; Eshuis & van Buuren, 2014, p. 402).

The theoretical contribution of this article is threefold. Firstly, by studying time not as an objective point of reference but as a social construction, we add a fresh perspective to the literature on spatial projects and spatial policy-making. This article, secondly, answers calls (Eshuis & van Buuren, 2014, p. 419; Pollitt, 2008, pp. 61–63) from the field of policy-analysis to pay more attention to the way in which time constructions shape policy-processes. More specifically, while the existing literature provides conceptualizations and demonstrates the influence of time perspectives on policy-making, it has not really unravelled mechanisms of how different time perspectives interact with each other beyond stating that this causes “tensions” (Eshuis & van Buuren, 2014, p. 417). Lastly, and relatedly, this article investigates the role of time perspectives in policy-making conflicts. The literature on (spatial) policy-making acknowledges that those who make plans and set time in policy-processes have a lot of power in setting the conditions for the policy-process. But it does not investigate how the struggle over time management may increase conflict between different parties in a policy-process.

This article focuses on the multiple perspectives on time in one spatial project: the Oosterweelconnection in Antwerp (Belgium). The Oosterweelconnection is a contested planned highway, currently estimated to cost 3.5 billion euros. We first discuss the main concepts of our study and our methodological approach. Next, we present the most important findings of our media-analysis. The following section analyses these findings and presents our main argument: when different time perspectives remain disregarded in a public policy debate over a spatial project, a binary debate on policy-making tempo can ensue, making the act of time management increasingly contested. As a result, the conflict between parties increases.

## **The management of multiple time perspectives in spatial policy-making**

### **Time as success or constraint**

The planning and construction of large spatial projects notoriously tends to take more time than initially calculated (Flyvbjerg et al., 2003; Siemiatycki, 2009). Dealing wisely with time is therefore often taken to mean finishing projects *on time*. The literature on so called “planning failures” even defines failure in temporal terms, with success typically defined as projects “being delivered on budget, time, and benefits” (Flyvbjerg, 2014a p. 11; for empirical applications, see also: Hall, 1982, p.138; Morris and Hough, 1987, p.193). This literature provides various explanations for projects not finishing on time. Studies focus, for example, on countering “optimism bias”: the tendency of policy-makers to underestimate time up front (Kahneman and Lovallo, 1993; Kahneman and Tversky, 1979). Such studies analyse why time is estimated poorly and how to improve estimations (e.g.: Flyvbjerg, 2008, 2009; Kahneman, 2011; Kirkeboen, 2009), but they see time as a measure of success (being “on time”) rather than as the core research subject.

The literature on “lock-in” in spatial policy-making does take time seriously as a core research subject (Cantarelli et al., 2010). Lock-in literature sees policy-making errors as resulting from actors being captured by decisions from the past, for example when it comes to choosing one technology over the other (Arthur, 1989). As a result, the decisions that actors make in the present are suboptimal. Lock-in studies are informed by path dependency theory (Hall and Taylor, 1996; Krasner 1988; Mahoney, 2000; Pierson, 2000) and sunk costs theory (Arkes and Blumer, 1985). Path dependency theory explains historical situations (e.g.: failed infrastructure projects) by focusing on the historical path leading up to these particular situations. The term “sunk costs” refers to investments that have been made and cannot be recovered (and are thus “sunk”). These should not influence decision-making as they are already lost, but often do (see also: Wilson and Zhang, 1997). Here, time is conceptualised as a uniform constraint on future decisions. Whether the past can be experienced in multiple ways, for example, is not analysed.

This paper conceives of time differently. It argues that actors within one policy-making process can have different perspectives on time. If different actors can have different perspectives on time within one process, both these perspectives themselves and their subsequent demands for time management become highly contestable.

### **Multiple perspectives on time in the policy-process**

It is in itself not a novel insight that time can be conceived of differently by different actors. Sociologists such as Adam (1990; 2008) and Nowotny (1996), as well as urban theorists (e.g.: Graham & Healey, 1999, p. 627; Harvey, 1996, pp. 210–247) and scenario planners (Frame, 2008; Rickards et al., 2014) have already studied time as a social construction, rather than an objective point of reference. These authors, however, do not investigate the impact of such constructions on concrete policy-making processes. This is also not their goal, as they aim to deconstruct the taken-for-granted notions of space and time in their respective disciplines.

How the constructed nature of time affects policy-making processes *has* been explored in the field of policy-analysis (Bressers et al., 2013; Eshuis & van Buuren, 2014; Pollitt, 2008, pp. 59–63). However, this field of study is still relatively young. Hence, the existing studies only scratch the surface of how social constructions of time impact policy-processes (Bressers et al., 2013, p. 26; Eshuis & van Buuren, 2014, p. 402). Still, evidence gathered thus far demonstrates that differences in how policy actors conceive of time can shape important aspects of policy-making, such as collaboration (Eshuis & van Buuren, 2014) and evaluation (Bressers et al., 2013).

The contribution of Eshuis & van Buuren is especially helpful, as these authors identify four dimension of a perspective on time: time-horizon, time-character, time-budget, and tempo (Eshuis & van Buuren, 2014, p.407). The *time-horizon* explains whether actors have a short-term, medium or long-term vision on a policy issue. This depends on their institutional embeddedness. A civil servant responsible for monitoring the procedural progress of a policy-process obviously has a different horizon from a politician who wants a project built within her term of office. From a time-horizon, then, follows a specific vision on the *character of time*: the sequentially structured time, ruled by administrative procedures, perceived by a civil servant, may be at odds with the cyclically structured time, ruled by elections, perceived by a politician. Time can also be experienced as unstructured and erratic. Time-horizon and the character of time subsequently shape perspectives on *time-budget* (is there ample time or little time) and *tempo* (is a process going fast or slow). A civil servant with a sequential view on time may feel that there should be sufficient time to maintain procedural integrity, while a politician with a cyclical view on time may view the same procedures as eating up time in the face of upcoming elections. Together, these four dimensions make up a time perspective.

### **Multiple time perspectives and conflicting demands for time management**

To this point we have argued that different actors within one spatial project can have different perspectives on time, and that this approach to time remains underdeveloped. We have also conceptualized a perspective on time by distinguishing between time-horizon, time-character, time-budget and tempo. But we have so far left out the topic of who manages time. However, although various stakeholders may have different time perspectives, some actors have more power than others to set the time.

Policy-makers manage time by deciding how to phase the policy-making process and how much time to allow for the various phases. By phasing the process, they automatically set some of the conditions for the policies themselves: policies requiring activities that would delay the process, after all, can be framed as inappropriate. Actors outside of the policy-making process, however, are not powerless when it comes to the setting of time. They, too, can try to influence time management. When different parties in a policy-making process have different demands for time management, this may result in conflict. We define conflict as: ‘the process that arises when two or more persons or groups manifest the belief that they have incompatible objectives’ (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2017, p. 2).

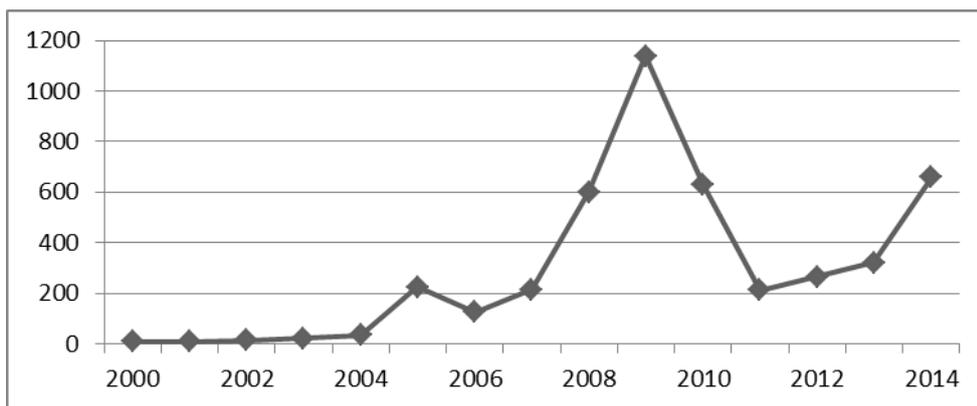
An illustration is provided by the work of van Eeten (1999, pp. 39–63). He discusses a conflict between protesters and governmental actors over a large dike improvement project in the Netherlands. Protesters asked for more time to study alternatives with a smaller spatial impact. Governmental actors, however, replied that time delays were irresponsible given the risk of flooding. The government’s refusal to concede more time, in turn, caused suspicion with protesters and led to increased efforts to block decision-making. A policy stalemate followed that only ended when the area again flooded in the 1990s. In this example, it seems that by prioritizing their own time perspective and subsequent demands for time management, policy-makers increased conflict over the dike improvement project instead of ending it.

It is widely acknowledged that policy-makers have significant, but contested, power in reimagining future places when making spatial policies (Healey, 2006; van Dijk, 2011) and that they set the often arbitrary conditions for what counts as rational action in policy-processes (Flyvbjerg, 1998). It is also acknowledged that the setting of time is an attribute of power (Goetz, 2014; Goetz and Meyer-Sahling, 2009). We hope to add to the existing literature by investigating the relationship between different time perspectives and conflict over time management in spatial policy-processes.

## Methods

This article studies the perspectives on time in the public debate over the Oosterweelconnection in Antwerp. The Oosterweelconnection is a planned highway that became the subject of a heated discussion in 2005. Today, the project is still publicly contested and remains in the planning phase. Because the policy conflict has endured for more than a decade, it is a good case for analysing how temporal perspectives interact with each other. The richness of the case thus holds promise for theoretical learning on the interaction of different time perspectives within a policy discourse, as well as for practical learning about the spatial policy-making process (Stake, 1994, 2010; Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). We studied media articles reporting on the Oosterweelconnection in 2005, 2009 and 2014. These years represent the peaks in media attention, offering a rich discourse on the time and timing of the project. The peaks were identified by searching for articles containing the word “Oosterweelconnection” (Dutch: ‘Oosterweelverbinding’) in the period from 2000-2014. We used the online database “GoPress”, which contains all Flemish newspapers. We included the following newspapers: “De Standaard”, “De Morgen,” “Gazet van Antwerpen,” “Het Laatste Nieuws,” “De Tijd,” “Het Nieuwsblad,” “Metro,” and “Het Belang van Limburg.” These represent all Flemish subscription newspapers and one widely read free newspaper (Metro). We chose the Flemish edition for each newspaper. If only regional editions existed, we chose the Antwerp edition, as Antwerp is where the Oosterweelconnection is planned for construction. Figure 3.1 shows the number of articles found for these years.

**Figure 3.1: Articles on the Oosterweelconnection**



For each year we first scanned through the titles. Next, we identified several months in each year for an in-depth qualitative analysis. These months were connected to key moments,<sup>i</sup> and also scored highest in terms of media attention. We analysed a total of 739 articles (Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1.: Years and months analysed**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of articles</i>	<i>Month</i>	<i>Key moment</i>
2005	80	March	Presentation of Oosterweel scale model
		April	Discussion of merits bridge versus tunnel
		October	Emergence of action group 'Straten-Generaal'
2009	470	March	Results of 'Arup/Sum' study
		October	referendum on Oosterweel in Antwerp
2014	189	February <sup>ii</sup>	Results of Environmental Impact Assessment; emergence of action group "Ringland"
		May	Flemish government elections

Coding was performed using the “Nvivo” software. The first step was coding the peak months for each year inductively. Our goal was to study the way in which time was made sense of in the Oosterweel debate. Coding therefore concentrated on identifying arguments related to time. In terms of how we identified arguments, we focused on two distinct discursive elements. One was the advancement of evidence. For example: actors referring to research to argue for rapid construction of the Oosterweelconnection. The other was the advancement of symbolic language. Symbolic language consisted mostly of metaphors, which reveal the way in which one thing is understood in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and thus attuned us to how the actors imaginatively constructed specific images of Oosterweel to make statements in terms of time. For example: by describing Oosterweel as “mortgaging” the city of Antwerp. Symbolic language also contained proverbs and the comparison of Oosterweel to other infrastructure projects or to events in the distant past. We attributed a wide range of codes to these discursive elements such as: “standing still” (for a statement like “we have lost time, because the planning process has been standing still”); “going forward” (for a statement like “the rapid planning procedure is shoving Oosterweel down our throats”); and “research” (for a statement like “considering trajectories proven inferior by prior research will only amount to unnecessary delay”).

After a first round of coding, we regrouped smaller codes under larger labels. In this second coding step we also recoded pieces of text that, in retrospect, fitted better under a different label. The resulting coding process clearly distinguished between arguments in favour of speed in the planning process and arguments in favour of taking more time to deliberate. Based on this

insight, we revisited the various temporal arguments in step 1 and paid specific attention to the way in which actors constructed time perspectives by embedding events in a past, present and future and how this related to time-horizon, time-character, time-budget, and tempo. Our coding process thus followed what is called the abductive approach, with iterations between data and theory (Schwartz-Sea and Yanow 2012; Timmermans and Tavory 2012). We found a clear difference between the arguments that presented time as structured through the planning procedure (e.g.: delay would be very costly), time as structured through the rhythm of elections (e.g.: speed is necessary because of approaching elections) and time as structured according to the impact of infrastructure (e.g.: there should be ample time to deliberate on a project having such impact for years to come). Based on this final analysis, we constructed the different temporal perspectives in the debate over Oosterweel. These are presented below, after first discussing the most important temporal arguments in the public debate over Oosterweel.

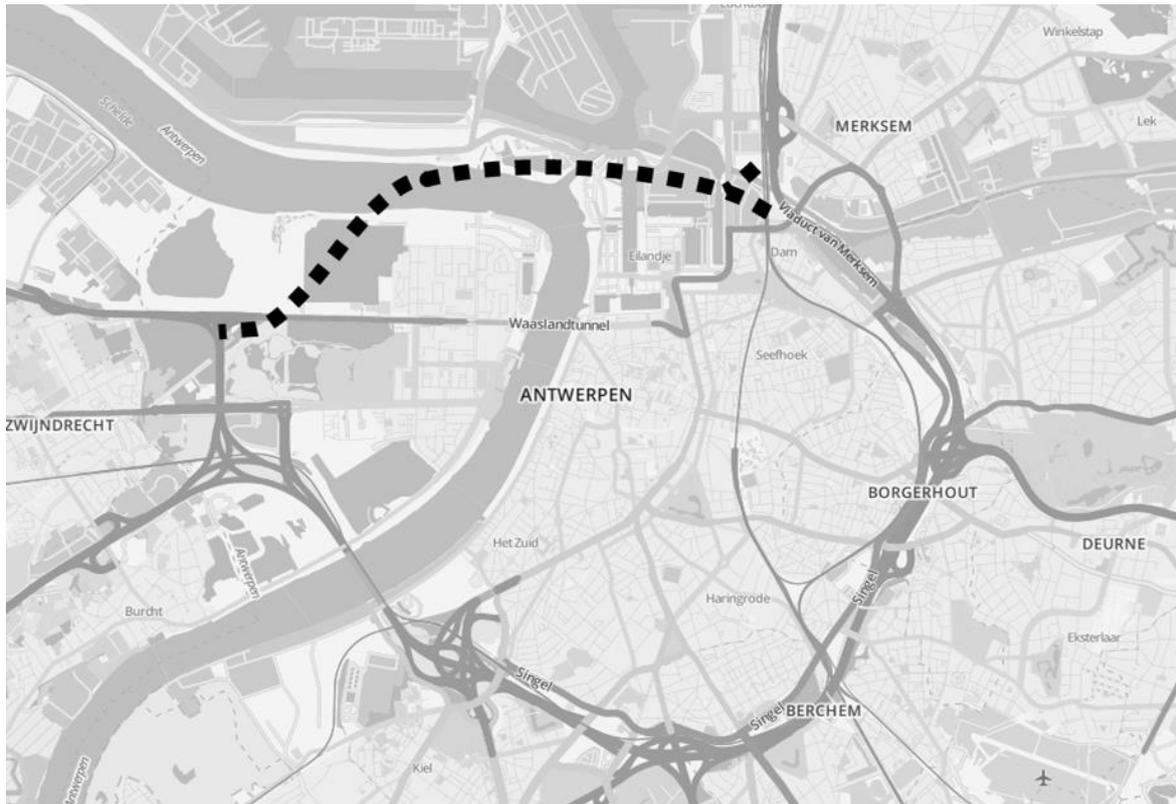
## **Temporal arguments in the public debate over Oosterweel**

In this section we discuss the most important temporal arguments in the public debate over the Oosterweelconnection at three different points in time: 2005, 2009 and 2014. For each year, we distinguish between arguments pleading for keeping up the decision-making tempo on Oosterweel and arguments pleading for decreasing the tempo. We start by briefly discussing the history of the Oosterweelconnection before 2005.

### **The early history of the Oosterweelconnection**

The region of Antwerp has been dealing with traffic congestion for a long time. It is commonly thought that the make-up of the Antwerp ring road, constructed in the 1960s, is largely responsible for this. The ring road does not form a circle around Antwerp, but something closer to a semi-circle that crosses directly through the city, thus inhibiting through traffic from bypassing Antwerp. At present, 270,000 cars and trucks use the ring road on a typical business day, making it the most crowded highway in Belgium. In 1995, the Flemish road agency<sup>iii</sup> declared it a priority to close the circle of the Antwerp ring road (Verelst, 2009). The trajectory for this enclosure was located in the Oosterweel area. Hence the name of this trajectory: the “Oosterweelconnection,” often shortened to “Oosterweel.” The project consisted of a tunnel under the Scheldt River and an overpass over part of the city. The map below shows both the Antwerp ring road and the plans for the Oosterweelconnection (dotted). In 2005, the scale model for the Oosterweelconnection was presented to political actors from the Flemish government and the city of Antwerp. This is when the public debate on Oosterweel begins.

**Figure 3.2: The Antwerp ring road showing the planned Oosterweelconnection in dotted lines**



Adapted from © OpenStreetMap contributors. Original map is available under the Open Database License and is licensed as CC BY-SA (Openstreetmap contributors, 2016).

### **2005: fearing delay and fearing haste**

In 2005 the Oosterweel project is presented to the wider public. Below we present the temporal arguments expressed in the public debate at key points during this year.

#### ***Time to move on***

Not long after the presentation of the scale model, a debate arises over the spatial impact of the Oosterweel overpass on the city. Consequently, the city of Antwerp orders a second opinion to investigate whether the overpass could be replaced by a tunnel. The city faces criticism for this, which mainly focuses on timing. Why order a second opinion so late into the process, actors from BAM (the administrative body responsible for project execution) and from the Flemish government wonder, when you previously committed to the same project? Moreover, various political actors from the Flemish government claim that Antwerp's ill-advised timing might jeopardise the larger political deal the Oosterweelconnection has been embedded in on the Flemish level. In addition to the Oosterweelconnection, that is, plans have been made to execute various bicycle and infrastructure projects in Antwerp. However, after the study concludes that a

tunnel would be more expensive than an overpass, the city of Antwerp recommits to Oosterweel and the planning procedure continues.

Nevertheless, the debate on Oosterweel soon resurfaces. At a press conference in September, the action group “Straten-Generaal” denounces the Oosterweelconnection because it would allegedly inhibit future city development in Antwerp. Instead, an alternative trajectory further away from the city is proposed. Administrative and political actors respond that the current plans are the result of many years of discussion and research. Further reflection is thus unwarranted; it is time to move on to the next phase of the planning process.

### *Taking more time*

Rather than arguing for speed, other voices in the public debate argue for taking more time. Various civic actors with expertise on urban planning join the public discussion started by Straten-Generaal. One architect illustrates his reasoning as follows: “I think that it is more important to take our time today, a few months or even a year, than to decide now on something that will mortgage the city for a hundred years to come” (as cited in Rinckhout, 2005, p. 8).

Moreover, in addition to the substantive discussion regarding infrastructure, the citizens from Straten-Generaal voice concern over the very insistence on speed by decision-makers. They stress that hardly any Antwerp resident had even heard of the Oosterweelconnection before 2005. How could citizens have voiced concerns earlier if they did not even know about the plans, they ask.

### **2009: blaming the other for delay**

Four years later, the conflict over Oosterweel remains ongoing. By this time, the action group “Ademloos” (literally, “Breathless”) has joined the protest. Ademloos resists Oosterweel over health concerns: a busy highway close to residential neighbourhoods would increase the volume of fine particles in the air. In the summer of 2008, faced with growing protests, the government asks the independent “Arup/Sum” research consortium to compare the Oosterweelconnection to other trajectories. Meanwhile, Ademloos collects enough signatures to hold a referendum on the Oosterweelconnection in Antwerp. In 2009, the results of the Arup/Sum study are presented and the municipal referendum is held. We will discuss the temporal arguments from the public discussion in this year.

### *Cutting the knot*

The Arup/Sum study concludes that none of the trajectories is good enough. They instead propose a new trajectory which strongly resembles the alternative of action groups. The study is interpreted in various ways. One of these interpretations, voiced by administrative actors from BAM and the responsible minister, is that only the Oosterweel trajectory would guarantee a quick solution to the worsening problem of traffic congestion. This is because choosing an alternative

trajectory would require a new Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), resulting in years of delay. This interpretation is ridiculed by action groups, who ask the question why the study was even ordered if its conclusions would be dismissed.

Despite these different opinions, political actors from the Flemish government feel that they have to make a decision on the issue quickly because the elections for a new Flemish government are approaching. As a compromise, the government decides to further research the alternative Arup/Sum trajectory, but also allows the Oosterweel project to continue in the permitting procedure.

In the lead-up to the Oosterweel referendum in October, actors from the BAM again argue that only Oosterweel could be completed in a timely manner. Moreover, Oosterweel is presented as a necessary project with a long history that should not be stopped by opponents in its final phase. This argument resounds in several newspaper pieces; the conflict over Oosterweel is characterised as one of endless bickering, and it is asked that Antwerp citizens vote for “moving forward” (Demeester-De meyer, 2009, p. 29) rather than “standing still” (Demeester-De meyer, 2009, p. 29) so that the government can finally “cut the knot” (Thomaes, 2009, p. 72) and begin construction.

### *Pushing through Oosterweel*

An alternative reading of the Arup/Sum study not only concludes that the Oosterweel trajectory is inferior, but also complains that it took so long even to find these results. After all, protesters claim, the government resisted appeals for further reflection for several years.

Reminding the public of this history, protesters argue that Oosterweel should certainly not be pushed through just for the sake of moving the procedure forward. When the political compromise is reached of further researching the Arup/Sum trajectory while also letting Oosterweel continue in the permitting procedure, action groups are furious. To simply continue with the Oosterweel project after four years of conflict and an independent study is, in their words, “simply rude” (as cited in “Nieuwe polemiek rond Oosterweelverbinding,” 2009, p. 21).

In the campaign for the referendum, protesters argue that cautious rather than fast decisions are needed, as Oosterweel will have effects for decades. They also stress that the government is to be held responsible for the slow decision-making process so far. One reader of a newspaper puts it as follows: “What have all those people [from BAM] even been doing for the past 11 years with all that money and time, that their only argument remains: if this is voted down, we will lose valuable time” (Leijssen, 2009, p. 22).

By now, several political actors that had supported the Oosterweel project before, join the action groups in their opposition. Some of them, most notably the mayor of Antwerp, are from political parties that are also members of the Flemish coalition. The changing of positions is met with resentment by other coalition parties, who portray the so called “U-turn” (e.g.: Brinckman, 2009, p.7) as a breach of prior commitments for pure electoral gain. The mayor of Antwerp, for example, is accused of changing positions to advance his re-election in 2011. However, those that change position argue that they had been politically pressured during previous terms of office into favouring Oosterweel just for the sake of upholding political commitments.

Eventually, 59.24% of the voting Antwerp citizens reject the Oosterweelconnection in the referendum. The referendum, however, is not legally binding, which prompts new debates over what to do next. However, at least for the moment, the planning process for the Oosterweelconnection is put on hold.

#### **2014: learning from history?**

In 2014 the Oosterweel debate continues. The original project has now undergone some major revisions, most notably through the decision of 2010 to replace the contested overpass with a tunnel. This restores the political consensus over Oosterweel. It does not, however, appease action groups who stress that they object to the location and not merely the overpass. The revisions do require a new EIA to compare different highway trajectories. It's results are presented in February; in May the elections for a new Flemish government take place.

#### ***Breaking ground***

Because the EIA states that the Oosterweel project scores highest among all trajectories for mobility, the government concludes that the Oosterweelconnection is the preferred trajectory. BAM's chairman asks protesters to stop their resistance, while political parties from the Flemish coalition reconfirm their commitment to Oosterweel in the so-called “Valentines agreement.” They stress that the decision-making impasse should end now and that ground must be broken as soon as possible

However, as the Flemish elections draw closer, a new action group called “Ringland” emerges. Ringland also recognises the impasse, but argues that to get beyond this, no new infrastructure should be built for the moment. Rather, the existing ring road should be tunnelled. In this way, Ringland claims, the existing traffic could be managed better *and* the space currently used by cars could be reclaimed for citizens (hence the name Ringland). Their plan is praised in various newspaper articles.

Administrative actors and actors from coalition parties alike do not object to tunnelling the ring road as such. However, they refuse to reopen the discussion on Oosterweel. As one politician explains:

We have come a long way already in developing the BAM trajectory [another name for the Oosterweel trajectory] and we cannot reset the counter now. It will then take another ten years before anything actually happens. And that would entail economic self-destruction (as cited in Moolenaar, 2014, p. 3).

### *Changing priorities*

A different EIA interpretation reads that the track proposed by the action groups performs best on liveability and that in terms of mobility there is almost no difference between this trajectory and Oosterweel. Hence, many citizens critical of Oosterweel are angry when political actors so quickly state that Oosterweel is the better option. This sentiment is illustrated by the following quote from a reader's letter:

On Monday the EIA is presented, on Wednesday the newspapers tell us that first changes have been made to the Oosterweel design, on Thursday one can read about additional changes and on Friday the three political parties involved have suddenly decided on everything. In my opinion this is equal to fraud (Goyvaerts, 2014, p. 35).

Protesters continue to resist Oosterweel. They also get a new ally in the lead-up to the election. One political party that had always backed Oosterweel decides that the plan lacks support and starts opposing it. Meanwhile, the Ringland action group refuses to take a position for or against Oosterweel, but merely stresses the priority of tunnelling. Consequently, Ringland asks that the timing of Oosterweel be adapted. Asked how it would react if political actors choose to ignore their plea, an actor from Ringland warns that this may be a very costly decision in terms of time, as the continued opposition would only lead to more delay in decision-making. At present (April 2017) the planning process for the Oosterweelconnection is still ongoing.

## **How a binary debate on tempo increased policy-making conflict**

The previous section described the main temporal arguments in the public debate on the Oosterweelconnection. We now analyse these arguments in three steps. First, we present three time perspectives that underpin the temporal arguments in the Oosterweel debate. Next, we analyse how these different perspectives interact with each other and, thirdly, how this impacts policy conflict.

### **Three perspectives on time**

In our theoretical section we explained how to discern perspectives on time by studying time-horizon, time-character, time-budget, and tempo. We can now discern three perspectives on time

in the Oosterweel debate, namely: a procedural perspective, an impact-based perspective, and a political perspective.

Firstly, we find a procedural perspective on time, in which new events are interpreted as being part of a planning procedure with phases and milestones. This perspective takes the policy-making procedure as a starting point and the *time-horizon*, consequently, is short- to medium-term. The *character of time* is sequential. Time is structured in a policy-making process with a fixed beginning, a projected ending, and activities that build on each other. The projected end date defines the remaining *time-budget*. Hence, it is important to keep up the *tempo* so that time is not lost. In the debate over Oosterweel, this perspective on time stresses rapid completion. The project has been in preparation for many years and has been studied repeatedly. It now needs to move forward in the planning procedure so that it can be completed on time. This perspective is primarily advanced by administrative actors whose task it is to manage the project procedures. Occasionally, political actors in favour of rapid decision-making and citizens and media growing increasingly tired of the continuing discussion over Oosterweel also adopt this perspective.

Secondly, we find an impact-based perspective on time, in which new events are interpreted as being part of an ongoing debate over Oosterweel's long-term consequences. The *time-horizon* is long-term and it takes the impact of building new infrastructure as its starting point. It is better to take the time for serious reflection now, it is argued, than to make bad and irreversible decisions that will harm the city for decades to come. The *time-character* is thus sequential, but the impact-based perspective focuses on the consequences of decisions rather than on the procedure itself. This also means that the *time-budget* for decision-making is perceived as ample, but as soon as infrastructure has been built there is no going back. When it comes to *tempo*, cautiousness rather than speed is stressed. This perspective is advanced primarily by citizens and action groups, but is also occasionally adopted by political actors who join the protesters in their resistance.

The third perspective on time is a political one and is advanced almost exclusively by politicians from ruling parties. The *time-horizon* is short- to medium term and the electoral cycle is the focal point of reasoning. Because of the cyclical nature of elections, the *character of time* is cyclical. Ruling parties have to uphold the agreements they made in the election aftermath, while elections provide the opportunity for parties to (re)position themselves on policy-issues. The *time-budget* is defined by the elections. Upcoming elections mean that the time is scarce for ruling parties. Moreover, the campaign offers a brief window to take a political position, which also results in time scarcity. The preferred *tempo* of policy-making varies, depending on perceived time scarcity. We mostly see demands from ruling parties for a high tempo, either to fulfil electoral promises or to reach decisions before electoral campaigning starts. On rare occasions, such as in the lead-up to the 2009 municipal referendum, ruling parties have also made the argument that the tempo of

decision-making should be paused for political reasons. In this case, the referendum seems to have allowed for a political window for repositioning reminiscent of electoral campaigns. Table 3.2 presents an overview of the various time perspectives in the public debate over Oosterweel, as well as an graphic illustration of these perspectives.

**Table 3.2: Perspectives on time in the Oosterweel debate**

Perspective	Horizon	Character	Budget	Tempo	Illustration
Procedural	Short/Medium	Sequential	Scarce	High	A • —————> B Procedure
Impact-based	Long	Sequential	Ample	Low	A • - - - - -> ? Impact
Political	Short/Medium	Cyclical	Depends	Depends	A B A B A B Political cycle

**How perspectives on time further diverge in a binary debate**

*Diverging time perspectives in a binary debate*

The previous section explained how different characterisations of time-horizon and time-character engender different time-budgets and policy-making tempos. We now argue that in the Oosterweel debate, the persistence of different, unacknowledged time perspectives led to a binary debate over the tempo of decision-making. The binary nature of this debate, in turn, contributed to the different perspectives further diverging.

From the start, a tension between the impact-based perspective pleading for more time and the procedural perspective that resisted this plea because time was seen as too scarce was present. We can understand this tension when we remember the very different time-horizons of these two perspectives. A procedural time perspective focuses on the short- to medium-term procedure of policy-making, the progression of which is managed by setting deadlines and organizing activities that build on each other. An impact-based perspective, on the other hand, focuses on the long-term consequences of the project and the permanence of the built environment. From one perspective, progress is welcomed; from the other, progress may be dangerous if it goes at the expense of caution.

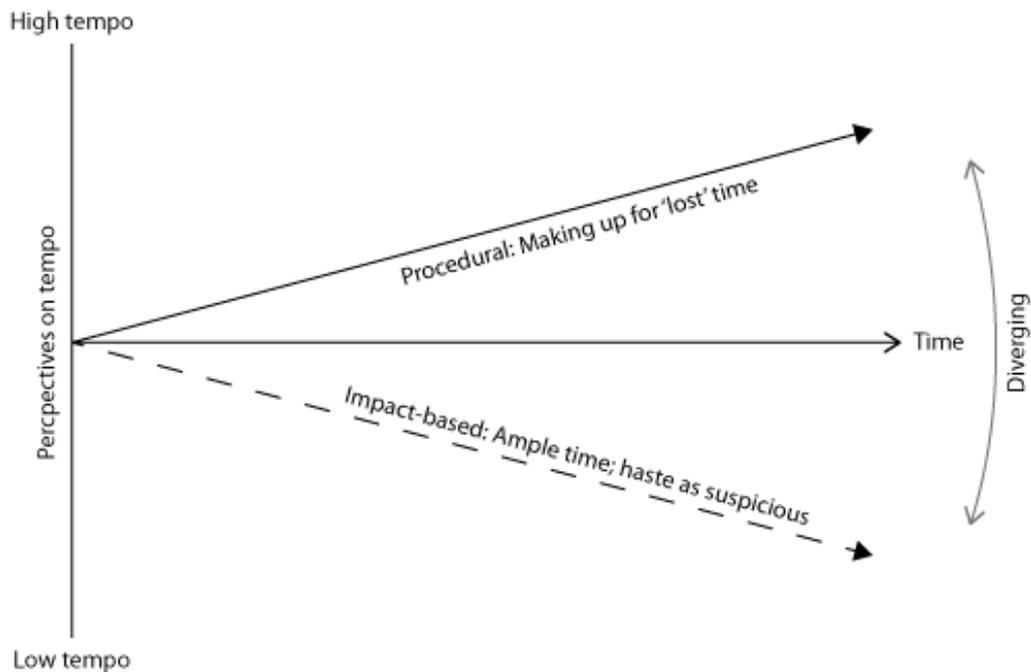
In 2005, pleads by citizens to pause decision-making were disregarded with the argument that enough research had been conducted already. Rather than recognizing various perspectives on time, policy-makers argued that the only sensible thing to do was to keep up the pace of decision-

making. This emphasis on progression, however, stirred the suspicion of those who reasoned from an impact-based perspective on time. The unwillingness to open up discussion was regarded as proof of a flawed policy-process, more concerned with project completion than with the long-term repercussions of infrastructure. The irreversibility of infrastructure construction, and the negligence policy-makers seemed to display towards this aspect, provided the grounds for protesters to increase their efforts to try and pause decision-making. For example through organizing a municipal referendum.

This, in turn, stirred the suspicion of those with a procedural perspective. As the policy procedure got delayed, the onset of delay was seen as proof of obstruction by action groups, rather than as a plea for more discussion. From a procedural perspective on time, after all, delay equalled the loss of valuable time. Oosterweel was presented as a necessary project with a long history that could not be obstructed in its final phase.

As delays increased, procedural thinkers attempted to 'make up' for time 'lost,' which in turn made those with an impact-based perspective even more suspicious. A binary debate on aspired tempo ensued: arguments increasingly focused on either *increasing* the tempo of decision-making, as enough time had allegedly already been lost, or *decreasing* it, with pleas for speed regarded suspiciously. As a result, these time perspectives that were already in tension with each other to begin with, diverged even more. The dynamic of different time perspectives further diverging in a binary debate on aspired tempo is illustrated in figure 3.3.

**Figure 3.3: How the procedural and impact-based time perspectives further diverged**



### *Political time reinforcing binarity*

Most of the temporal arguments in the Oosterweel debate were advanced from what we called a procedural perspective and an impact-based perspective on time. However, there are a few key moments when politicians advanced their own, political, time perspective. Mostly, they stressed the need for project progression, either to make good on political agreements made earlier in their term (in 2005) or because of upcoming elections (in 2009). However, during rare political windows (during elections and during the lead-up to the referendum), ruling politicians have argued for temporarily pausing decision-making. Neither plea, however, has succeeded in putting an end to the binarity in the public over tempo. Moreover, at several points in time, decisions motivated by a political time perspective seems to have strengthened this binarity.

In 2009, for example, political actors decided that because the elections were coming up they could not make any final decisions on the Oosterweelconnection. As a result, they allowed both the planning process for Oosterweel to continue while also commissioning additional research into the Arup/Sum trajectory. The Oosterweel project thus continued to move forward in the permitting procedure, strengthening the claim that opting for an alternative trajectory would amount to even more delay. However, the call for additional research also suggested that time would be taken for serious debate, thus increasing the frustration of impact-based reasoners when the debate was not opened up after the elections but instead a compromise on Oosterweel was forged in politico-administrative circles. These actions may have made sense from a political

perspective, but ended up strengthening the dichotomy over tempo in the public debate over Oosterweel rather than pacifying it.

### ***How conflict between parties increased***

In our theoretical section we defined conflict as the process that arises when two or more persons or groups manifest the belief that they have incompatible objectives. As the debate on the tempo of Oosterweel policy-making became increasingly binary, parties for or against the Oosterweelconnection were not merely fighting over different highway trajectories anymore. They also increasingly believed that their objectives for time management were incompatible. Demands for keeping up the decision-making tempo became suspicious in and of themselves, because they were cast as leading to bad and irreversible decisions, while demands for decreasing the tempo became equally suspicious, as they were cast in terms of obstruction. This was evident in 2009, when the delay was used to argue both for (because too much time had already been lost) and against (because effort to push through plans had to be resisted) the need to make decisions quickly. And in 2014, when there was a general acceptance of tunnelling the ring road in the public debate, but the conversation again spiralled into conflict over tempo.

As a result of believing that their objectives for time management were incompatible, the activity of structuring the policy-process became an additional source of conflict. Paradoxically, then, although arguments for a high policy-making tempo were advanced out of concerns for time management, they only added to conflict protraction rather than rapid project completion. In the policy-making process over the Oosterweelconnection, the public debate increasingly became splintered over the question of how to order time, in addition to being divided over the question of how to order space.

## **Conclusion and discussion**

Through an in-depth qualitative study of newspaper articles about the contested “Oosterweelconnection” in Antwerp, this article has argued that when different time perspectives remain disregarded in a public policy debate over a spatial project, a binary debate on policy-making tempo can ensue. As a result, the act of time management itself becomes increasingly contested and the conflict between parties wielding different time perspectives grows.

The contribution of this article to the literature on spatial projects and spatial policy-making is threefold. Firstly, it demonstrates that while it is understandable for policy-makers to emphasize procedural progression to prevent delay, insensitivity to multiple time perspectives can actually lead to conflict protraction and hence further delay. Attempts to avoid so-called planning “failure” (Flyvbjerg 2014a; Hall, 1982; Morris and Hough, 1987), can paradoxically thus contribute to planning failure. Secondly, the analysis demonstrates the largely covert power that

policy-makers have when making spatial policies. By structuring the policy-process, they not only set the conditions for which policies make (no) sense in terms of space (Healey, 2006; van Dijk, 2011) but also in terms of time. A time perspective can thus activate a specific rationality (Flyvbjerg, 1998) that policy-makers employ to further their preferred policy at the expense of other options. The latter conclusion, relatedly, may also add to the literature investigating decision-making lock-in. Lock-in, we argue, may result from policy-makers having specific demands for time-management that lock-out other options.

The article also contributes to the emerging body of literature in policy analysis that investigates the role of time constructions in policy-making (Bressers et al., 2013; Eshuis & van Buuren, 2014; Pollitt, 2008). Our analysis teases out two theoretical mechanisms that may be activated when policy-processes harbour multiple perspectives on time. Firstly, it demonstrates that different time perspectives may not only be in tension with each other, but that these perspectives can further polarize as a result of confrontation. In the Oosterweel debate, an increasingly binary debate over policy-making tempo ensued which contributed to further diversion of perspectives. Secondly, the analysis demonstrates that prioritizing one perspective on time can make the act of time management increasingly contested and consequently increase the conflict between various parties in a policy-process.

These findings underscore the need for what is also called “time-sensitivity” (Bressers et al., 2013; Eshuis & van Buuren, 2014) in policy-making. Policy-makers should be sensitive to the time perspective of other parties, as those who fail to do so may ultimately do so at their own peril. In the Oosterweel case, not only has the policy-process been severely delayed, the conflict between parties also became much harder to settle when time management itself became a topic of contestation. Indeed, actors seemed to have lost trust in the very potential of alignment between time perspectives and their demands for time management, and as Eshuis & van Buuren (2014, p.419) stress: “without trust and reciprocity, the process of alignment will be extremely cumbersome.”

Operating in time-sensitive ways is no easy task for policy-makers. Firstly, they may not recognize other perspectives on time. Hence, awareness of the importance of time-sensitivity is a first step. Moreover, even if policy-makers recognize other time perspectives, they may find themselves bounded by procedures. There is, for example, an inherent tension between following up on past promises and procedural guidelines and being responsive to what citizens demand “today.” A second step to improve time-sensitivity may therefore be to redesign some aspects of the spatial policy-making process. Our conclusions could for example question the trend of designing highly integrated, tight planning processes (e.g.: Lenferink, Tillema and Arts, 2013). When many different aspects of a planning process are temporally linked, the ability of policy-

makers to reflect on and respond to changing circumstances may be compromised. As our analysis demonstrates, tight planning with a strong focus on efficiency can prove highly inefficient in the end.

---

<sup>i</sup> The empirical section will further elaborate on these.

<sup>ii</sup> For February 2014, Gopress at present (January 2017) lists 103 articles. At the time of our download (June, 2015), 108 articles were available. This is due to differences in availability of content over time.

<sup>iii</sup> In Belgium, spatial planning/ public works are governed by the regional governments of Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels. In the case of Oosterweel, the Flemish government has jurisdiction.

# 4. Dismissing the “vocal minority”: How policy conflict escalates when policy-makers label resisting citizens

*E.E.A. Wolf*

*Revise & Resubmit Policy Studies*

## **Abstract**

This article investigates the feed-forward effects of labelling in policy conflicts. It argues that policy conflict escalates when policy-makers separate segments of the population from each other by distinguishing between more and less deserving parts and more and less powerful parts. The article studies policy conflict through the theory of Social Construction and Policy Design. It draws on an empirical analysis of 32 narrative interviews with vital stakeholders in the conflict over the contested multibillion-euro “Oosterweelconnection” highway in Antwerp (Belgium). It concludes that policy-makers became increasingly hostile towards action groups as the latter moved outside of the conventional policy-making procedure. They were labeled as a powerful but undeserving “vocal minority.” Meanwhile, seeing themselves as just the opposite of action groups and as victimized by them, policy-makers presented the Oosterweel policy that they defended as representing an increasingly powerless but deserving “silent majority.” However, labelling action groups as powerful but undeserving and consequently dismissing them resulted in an escalation from substantive policy conflict, which was productive because it led to civic engagement, to relational policy conflict, which was destructive because parties were fighting each other rather than fighting over policies.

## Introduction

Policy conflicts often change over time. What starts out as a conflict over dikes, for example, can change into a conflict over the way in which policies are made (M.J.G. van Eeten, 1999b). What begins as a conflict over the relocation of a train station can change into a fight filled with abusive remarks (Durnova, 2013). A conflict over a development project can turn into something described as a “civil war” between local governments and their citizens (Hendriks, 2010; Novy & Peters, 2012). As these examples demonstrate, many policy conflicts change by moving from substantive to relational conflicts as they become more protracted. This is the sense in which policy conflicts escalate: the parties in these examples are no longer fighting only over policies, but also fighting each other (Glasl, 1982). This article explores how to make sense of such escalation through an in-depth study of the policy conflict over the “Oosterweelconnection,” a planned multibillion-euro highway in Antwerp (Belgium) that became the subject of public debate in 2005 and remains in the planning phase at the time of writing.

This study uses the “Social Construction and Policy Design” (SCPD) theory (Ingram & Schneider, 2015; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Schneider & Sidney, 2009) to better understand the relationship between the policy-making process and the escalation of policy conflict. While SCPD theory is most often used to explain socio-economic inequalities between different groups in society, this paper argues that it can also explain how processes of conflict escalation work. This is because of the attention that SCPD gives to the way in which policies shape the democratic participation of citizens through the messages that policies send.

By studying conflict escalation through the theoretical lens of SCPD, this article makes a contribution to the policy conflict literature. Tracking the messages sent by policies to the population and their feed-forward effects in terms of participation, that is, may help explain the transition from productive conflicts, that trigger democratic engagement (M. Hajer, 2003; I. Verhoeven, 2009; Verloo, 2015), to destructive conflicts, that result in the distrust of those involved towards each other and the policy-making system (Schön & Rein, 1994; Termeer, Breeman, van Lieshout, & Pot, 2010; M.J.G. van Eeten, 1999a). This article contributes not only to the policy conflict literature, but also to the SCPD literature. Cases of conflict are, first of all, well-suited for an in-depth study of the feed-forward effects of policies, a topic that remains insufficiently studied in SCPD theory (Pierce et al., 2014). Moreover, this paper answers a call for more attention to the role of interpretation in SCPD theorizing (Ingram & Schneider, 2006, p. 184; Schneider & Sidney, 2009, p. 111). Its most important contribution may be the insights it provides into policy-makers. SCPD often assumes that policy-makers make policies based on electoral calculations (Schneider & Ingram, 1997, pp. 103–149; Schneider & Sidney, 2009, pp.

106–108). This article, however, does not assume that policy-makers necessarily behave strategically, but rather investigates their interpretations of the policy process.

The structure of this article is as follows. The first section discusses the SCPD theory and elaborates on what this scholarship can bring to the policy conflict literature- and vice versa. The second section focuses on methods. After discussing the empirical results of the analysis, the main argument is presented. Policy conflict can move policy-makers to separate segments of the target population from each other by distinguishing between more and less deserving parts and more and less powerful parts. Doing so, however, only escalates the conflict as it becomes increasingly relational and destructive.

### **The feed-forward effects of policy design and labelling in policy conflicts**

This section explains how the SCPD theory could help us to better understand the escalation of policy conflicts. To that end I first explain the most important aspects of the SCPD theory. After that I explain how SCPD theory can contribute to a better understanding of policy conflict escalation.

#### **SCPD: the feed-forward effects of policy design through labelling**

SCPD theory states that, rather than seeing policies solely as the result of political participation, policies should also be seen as setting the stage for political participation (Ingram & Schneider, 2015; A. Schneider & Ingram, 1993; A. Schneider & Sidney, 2009). Policy designs, defined as: “the content of public policy as found in the text of policies, the practices through which policies are conveyed, and the subsequent consequences associated with those practices” (Pierce et al., 2014, p. 6), have feed-forward effects (Pierce et al., 2014, pp. 5–6; Schneider & Sidney, 2009, pp. 108–111). Welfare recipients, for example, are constantly being told, through the strict rules that they have to abide by and the constant screening they are subjected to, that they are a burden to society at large. The policies that welfare recipients are subjected to thus discourage them from defending their interests in the public arena. Business leaders, on the other hand, are treated as if their well-being is not only important for the corporations themselves, but for the whole of society. The interests of some groups in society are thus equated with the public interest at large, while the interests of others are represented as standing in direct opposition to it. Through policy designs, then, some groups in society are encouraged to participate in the democratic institutions of policy-making to claim what they are signaled is rightfully theirs. Meanwhile, the claims of other groups are systematically delegitimized and hence discouraged.

These feed-forward effects, SCPD theory argues, result from labelling. Policy designs label target groups and these labels deliver messages that can encourage or discourage participation. SCPD theory identifies two aspects based on which target populations are labelled: perceived power

and perceived deservedness (Ingram & Schneider, 2015, pp. 262–266; Schneider & Ingram, 1993, pp. 335–338). It furthermore argues that policy-makers are most likely to make policies with many benefits and few burdens for groups that they perceive as powerful and deserving. Again, this pertains both to the content and the practices of policy-making. Beneficial policies thus bestow rewards on population groups without them having to expend significant effort to obtain these. Rewarding perceived powerful and deserving groups pays off for policy-makers because it enlists the support of powerful actors themselves while also enlisting public sympathy at large. Let us take scientist as an example of such a group (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, p. 336). The opposite is also the case. Policy-makers are most likely establish many burdens and very few benefits for groups perceived by them as having little power and being undeserving. These groups wield little power themselves, and punishing the undeserving may foster public sympathy. We may take criminals as an example (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, p. 336). Of course, the 2x2 grid generates mixed categories as well: powerful but undeserving (for example: the “elderly” (Hudson & Gonyea, 2012)) and powerless but deserving (for example: “welfare mothers” (Soss, 2005)).

Through policy design, SCPD theory concludes, some segments of the population are labelled as powerful and/or deserving and other segments of the population as powerless and/or undeserving, which sets the stage for their democratic participation. Some groups receive the message that their participation is welcomed because they are labelled as deserving people whose voices will be taken seriously. Again, the reverse is also the case: some groups receive the message that their participation is not welcomed, or they receive mixed messages when they are classified in a mixed category.

This does not mean, of course, that target populations have no agency to fight the labels assigned to them. Japanese immigrants, for example, became labelled as a “model minority,” rather than “problem minority” through their fight to be treated as equal to American citizens (DiAlto, 2005). However, SCPD theory predicts that the weakest groups in society will find it hardest to do so, and that their lack of participation will reinforce their marginal position. One of the most interesting features of the theory, then, is the direct link it establishes between the institutions of policy design on the one hand and the interpretations and actions of target groups on the other. The theory also explicitly references the quality of a democratic system. To the extent that democracy should promote the ideal of equality, SCPD theory argues that policy designs that discourage some groups from democratic participation are harmful to the democratic system.

### **The value of SCPD for explaining the escalation of policy conflict**

Various empirical applications demonstrate the explanatory value of SCPD theory (for an overview, see: Nowlin, 2011; Pierce et al., 2014). The theory has proven itself especially useful

for explaining gaps in participation between different groups in society (Soss, 1999, 2005) and for explaining changes over time in how some groups in society are labelled and, as a result, participate in democratic systems (DiAlto, 2005; Donovan, 1993; Hudson & Gonyea, 2012). SCPD theory has not, to my knowledge, been utilized to explain the escalation of policy conflicts. This paper argues that the theory is useful for achieving a better understanding policy conflicts because of the attention that it devotes to the feed-forward effects of labelling.

Conflict literature suggests that, on the one hand, conflicts can be very productive. They signal engagement and the willingness of people to expend energy to reach their goals (Laws et al., 2014). If political apathy is something that worries us, then policy conflicts serve as reminders that people still care about what happens in the public domain (M. Hajer, 2003; I. Verhoeven, 2009; Verloo, 2015). On the other hand, conflicts can become destructive. This is most obviously the case when conflicts become violent, but non-violent policy conflicts can become destructive as well when they lead to zero-sum games (Laws et al., 2014) that leave the parties involved questioning and even distrusting the policy-making system (Schön & Rein, 1994; Termeer et al., 2010; M.J.G. van Eeten, 1999a).

The conflict literature also tells us that the move from productive to destructive conflict may occur as a consequence of substantive conflict becoming increasingly relational (Glasl, 1982; Kriesberg & Dayton, 2017, pp. 152–154; Pruitt., Rubin, & Kim, 2003, pp. 70–71). The move from substantive to relational conflict is called escalation, and it can render a productive conflict destructive because it means that actors are fighting each other rather than discussing the issue at hand. An example of such escalation, although he does not conceptualize it as such, is provided by van Eeten (1999b). He discusses a conflict between protesters and governmental actors over a large dike improvement project in the Netherlands. When the project was launched in 1970s, it quickly provoked opposition. Protesters argued that the planned dikes were based on an unrealistic risk assessment, and that the damage done to the environment was weighed unfairly against the theoretical improvement of safety. The government rejected this assessment and pressed the public interest of protecting the Dutch people from floods. As the policy conflict dragged on over multiple decades, the parties began to fight not only over substantive issues but also over the negative personal characteristics of their opponents in the conflict.

Conflict literature tells us that so-called “othering” (the process in conflicts of separating “us” from “them” and seeing the other in increasingly oppositional terms) plays a crucial role in the transition of conflict from the substantive to the relational realm (Wu & Laws, 2003). In the previous example, protesters and governmental actors increasingly saw each other as the “other” party that possessed negative personal qualities standing in direct opposition to their own. Through the theoretical lens of SCPD, the process of “othering” could be seen as closely related

to labeling. In fact, Ingram and Schneider, the founders of SCPD theory, themselves note that the processes of othering and labelling are closely connected (Ingram & Schneider, 2015, p. 268). A well-known example of labelling in policy design that simultaneously separates “us” from “them,” is the “NIMBY” (Not In My Backyard) label that is often ascribed to citizens resisting spatial planning efforts. By labelling citizens as NIMBYs, their claims for land are constructed as different, and less honorable, than the claims for land as brought forward by spatial planners that act in the so-called general interest (Burningham, 2000; McAvoy, 1998; Wolsink, 2000). Through labelling, the “us” of spatial planners is separated from the “them” of resisting citizens.

Studying policy conflicts through the lens of SCPD can help us connect labeling by policies to the process of othering and, subsequently, to its feed-forward effects in terms of conflict escalation. In other words, by tracking how policy designs assign labels and how this labelling has feed-forward effects, we might better understand the process by which the personal qualities of the “other” party enter the policy conversation. And, consequently, the process by which substantive, productive, conflict (M. Hajer, 2003; I. Verhoeven, 2009; Verloo, 2015) becomes relational, destructive, conflict (Schön & Rein, 1994; Termeer et al., 2010; M.J.G. van Eeten, 1999a). At the same time, studying conflicts may bring additional insights to SCPD theory. The investigation of how policy designs contribute to the escalation of conflict may teach us more about how designs convey messages to citizens to participate and resist policies. This answers a call in the literature for more studies on the feed-forward effects of design (Pierce et al., 2014). Conflict escalation, moreover, may seem entirely irrational. After all, when conflicts escalate and become increasingly protracted a solution that might bring respite to all the parties involved becomes increasingly hard to find. Studying feed-forward here can teach us more about the role of interpretation in sustaining a seemingly irrational process. While more attention to the role of interpretation in policy-design is called for generally by authors in the field (Ingram & Schneider, 2006, p. 184; Schneider & Sidney, 2009, p. 111), it is my opinion that such an approach is particularly beneficial for better understanding policy-makers. This is because much of the SCTP scholarship focuses on how target populations interpret designs, while policy-makers are, curiously, very often hypothesized to act in ways strictly governed by electoral considerations (Schneider & Ingram, 1997, pp. 103–149; Schneider & Sidney, 2009, pp. 106–108). This study does not assume that policy-makers necessarily behave strategically, but rather investigates how they interpret the contested policies that they produce.

## **Methods**

This article studies the escalation of conflict in the policy-making process over the Oosterweelconnection. The Oosterweelconnection is a planned highway, estimated to cost 3.5 billion euros, that became the subject of heated public debate in 2005, but for which the policy-

making process started as early as 1995 (Verelst, 2009a). The project is still publicly contested and remains in the planning phase as of this writing. Because Oosterweel represents a politically heated policy-making process spanning more than a decade, it is a good case for studying the feed-forward effects of policy design in a situation of policy conflict. The richness of the Oosterweel case thus holds promise for both theoretical and practical study (Stake, 1994, 2010; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012) of how policy-makers deal with policy conflict and how their approaches to conflict in turn shape target populations and affect the policy design process.

The empirical analysis focused on the data collected from 32 in-depth interviews with key stakeholders. These included key political figures from the Flemish administration and the city of Antwerp (7), as well as civil servants<sup>i</sup> (16), members of action groups (7) and others<sup>ii</sup> (2) engaged in the Oosterweel debate. Respondents were selected as follows. First, I compiled a list of important stakeholders in the Oosterweel conflict after consulting with academics who were well versed in the case. The stakeholders on this list were subsequently approached for an interview and the list was updated during the data collection process using the “snowball method” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28) for selecting respondents. Of the 42 respondents that were contacted, 32 were interviewed. Of the 10 that were not interviewed, two were unwilling to participate in the research. The others were not interviewed due to the data becoming increasingly repetitive, a stage sometimes referred to as “saturation” (Saumure & Given, 2008). The average length of the interviews was 1h 44m, with some lasting as long as 3h 10m and others lasting 50m.

The interviews followed a narrative format. Respondents were asked to tell their stories of the Oosterweel policy process. Hence the focus was on their involvement and on how they had experienced different parts of the process. As such, the interviews made for a very rich discourse of how various stakeholders, from different positions in the policy field, reconstructed the policy trajectory. Respondents reconstructed their history of Oosterweel by reflecting on the most important events they had been involved in over the years. A timeline was drawn to assist them in this. This timeline was filled out on paper together with respondents over the course of the interview.

The interviews were transcribed by me and a research assistant. Because of the politically sensitive nature of the events in the Oosterweel conflict all respondents were promised anonymity; the interview data was therefore anonymized. After transcribing the interviews, the “Nvivo” software program was used for coding. Coding focused on how respondents made sense of the Oosterweel conflict, with a specific focus on the labels policy-makers assigned to action groups at different stages of the policy process and the reactions of action groups to the labels they felt were assigned to them. Various themes were distinguished inductively in a first round of coding. Examples include: “deceit” (e.g.: respondents from action groups calling the government

dishonest or policy-makers calling members from action groups dishonest); “politics” (e.g.: protesters describing policy-makers as intent on saving face rather than making good policies for political reasons); and “battling” (e.g.: a policy-maker explaining that he and colleagues would talk about “war stories” when reminiscing on Oosterweel). I also coded for the events that respondents emphasized had held great importance for them in the policy process. When analyzing these codes, I found that events in the policy-making process were linked by respondents to the negative personal qualities of the other parties in the conflict. Moreover, these then seemed to have feed-forward effects in explaining subsequent events. For example, the way in which action groups took to the street for protest in 2008 was seen by policy-makers as indicative of the way in which protesters allegedly tried to manipulate public opinion. This was then seen as further confirmed by the subsequent insistence of action groups on a municipal referendum, which in turn motivated policy-makers to exclude action groups from policy deliberation. The codes thus hinted at a dynamic in which the personal qualities of other parties became increasingly important in the course of the conflict for explaining what parties were arguing about and how they were arguing. In subsequent rounds of coding, the initial coding scheme was refined by grouping similar codes (e.g.: different allegations of “deceit” were placed as sub codes under the larger “deceit” mother code) and by removing codes that turned out in retrospect to be inconsequential. Moving between data and theory (Schwartz-Sea & Yanow, 2012; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), I linked the personal qualities that action groups possessed, according to policy-makers, to feed-forward effects in terms of policy responses and, ultimately, to how the resulting policy-making dynamic affected conflict escalation.

## **From public discussion to systemic distrust in the conflict over Oosterweel**

This section discusses the way in which the conflict over the Oosterweelconnection has developed over the years. It does so in a narrative format based on the conducted interviews. As it also reconstructs the policy process, it simultaneously serves as a description of the Oosterweelconnection case. The subsequent section then analyzes the move from substantive to relational conflict through the theoretical lens of SCPD.

### **A public discussion over infrastructure**

In 1995, the Flemish road agency<sup>iii</sup> announced its intention to build a new highway in Antwerp to improve the flow of traffic in this highly congested, but economically vital<sup>iv</sup>, part of Belgium. In the years that followed, the route was placed near the city in the “Oosterweel” area. The highway was named the Oosterweelconnection, often shortened to “Oosterweel.” The highway would consist of a tunnel under the Scheldt River and an overpass over part of the inner city. For a long time, decision-making on the Oosterweelconnection largely took place away from the

public eye. This changed in 2005, however, when the scale model for the Oosterweelconnection was presented to politicians from both the Flemish parliament and the Antwerp city council. Media attention surged and public discussion about the Oosterweelconnection soon took off.

Firstly, politicians from the city of Antwerp raised questions about the spatial impact of the Oosterweelconnection. Actors from the Flemish government and from “BAM,” the governmental organization tasked with managing Oosterweel’s construction, were irate. In their view, there had been ample opportunity for the city to voice concerns in earlier stages of decision-making. To do so now meant delaying a highly urgent infrastructure project. After a second opinion concluded that a tunnel would be more expensive than an overpass, however, the city of Antwerp reaffirmed its political commitment to Oosterweel and the planning procedure continued.

This brought no end to the debate over the Oosterweelconnection. At a press conference later that year, the action group “Straten-Generaal” presented an alternative highway trajectory located further away from the city. They argued that the planned overpass would impose a spatial barrier on the city, constricting city development, and asked that the government consider their alternative. However, policy-makers argued that the time for debating routes was long past. These policy-makers, while sympathetic to the concerns raised by Straten-Generaal, argued that the trajectory they proposed had already been proven to be inferior to Oosterweel in earlier stages of decision-making. They also argued that the overpass would be a beautiful bridge, which would become a landmark for Antwerp rather than a barrier. Straten-Generaal was, however, invited to submit their plans for an alternative trajectory for further review in an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Straten-Generaal agreed to participate in the EIA and awaited its results.

### **How the perceptions of the “other” party changed: disappointment and allegations**

When they read the results in 2007, however, members of Straten-Generaal felt that their proposed route was treated unfairly. Only around 30 pages of several hundred were dedicated to their proposal and these fragments allegedly contained errors. They had to consider how to move forward from there and felt that their options were limited. The EIA, in their view, demonstrated that the chances for being taken seriously were bleak. Either they would have to give up on the Oosterweel debate, or they would have to become activists:

Which we had not been, up until that moment. (...) I think that we turned a page in the summer of 2007 and said: ‘this will become activism, of a form that is of yet unknown, but we will have to fight.’

Straten-Generaal started organizing what they called “roadshows,” which consisted of presentations to neighborhoods and companies about the adverse effects they felt the Oosterweelconnection would have on Antwerp. One of these presentations was given to people who would soon start a new action group. This action group, called “Ademloos” (literally: breathless), was founded in the first half of 2008. Ademloos argued that the Oosterweelconnection would increase the amount of fine particles in the air by bringing more cars into the city center. As a consequence, the respiratory health of the Antwerp population would be adversely affected.

Now not one, but two action groups were resisting the Oosterweelconnection. Ademloos, moreover, actively sought out media attention with its focus on public health. Attention surged, for example, after Ademloos and Straten-Generaal organized a demonstration together with a school, located near the planned overpass, that housed children with respiratory illnesses. The demonstration, in which the children with respiratory illnesses marched against Oosterweel, received significant media coverage. It also led to resentment from policy-makers. The latter felt that the action groups were selfishly taking advantage of sick children by making them march the streets, and stressed during the interviews that they were planning to relocate the school anyway. In the interviews many policy-makers, even those critical of the Oosterweelconnection, explicitly expressed their disapproval of the way in which action groups, particularly Ademloos, began resisting Oosterweel from 2008 onwards. They were charged with manipulating the public debate:

Fine particles, nobody really understands them, what exactly they are. You cannot see them. You inhale them and that creates an instinctive reflex; your lungs. And if something happens to your lungs, that instills fear. [It was used] as a symbol. [protesters looked for what could best be used] for [their] marketing campaign.

Even as members from the Flemish government and the BAM started to resent the way in which action groups operated in the public domain, as media attention flourished the pressure mounted on the Flemish government to respond to the pleas of action groups.

### **Increasing mutual allegations**

In the summer of 2008, the Flemish government announced that it would order a “final” study to compare several trajectories for the new highway. The research was conducted by the independent “Arup/Sum” consortium. Meanwhile, Ademloos announced that it would organize a municipal referendum to gauge the opinion of the Antwerp population on the Oosterweelconnection. In these two ways, then, Oosterweel’s civic opposition gained entrance back into the institutions of policy-making.

The results of the Arup/Sum study were presented in the summer of 2009. The study concluded that none of the trajectories suggested so far were actually adequate in terms of balancing costs and benefits. Arup/Sum then proposed a new route that strongly resembled the option favored by Straten-Generaal. This provoked various reactions. The minister responsible denounced the Arup/Sum proposal, claiming it had never been Arup/Sum's task to propose a new trajectory in the first place. Moreover, based on pre-conditions set years earlier, with regard to tolls among other things, the minister concluded that the research still proved the Oosterweelconnection superior. Action groups were angry about his response, as they felt the Arup/Sum research proved them right. Finally, and to the shock of many, the mayor of Antwerp publicly proclaimed his sympathy for the Arup/Sum trajectory. As he had supported Oosterweel since 2005, and his social-democratic party was a coalition party in the Flemish government, many from the Flemish government and the BAM saw his so called "U-turn" as political betrayal. His motivation, they felt, was surely to gain electorally at the expense of the other parties.

This electoral positioning, it was argued, was highly selfish and harmful to the public interest that Oosterweel served. However, he and other members from the social-democratic party claimed that their reconsideration of what they saw as an inferior highway project not harmed but served the public interest.

The referendum brought no respite to the situation. 59.24% of Antwerp citizens voted against the Oosterweel trajectory, but the referendum was not binding. In legal terms, it only advised the city on how to judge the existing planning permit. Moreover, those in favor of the Oosterweelconnection, most vehemently the minister responsible and actors from BAM, denounced the democratic value of the referendum. Only a fraction (35%) of the Antwerp citizens had voted, they stressed. Besides, the Oosterweelconnection was not just an Antwerp issue but a national issue. The referendum was condemned as an illegitimate instrument used by protesters to block a highly urgent public project. A policy-maker in favor of the Oosterweelconnection looked back as follows on the referendum outcome during the interview:

Was I surprised? No, not one referendum has been won yet. The opposition always makes it, for why would the supporters show up? (...) Well, I am convinced that if the vote had been mandatory, the referendum would have been easily won. Because there is a big silent majority in this city that mostly thinks: "please fix it!" [i.e.: traffic congestion] And not just back in the days of the referendum: this plea is continuous.

The action groups, on the other hand, saw the outcome of the referendum as proof of Oosterweel lacking public support. Various governmental committees were formed to reflect on the situation. Eventually, the government decided to replace the contested overpass with a tunnel.

The Flemish government presented the revision as a political compromise, but the action groups countered that they had not just opposed the overpass but the Oosterweel route as a whole.

Asked during interviews why they did not include the action groups in the forging of the Oosterweel compromise, policy-makers stressed the lack of legitimacy they felt the action groups had. They would only have abused the situation, it was thought, to further their own cause. However, the imposition of the Oosterweel compromise re-confirmed, in the eyes of the action groups, that the government simply wanted to push through their own plans. Added to the already substantial opposition against Oosterweel was an extra layer of frustration for the way in which policy-makers were handling civic opposition. Action groups continued their resistance.

### **Systemic distrust: “egoistic” protesters and governmental “deceit”**

The results of a new EIA, now obligatory because the government had altered its original project, were presented in February of 2014. The study was again interpreted in wildly different ways. The Flemish government felt that the Oosterweelconnection had come out on top, as it scored best in the category of “mobility.” The speed at which the government decided this, however, raised the suspicion of protesters, who felt that this surely reflected bias. One action group member reflects:

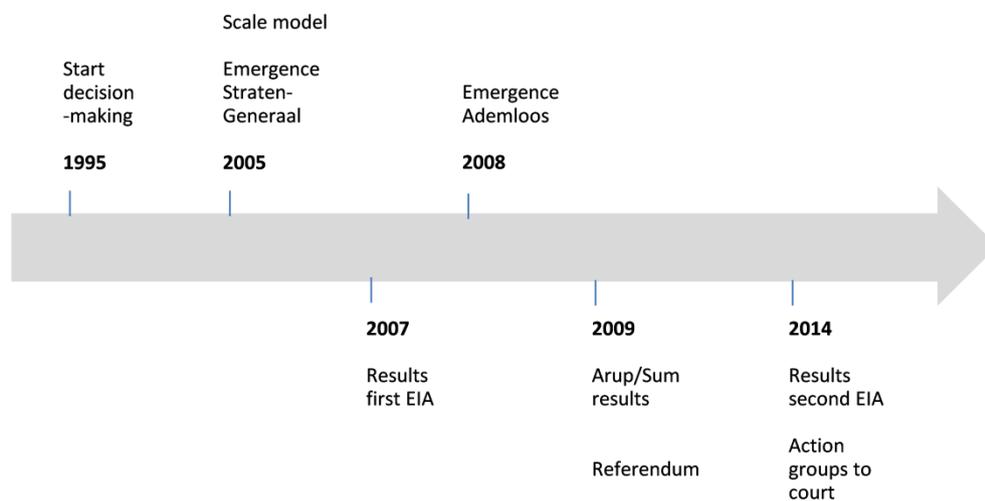
It [the EIA report] was submitted (...) on the 6th of February and on the 10th of February the EIA committee approved it. 4000 pages, just like that, with a weekend in the middle. You cannot even - I will not even say read- you cannot even scan that.

Moreover, they felt cheated in the way the EIA had covered their trajectory. After unsuccessfully appealing to the parliament to take additional time to fix what they claimed were mistakes in the EIA, members of the action groups felt their only recourse was to take the issue to the judicial arena.

Asked how they made sense of the conflict over this new EIA, policy-makers supporting Oosterweel claimed it confirmed that the Oosterweel opposition would always find reasons to object. In their eyes, the continued opposition to Oosterweel was a sign not of public resistance, but rather of egoistic perseverance from individual protesters. The Straten-Generaal and Ademloos action groups were not seen in the interviews as being part of public opinion, but as “playing” and “manipulating” public opinion. Meanwhile, policy-makers remained convinced that there existed a large “silent majority” in favor of the Oosterweelconnection that was hard to mobilize. They felt that the aggression of action groups rendered these voices inaudible. The struggle was, in their view, to find ways to make this silent majority audible.

Meanwhile, the Oosterweel policy-making process demonstrated to members of action groups that, despite the rhetoric of listening to civic concerns, policy-makers were set on pushing through their decisions at all costs. Some respondents would even hint that the government was deceitfully refraining from taking action against the worsening traffic jams, just so the public would tire of the policy stalemate and demand the Oosterweelconnection. They also expressed their unhappiness at having to take the issue to the judicial arena. However, they explained, in light of all that had happened in the policy process so far, they felt that this was the only option left for them to be treated fairly.<sup>v</sup> The image below sums up the timeline of the Oosterweel conflict as discussed in this section.

**Figure 4.1: Summary of most important events in Oosterweelconnection conflict.**



### **Conflict escalation: separating “vocal minority” from “silent majority”**

This section analyzes the transition from substantive, productive, conflict to relational, destructive, conflict through the theoretical lens of SCPD. It first discusses how the feed-forward effects of policy design for the Oosterweelconnection have perpetuated conflict. It then argues that many design-choices that increased antagonism were motivated by policy-makers’ labelling of protesters as a powerful but undeserving “vocal minority,” a move which fueled increasingly relational conflict. The final section argues that this has resulted not only in escalation of policy conflict, but also in a general disillusionment with the policy-making system.

### **The feed-forward of design: from participation to mutual suspicion**

The first paragraph of the theoretical section described how a policy design, defined as “the content of public policy as found in the text of policies, the practices through which policies are conveyed, and the subsequent consequences associated with those practices,” has feed-forward

effects in terms of encouraging or discouraging democratic participation. In the case of the policy design for the Oosterweelconnection, we can now conclude that citizens were initially triggered to participate within the conventional procedures for policy-making, through participating in the EIA, but that their participation changed over the course of time. From 2008 they began using means outside of the policy-making procedure to resist Oosterweel. As a result, interactions between citizens and policy-makers became increasingly hostile. Let us take a closer look at the feed-forward effects of Oosterweel's policy design.

At the start of the conflict, the policy design for Oosterweel had been underway in politico-administrative circles for many years. This created a situation in which much time had already been invested in designing and optimizing Oosterweel. Hence when citizens, organized in Straten-Generaal, objected to the Oosterweel plans, they were told that they were too late. Citizens felt that this was unfair. While it makes sense that they should feel so, one can also understand that policy-makers, some of whom had been involved in policy-design for what they considered a vital project from the late 1990s on, were not eager to simply halt the decision-making procedure because one action group raised objections in 2005. As action groups perceived it at the time, the only option left for contributing to policy design was for them to participate in the EIA. When they also felt mistreated by the EIA procedure, however, not only did they become increasingly frustrated by the dismissal they felt was directed at them, but they also felt that they now had to become activists and take to the streets to resist Oosterweel.

These actions by protesters, however, in turn triggered policy-makers to regard them with suspicion rather than include them in further decision-making. Policy-makers felt that action groups were acting unfairly by taking advantage of sick children and the fine particles argument, as well as by organizing a local referendum on a national issue. That the social democrats, who were regarded as part of the coalition, part of "us," switched positions just as action groups were pushing for the referendum, seems to have exacerbated the hostility from policy-makers. The very actions of protesters, then, triggered suspicion on the part policy-makers, which in turn contributed to action groups being excluded from vital decisions such as the construction of the compromise after the referendum. As a consequence, interactions between action groups and policy-makers in the policy process grew increasingly antagonistic over time.

### **Labelling and relational conflict: "vocal minority" versus "silent majority"**

The theoretical section noted that a crucial mechanism in the feed-forward effect of policy design is the labelling of target populations as powerful or powerless and as deserving or undeserving. This labeling communicates messages to target groups about whether they are entitled to have their voices heard. Having seen that the design of Oosterweel had feed-forwards effects in terms

of participation and increased suspicion, one may wonder how these feed-forward effects relate to labelling.

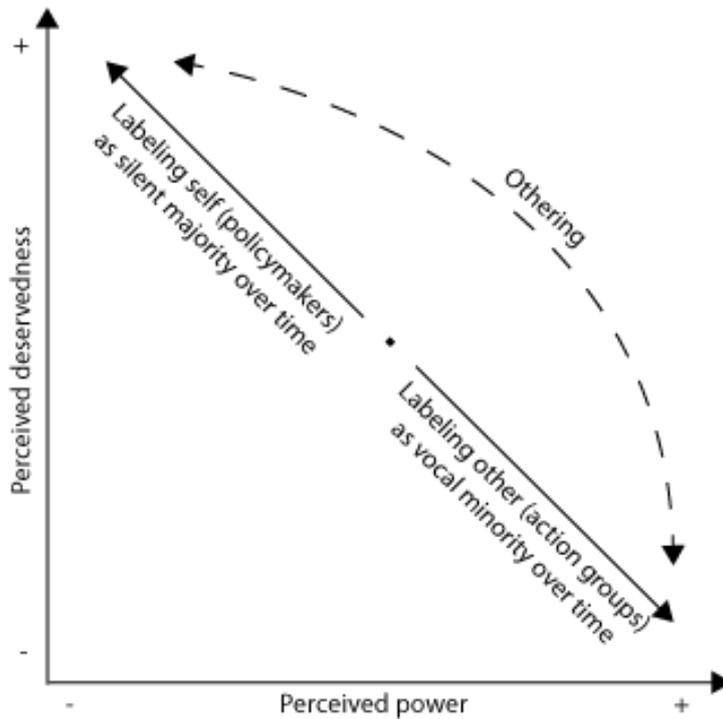
The analysis indicates that, in the case of the Oosterweel conflict, many of the design choices of policy-makers resulted from them increasingly labelling action groups as underserving and powerful. The more powerful action groups were perceived to have become, the more this resisting part of the target population was separated from the rest of the population by labelling them as undeserving. While the words “treating” and “separating” may seem to hint at malicious intent, the interviews do not indicate overt attempts by policy-makers to silence citizens. Instead, the interviews point to a tragic cycle of action and reaction. Policy-makers reacted towards what they saw as unfair obstruction, in turn triggering more protest. The analysis thus highlights how labelling is not necessarily calculated, but may also be born from policy-makers improvising as they try to interpret an unusual policy-making process.

In fact, action groups were not immediately labeled as standing in opposition to the public interest. When Straten-Generaal emphasized the burdens that Oosterweel would place on the city of Antwerp in 2005, this was initially countered by the argument that years of research had already proven Oosterweel superior, while simultaneously sympathizing with the civic concerns raised. Policy-makers at the time did not yet separate between a more and a less deserving part of the general population that Oosterweel would affect. However, as action groups moved outside of the conventional procedures of policy design, by insisting on additional research and organizing a local referendum, the perceptions of policy-makers changed. As policy-makers felt threatened by perceived unfair resistance, action groups were increasingly seen as a hostile “other” and a segment of the population with the primary goal of serving its own interests at the expense of those of the general public.

It was at this time that policy-makers started to ascribe negative personal qualities to the action groups. This is thus also the moment in which a conflict that had been perceived by policy-makers as mostly substantive, as a discussion about different types of highways, became relational. As policy-makers became more convinced of unfair obstruction by action groups, they also increasingly identified themselves as the victims. As a result, their own Oosterweel policy was increasingly seen as just the opposite of its opponents, and hence as representing the greater public interest of the “silent majority.” As described in the theoretical section, this process of separating “us” from “them” and seeing the other in increasingly oppositional terms is also known as “othering.” That they were labelled and dismissed by policy-makers, however, only reinforced the hostility that action groups felt towards policy-makers, which in turn confirmed the adverse interpretation that policy-makers had of action groups. Figure 2 below illustrates the move over time by policy-makers in labelling their own policies as increasingly deserving and

representative of the “silent majority,” but also increasingly powerless and thwarted by a powerful and undeserving “vocal minority.”

**Figure 4.2: Othering by policy-makers through increased labeling of self as serving “silent majority” and increased labeling of action groups as serving “vocal minority.”**



The image shows how the processes of othering and labelling worked in the case of the Oosterweelconnection. At the outset of the conflict, Oosterweel’s benefits in fighting congestion were seen as fairly self-evident and the target population for Oosterweel was not separated into more or less deserving parts. However, over time, the labelling of the Oosterweel policy (increasingly deserving but powerless) and the labelling of action groups (increasingly undeserving but powerful) by policy-makers moved in opposite directions. The conflict became relational as a result. The initial design of Oosterweel thus led to the democratic participation of a contesting target group, while the becoming of this contesting target group contributed to policymakers regarding them as a hostile “other.” Their labelling as a “vocal minority” and their subsequent exclusion from actual policy-making only increased the resentment that the action groups felt, which helped extend rather than resolve the conflict.

### **Conflict escalation and the policy-making system**

Ultimately, the consequence of this policy design dynamic has been the escalation of policy conflict. The energy focused on dismissing the “other,” that is, has resulted in the conflict

escalating from a substantive, productive, conflict to a relational, destructive, conflict. Through the feed-forward effect of increasingly antagonistic interactions, parties have become frustrated not just with the policy proposals from the other side, but also with their very qualities. Policy-makers have become frustrated with what they perceive as selfish protesters manipulating the public debate, while protesters have become frustrated with what they perceive as the deceitful actions of unfair policy-makers. This in turn makes it more likely that policy-makers will continue excluding action groups, whom they see as an undeserving minority, and that action groups will use all available institutional opportunities to resist Oosterweel. As a result, the policy contenders interact less with each other and more against each other, fueling the conflict and adding to further protraction.

One of the central tenets of SCPD theory is that it encourages scholars to draw connections between the way in which policies are made and the state of our democratic system as it concerns participation by its constituents. Following this, the article concludes that the policy design dynamic in the case of the Oosterweelconnection has not only been detrimental in that the conflict has escalated and has become increasingly difficult to resolve as a result. It has also been detrimental for the faith of Oosterweel's stakeholders in the institutions of policy-making. Action groups have interpreted the conflict as the product of policy procedures that are unfair and only serve decision-makers, policy-makers have made sense of the conflict as coming from abuse and capture of policy procedures by self-serving protesters. A policy-making system from which action groups shy away because they feel that it is rigged, and a system that policy-makers try to restrict because they feel that openness only invites manipulation, is not a system that encourages the democratic participation of all members of the society.

## **Conclusion and discussion**

This article set out to study conflict escalation through the theoretical lens of SCPD. The empirical analysis consisted of an in-depth study of 32 narrative interviews with the most important stakeholders in the policy conflict regarding the multibillion-euro "Oosterweelconnection" highway in Antwerp. While initially sympathetic towards the concerns that action groups expressed over the Oosterweelconnection, policy-makers became increasingly hostile towards them when they used instruments outside of the regular policy-making procedure in an effort to be heard. They were labeled as a powerful but undeserving "vocal minority" and subsequently excluded from decision-making. Meanwhile, seeing themselves as the opposite of action groups and as victimized by them, policy-makers presented their Oosterweel policy as increasingly powerless but deserving. Policy-makers, unlike the "others" (i.e.: protesters), were supposedly serving the interests of the "silent majority". Labelling action groups as powerful but undeserving, however, only fueled further conflict that became increasingly relational and

destructive. Hence, the conflict escalated. Moreover, as the parties have become increasingly frustrated with each other, they have also become disillusioned with the policy-making system.

This article contributes to the scholarship on policy conflicts. It systematically unravels the transition from constructive conflict (M. Hajer, 2003; Laws et al., 2014; I. Verhoeven, 2009; Verloo, 2015) to destructive conflict (Schön & Rein, 1994; Termeer et al., 2010; M.J.G. van Eeten, 1999a). It explains how institutions and stakeholders interact with each other in policy-making systems to bring forth the escalating move from substantive to relational conflict (Glasl, 1982) as a result of increased othering and labelling. The analysis has demonstrated that the institutional exclusion of action groups resulted from policy-makers defining them in increasingly hostile ways. Meanwhile, these action groups also acted as they did because of how they interpreted their role in the policy-making system. Utilizing the SCPD framework, the article thus provides an explanation of how institutions and the divergent meanings they engender have feed-forward effects and can perpetuate a tragic cycle of escalation.

To the SCPD literature this article adds, firstly, insights on the actions of policy-makers when it comes to policy-design and the feed-forward effects of these actions. It is usually assumed that policy-makers make design choices based on how best to maximize electoral support, which leads them to advantage perceived powerful and deserving segments of the population (Schneider & Ingram, 1997, pp. 103–149; Schneider & Sidney, 2009, pp. 106–108). This article demonstrates that policy design is also based on how policy-makers relate and feel towards the population for which they make policies. This is an overlooked aspect of SCPD and may provide additional insights in terms of why already advantaged groups, to which it may be easy to relate as a policy-maker, are privileged over disadvantaged group, which may represent more of a foreign “other” to policy-makers. Secondly, the article shows that the dimensions of power and relatedness can interact with regard to how target populations are labeled, in that when certain groups gain power, they are also perceived as less deserving. This insight fits with existing SCPD scholarship (DiAlto, 2005; Donovan, 1997) indicating that in the process of gaining more power, target groups run the risk of being constructed as less deserving.

The article leaves at least three unexplored issues that may provide fruitful directions for future research. The first question relates to the types of actors that become empowered, through policy design, to resist policies. The analysis of the policy conflict over Oosterweel demonstrates that action groups were encouraged to continue their resistance, even as they were increasingly labeled as undeserving and excluded from decision-making. This raises the question of which types of actors are encouraged and which are discouraged from resisting policies when they feel treated in hostile ways. Are, as may be expected, the actors who resist also the type of actors who receive the message that they are powerful and deserving in other policy domains? Secondly, and

relatedly, the analysis has investigated the escalation of conflict and has thus focused on the perceptions and actions of those directly involved in the conflict. Hence it has omitted other voices in the target population for Oosterweel. It would be interesting for future research that investigates conflict from an SCPD point of view to also render audible the voices of the target population that have not positioned themselves actively in the public discussion. Are there certain types of voices that are marginalized in a policy conflict? And, if so, how does this relate to power and deservedness? Finally, future research may further explore the way in which policy-makers interpret policies and their own choices in policy design. This article has demonstrated the importance of the extent to which policy-makers can identify with their target population. One important question that this raises is how the type of institutional environment policy-makers are embedded in reflects on feelings of “otherness” between themselves and the population. It may, for example, be that in environments that are more consensus-seeking, policy-makers undertake different kinds of design than in environments that are more conflict-seeking (see also: Mondou & Montpetit, 2010).

Finally, the analysis demonstrates to policy-makers how labelling and dismissing action groups to protect the perceived public interest can, on the contrary, harm the public interest. Labelling and dismissing action groups has fueled conflict rather than bringing it to an end. Hence failing to generate any solution at all for the public problem of traffic congestion and harming the faith of stakeholders in the policy-making system in its wake.

---

<sup>i</sup> The employees of the governmental organization responsible for Oosterweel’s execution are also grouped under the “civil servant” category. So too are the actors that work as special political advisors to the Flemish government. The broadness of this category also explains the relatively big number of respondents.

<sup>ii</sup> One urban planning academic and one actor from an organization hired by the government to organize the public communication on Oosterweelconnection.

<sup>iii</sup> In Belgium, spatial planning is not governed on a federal level, but on a regional level by the separate regional governments of Flanders, Walloon and Brussels.

<sup>iv</sup> The harbor of Antwerp represents 149 714 direct and indirect jobs (2016: *Feiten en cijfers*, 2016)

<sup>v</sup> At present, the planning process for Oosterweel continues and the court process is ongoing.



# 5. Conflict reconsidered: The boomerang effect of depoliticization in the policy process

*E.E.A. Wolf & Wouter Van Dooren*

*Accepted for publication in Public Administration*

## **Abstract**

This paper argues that the efforts of policy-makers to avoid conflict in the short run can be counterproductive in the long run. Not only may policy-makers fail to reap the benefits of conflicts when they try to steer clear, but conflict may actually increase rather than diminish. We study conflict through the conceptual lens of (de)politicization in the lengthy and highly contested policy-making process over the multibillion-euro “Oosterweelconnection” highway in Antwerp (Belgium). An in-depth media analysis of 739 articles is combined with data from 32 narrative interviews. We conclude that efforts to end public debate through depoliticization can have a boomerang effect, in which conflict disappears only temporarily, and that these efforts can ultimately increase conflict while wasting engagement and creativity. More attention to the productive aspects of conflict is needed in public administration literature and practice.

## **Introduction**

When confronted with public resistance towards policies, policy-makers may be tempted to disengage from the discussion wherever possible, hoping that the conflict will eventually disappear. However, conflict also has a productive side. It is a potential source for human betterment (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2017, p. 1) and can foster engagement (Hajer, 2003; Laws, Hogendoorn, & Karl, 2014; Mouffe, 2009; Rosanvallon, 2008; Verloo, 2015) and stimulate creativity (Carnevale, 2006; Coppens, 2014; Coser, 1956; Cuppen, 2011). These values seem highly relevant for good policy-making. Might avoiding or negating conflict be equal to wasting a good opportunity?

This article uses the theoretical perspective of “(de)politicization” (Beveridge & Naumann, 2014; Gamble, 2000; Hay, 2007; Jenkins, 2011; Wood & Flinders, 2014) to analyse how policy-makers deal with public conflict over policy plans and the concomitant effects on the policy-making process. The question of how policy-makers deal with conflict is explored through an in-depth analysis of the policy process surrounding the contested multibillion-euro “Oosterweelconnection” highway in Antwerp (Belgium). We add to the academic literature in three ways. Firstly, this article addresses what may be called a conflict gap in public administration (PA). Explicit attention to the topic of conflict is sparse, and when conflict is mentioned it is, with some notable exceptions (Laws et al., 2014; Verloo, 2015), usually seen as something problematic to avoid or overcome, thus neglecting its productive capacities. Secondly, we know very little about the reasons why policy-makers choose to engage in or disengage from conflict. This article answers a call for more research into why policy-makers deal with political conflict the way that they do (Hay, 2014; Hay & Stoker, 2009; Kuzemko, 2016). Finally, it answers the call for more empirical research on the topic of depoliticization and on the dynamic interplay of depoliticization and politicization (Beveridge & Naumann, 2014; Hay, 2014; Wood & Flinders, 2014).

## **Steering clear of conflict in policy-making?**

### **Conflict in public administration literature**

Conflict can be defined as: “the process that arises when two or more persons or groups manifest the belief that they have incompatible objectives” (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2017, p. 2). Scholars of PA often fail to acknowledge importance of conflict in policy-making process (Lan, 1997). Moreover, when PA scholars do write about conflict over policies, it is usually framed as a bad thing. This negative view is found in the Weberian approach to PA, which prescribes conflict as only appropriate during a limited amount of time, namely during the political discussions leading up to a policy-decision. After politicians agree on a policy, the idea is that the policy moves on to

the implementation phase, where public administrators technically execute the political decisions taken (Weber, 1946). Although it has long been demonstrated that the confinement of political conflict to one phase of policy-making is normatively untenable and empirically incorrect (Lipsky, 1980; Lodge & Wegrich, 2012; Stone, 2002; Svava, 1985), the continuing influence of the Weberian model means conflict is still seen as something that should be contained. Once politicians have set a policy, political conflict should ideally be over and done with.

Take, for example, the new public management (NPM) school of thought. While ill-defined (Hood, 1991; Rhodes, 1996), work in the NPM tradition usually aims to incorporate private sector management techniques into public policy-making to improve public sector performance. Political conflict should only come into play when politicians determine political goals (“steering”), but should not play a role in the execution or implementation of policies (“rowing”). Given its focus on the efficient execution of policy, it should not come as a surprise that the NPM literature sees conflict over policies as a hindrance. Conflict, after all, is often highly inefficient. Existing research highlights the tendency of NPM strategies to deny or repress political conflict in policy implementation (Burnham, 2001; Diefenbach, 2009, p. 895; Gray & Jenkins, 1995, pp. 91–92; Watson & Hay, 2003).

The value of policy conflict is also underappreciated by approaches that oppose NPM’s focus on efficiency, e.g. public value governance (PVG). PVG aims to maximize the creation of public value when responding to complex public sector challenges (Benington & Moore, 2011). However, similar to NPM, PVG theoretically underplays the political process that is inherent to all phases of policy-making (Dahl & Soss, 2014; Hartley, Alford, Hughes, & Yates, 2015). Hence, it mostly focuses on finding shared goals and steering clear of conflict. As does the “evidence-based” stream in the PA literature (Boswell, 2014) with its focus on letting evidence settle political questions. Other contemporary PA approaches, such as “joined-up government,” “collaborative governance,” and “networked governance”, also do not fully appreciate conflict. While they give tacit attention to conflict, they still prescribe managerial consensus-building tactics to move beyond conflict at the expense of fostering the productive capacities of political difference (Behagel & Arts, 2014; Davies, 2009; Eriksson, 2012; O’Toole & Meier, 2004; Swyngedouw, 2005). This also holds for the traditional and more recent participative planning literature (see also: McClymont, 2011; Mouffe, 2000).

While others recognize that many PA approaches negate political conflict (see also: Dahl & Soss, 2014; Davies, 2007; Swyngedouw, 2014), they tend to focus on how this impacts democratic inclusivity. With some exceptions, the most notable ones from scholars working on the crossroads of conflict resolution, urban planning and public administration (Hajer, 2003; Laws et al., 2014; Verloo, 2015), the literature does not explore the impact of conflict on the policy-

making process itself. Nor does it ask whether steering clear of conflict is even practically feasible and/or desirable. These questions are relevant, however, as there are reasons to believe that the negative view of policy conflict is unwarranted.

Conflicts have productive capacities. As noted in the field of conflict studies, conflicts are not only part and parcel of human lives but also a source of human betterment (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2017). Indeed, if political apathy is something that worries us, then policy conflicts serve as reminders that people still care about what happens in the public domain. Conflict thus signals civic engagement (Hajer, 2003; Laws et al., 2014; Mouffe, 2009; Rosanvallon, 2008; Verloo, 2015). In addition, conflict can stimulate creativity. The confrontation of different ideas can not only prevent tunnel vision, but also stimulate innovation (Carnevale, 2006; Coppens, 2014; Coser, 1956; Cuppen, 2011). This is not to say that policy conflicts cannot become destructive. They can lead to zero-sum games that leave the parties involved questioning and even distrusting the policy-making system (Schön & Rein, 1994; Termeer, Breeman, van Lieshout, & Pot, 2010) and the “other” party (Glasl, 1982; Kriesberg & Dayton, 2017, pp. 152–154). However, good things may be lost in the policy-making process when too much effort is expended on avoiding conflict.

### **Engaging or disengaging with conflict through (de)politicization**

The previous section has argued that the lack of attention in PA to the positive effects of conflict is problematic because avoiding conflict might mean a lost opportunity to reap its productive benefits. The potential threats that steering clear of contestation poses for the policy process is also the subject of the literature on “depoliticization.” This article follows Hay (2007) in defining depoliticization as the moving of issues from the political arenas of deliberation and contingency, where action is possible, to the non-political arenas of fate and necessity, where nothing can be done (Beveridge & Naumann, 2014; Gamble, 2000; Hay, 2007; Jenkins, 2011; Wood & Flinders, 2014). When policy-makers depoliticize public issues, they present them as unamendable. When subjects that ought to be open to deliberation are presented as beyond the reach of policy-makers, the democratic quality of policy-making may be threatened.

Depoliticization can operate in various ways (see also: Flinders & Buller, 2006; Wood & Flinders, 2014). Policy-makers can put decision-making power “at one remove” (Burnham, 2014, p. 189), so that the power to decide on public issues lies no longer with them, but, for example, with institutions such as public private partnerships (Willems & Van Dooren, 2014). Flinders & Buller call this “institutional depoliticization.” They may also institute rules that “tie their hands” (Flinders & Buller, 2006, p. 304) to remove contingency, a form of depoliticization also known as “rule-based” depoliticization. Both pose problems in terms of the amenability of policies by democratic institutions. If, for example, interest rates are not set through political

decisions, but through an independent central bank (institutional depoliticization) or through a fixed algorithm built into decision-making (rule-based depoliticization), the possibilities for resisting decisions on interest-rates become heavily constrained (Burnham, 2011).

Finally, depoliticization can be accomplished discursively, when policy-makers state that there is no space for deliberation on specific topics. This type of depoliticization, realized through argumentation, is termed “preference shaping depoliticization” by Flinders & Buller (2006), but has recently been re-termed “discursive (de)politicization” by Wood & Flinders (2014). Discursive depoliticization can, for example, be accomplished through the TINA (There Is No Alternative) argument, made famous by Margaret Thatcher in relation to globalized capitalism. Discursive depoliticization, too, can pose problems for democratic amenability. If, for example, policy-makers convincingly claim that globalization is an external force that cannot be contended with (Diefenbach, 2007, p. 129), policy-proposals seen to be at odds with globalization are delegitimized.

We have earlier defined conflict as the manifest beliefs of incompatible objectives. This definition, that focuses on the manifestation of views, requires attention to argumentation and deliberation. The theoretical lens of discursive depoliticization is useful for studying how policy-makers deal with conflict, because it foregrounds how policy-makers allow, avoid or deny the possibility of political deliberation on (incompatible) policy-objectives. We are not only interested in how policy-makers deal with conflict, but also in the concomitant effects on the policy process. For this second purpose, too, the theoretical lens of discursive depoliticization is useful, as the depoliticization literature pays explicit attention to the problems taking away contingency may pose for the policy process.

In addition to becoming discursively depoliticized, issues can also become discursively politicized. This happens when what was previously argued to be unamendable becomes subjected to democratic deliberation. Nor is discursive (de)politicization the prerogative of policy-makers. Citizens, too, can (de)politicize issues by pressing or denying the possibility for further deliberation on set policy-objectives. Compared to citizens, however, policy-makers obviously have a privileged institutional position to set public problems and their solutions. Because of this privilege, they can define public problems and promote particular solutions as the only ones that make sense. As Flyvbjerg’s (1998) analysis of urban planning in Aalborg demonstrates, those with the power to define what counts as rational thinking can preclude further deliberation, which automatically becomes a waste of time if only one solution is promoted as sensible (see also: Stone, 2002). How politicization, depoliticization, and repoliticization interact, and how citizens can take part in this process, still remains an under

examined topic in the (de)politicization literature (Beveridge & Naumann, 2014; Hay, 2014, p. 308).

Through the conceptual lens of discursive (de)politicization, this article empirically addresses the question of whether policy-makers engage or disengage with conflict by allowing or closing off deliberation. This article adds to the depoliticization literature in three ways. Firstly, it studies the interaction of depoliticization and politicization in a field dominated by studies focusing on depoliticization only (Beveridge & Naumann, 2014; Hay, 2014, p. 308). Second, it explicitly explores how and why policy-makers deal with contentious debate, thereby moving beyond the assumption that they intentionally depoliticize for self-interested reasons (see also: Hay, 2014; Hay & Stoker, 2009) and thus adding to the recent work of authors that highlight the non-intentionality of depoliticization (Kuzemko, 2016). Third, it answers the call for more empirical work on how depoliticization works (Hay, 2014; Wood & Flinders, 2014).

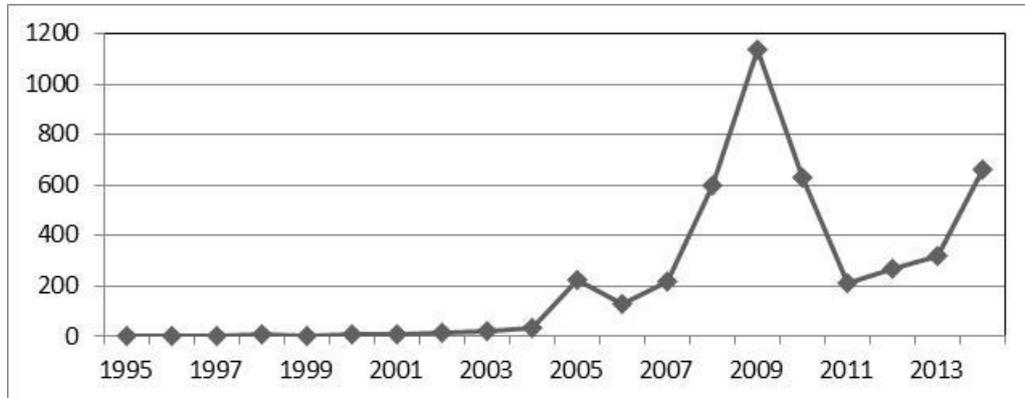
## Methods

This article presents a study of conflict in the policy-making process through an examination of the Oosterweelconnection-case. The Oosterweelconnection, often shortened to just “Oosterweel”, is a planned highway currently estimated to cost 3.5 billion euros. The history of the Oosterweel-project dates back to 1995 (Verelst, 2009). From 2005 onwards, the project became the subject of heated public debate and it remains in the planning phase as of this writing. As Oosterweel’s policy process spans more than two decades of policy-making and one decade of public debate it is a good case for analysing the dynamics of politicization and depoliticization over time. From the case, we can learn more about how policy-makers deal with policy conflict and how their approaches to conflict affect the process of policy-making (Stake, 1994; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012).

The case-study combines an in-depth media analysis with data from 32 narrative interviews. For the media analysis we studied articles pertaining to the Oosterweelconnection in 2005, 2009 and 2014, the years that represent the peaks in media attention and thus offer a rich public discourse on the topic. These peaks in attention indicate times of politicization and depoliticization, because a lack of media attention indicates a lack of public deliberation and a glut of media attention suggests the opposite. Peaks were identified by searching for articles containing the word “Oosterweelconnection” (Dutch: “Oosterweelverbinding”) in the period from 1995-2014. We included the following newspapers: *De Standaard*, *De Morgen*, *Gazet van Antwerpen*, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, *De Tijd*, *Het Nieuwsblad*, *Metro*, and *Het Belang van Limburg*. These represent all Flemish subscription newspapers and one widely read free newspaper (*Metro*). We chose the Flemish edition for each newspaper. If only local editions existed, we chose the Antwerp edition, as

Antwerp is where the Oosterweelconnection is planned for construction. Figure 1 shows the number of articles found for the various years.

**Fig. 1: Articles on the Oosterweelconnection**



For each year, we first scanned through the titles, then selected several months in each year to analyse in greater depth. These months were tied to key moments and were also the months that scored highest in terms of media attention. A total of 739 articles were analysed in-depth. Table 1 presents the number of articles for each year, the months analysed, and the key moments. The latter will be discussed in more detail in the empirical sections.

**Table 1: Years and months analysed**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of articles</i>	<i>Month</i>	<i>Key moment</i>
2005	80	March	Presentation of Oosterweel scale-model
		April	Discussion over merits of replacing bridge with tunnel
		October	Emergence of action group Straten-Generaal
2009	470	March	Results of independent study published
		October	Municipal referendum on Oosterweel in Antwerp
2014	189	February	Results of EIA; emergence of action group Ringland
		May	Elections for Flemish government

The articles were coded in the Nvivo software program between January and November 2015 to analyse the arguments in the public discussion. With iterations between data and theory, our coding process followed what is called the abductive approach (Schwartz-Sea & Yanow, 2012; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). To identify arguments, we focused both on symbolic language (metaphors, proverbs and comparisons of Oosterweel to other projects) and on the presentation of evidence (numbers, references to specific research, claims made by experts and legal references). We then inductively divided these arguments into a large number of themes related to both policy content (i.e.: “health”; “environment” and “spatial impact”) and the process of policy-making (i.e.: “standing still”, “moving forward” or “fraud”). In subsequent rounds of coding smaller codes were regrouped under larger labels, recoded or removed when deemed inconsequential. The resulting coding process clearly distinguished between arguments in favour of moving forward with the planning process for Oosterweel, and thus closing off the public discussion (depoliticization), and arguments in favour of taking more time to deliberate, and thus opening up the discussion (politicization).

In addition to the media analysis, 32 interviews were conducted with key stakeholders in the Oosterweel policy-making process between August 2015 and February 2016. The respondents included 7 key political figures from the Flemish administration and the city of Antwerp, 16 civil servants, 7 members of action groups, one urban planning academic and one representative of an organization hired to organize the public communication on the Oosterweelconnection. Respondents were selected based on their involvement in the policy process and in consultation with knowledgeable academics. The list of respondents was subsequently updated over the course of the interviews through the snowball method. The average length of the interviews was 1h 44m, with the longest lasting 3h 10m and the shortest lasting 50m. The interviews followed a narrative format. Respondents were asked to tell their story of the Oosterweel policy process, which allowed for a focus on their involvement and on how they had experienced different parts of it. To aid the reconstruction of stories, a timeline was drawn on a piece of paper, which was filled out over the course of the interview together with the respondent. By asking about events rather than asking directly about opinions, attitudes or causes, we tried to avoid justifications and rationalizations as much as possible (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Nevertheless, when we speak of “motivations” or of “why” actors acted the way they did, we are always referring to actors stated reasons.

Because of the politically sensitive nature of the events in the Oosterweel conflict, all respondents were promised anonymity. The interview data was therefore anonymized. After transcribing the interviews, Nvivo was used for coding, again following an abductive logic. In the first round, the interviews were coded inductively with a focus on how respondents made sense of the conflict.

This resulted in a large number of thematic codes, such as “fixed policy” (when respondents stated that their hands had been tied), “party politics” (when respondents stressed electoral motives) and “steering” (when respondents expressed personal views on good and bad policy-making). We also coded the events that respondents emphasized were of critical importance (“critical events”) in the development of the conflict. Subsequent rounds of coding grouped similar codes together and removed codes that turned out to be inconsequential. Based on the thematic codes and the codes for “critical events”, we identified a split between explanations employed by actors to justify their efforts to disengage from public debate, so that the Oosterweel policy process would move forward (depoliticization), and efforts to open up debate, so that the Oosterweel project would be reconsidered (politicization). The media analysis was combined with the analysis of interview data which allowed us to investigate both the public discussion on Oosterweel and the events not covered in the media and link the public debate to the lived experience of the actors in the process.

## **Opening up and closing off the Oosterweel debate**

This section presents our results by discussing how policy-making regarding the Oosterweelconnection has been closed off (depoliticization) and opened up (politicization) over the years. Figure 2 at the end of the section provides a summary. The next section analyses these processes of (de)politicization and discusses its consequences for the policy process.

### **1995-2003: Making and implementing plans**

Public works in Belgium are governed by the regional governments of Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels. The Flemish government has jurisdiction for the Antwerp region; a region which has long been struggling with severe traffic congestion. To address this issue, actors from the Flemish government, the province of Antwerp and the city of Antwerp started sketching out plans beginning in 1995 for a new highway that would close the beltway around the city. The Flemish government feared local resistance, so it was deemed important by local actors to demonstrate that they spoke in unison. Various private meetings between important political and economic actors in Antwerp were organized between 1995 and 2000. In 2000, the governor of the Antwerp province organized a one-day public meeting for which a wider circle of stakeholders were invited, which also included representatives from civil society organizations. During this meeting, the highway plans were disclosed to gauge public support, which was deemed sufficient. The Flemish government agreed to fund the highway. This decision was part of a larger political deal between the ruling parties (liberal, social-democrat, and green), which also included investments in public transportation and bicycle infrastructure in Antwerp.

After this commitment, decisions still had to be made on the implementation of the trajectory and the construction. To that end, the Flemish government decided to establish a special purpose

vehicle (SPV) named “BAM” in 2003. Meanwhile, several engineering studies were carried out to prepare for construction. By now, the highway had been named the Oosterweelconnection since it would be situated in the “Oosterweel” area of Antwerp. In interviews, those involved in the early decision-making described their satisfaction during this period with finally reaching conclusions about this vital piece of infrastructure.

Respondents from the city of Antwerp, however, experienced this period differently. According to them, the Oosterweelconnection only seriously came to their attention after the Flemish government had already committed itself to its construction. Before that time, plans had simply been too vague to invite serious debate. They remember being shocked by some of the engineering studies, which seemed to be more focused on the technicalities of connecting the two highways than on the integration in and effect on the city. Some city officials also remember being sceptical about the highway’s location so close to the city centre. However, these doubts were deflected by their city council (for administrative actors) or their political party (for political actors), who emphasized that political commitments had already been made. This first explicit effort to keep Oosterweel depoliticized resulted in an initial lack of overt resistance against Oosterweel. While there were manifested beliefs about the incompatibility of policy-objectives (building Oosterweel and integrating this highway into the city of Antwerp), conflict remained internally suppressed.

### **2003-2008: Debate opened and repressed**

Debate on Oosterweel flared up between 2003 and 2008. The lingering doubts from within the city-government were reinforced when new spatial development plans suggested that the Oosterweelconnection could curb urban development. Actors from the city council now asked BAM and the Flemish government to reconsider the trajectory. Respondents, both those connected to the city-government and to the Flemish administration and BAM, remember this period clearly. Respondents from the city of Antwerp recall being told, again, that the Oosterweel trajectory had already been decided on. As they felt that there was no leeway in terms of location, they ordered a second opinion on the possibility of replacing the overpass with a tunnel, and, doing so, attracted media attention. Actors from the Flemish administration and BAM felt it highly inappropriate for the city to raise these objections so late in the policy-making process. They publicly labelled the second opinion as a loss of valuable time because the “traffic infarct” (“Stad speelt met vuur,” 2005) suffered by Antwerp and Belgium needed to be fixed as soon as possible.

Civil society actors also started to question the Oosterweel project. To this point policy-making had largely been conducted inside political and administrative circles. In March 2005, however, when the scale model of the Oosterweelconnection was presented, media attention surged. While

many newspapers praised the design of the overpass, some civic actors were highly critical. Similar to the city-government, these actors argued that Oosterweel could harm urban development. This civic critique culminated in October of 2005, when the action group “Straten-Generaal” presented a proposal to locate the highway further away from the city centre. Their plea to reopen the discussion, however, was deflected by the argument that all possible trajectories had already been researched.

After the second opinion concluded that the tunnel would be the more expensive option, the city of Antwerp reconfirmed its commitment to the Oosterweelconnection. Although municipal politicians and civil servants still had reservations, they felt that there was simply no way the Flemish government would change the Oosterweel trajectory. Interviewees also noted that the political coalition of the Antwerp city council was similar to the Flemish government: therefore, party discipline further silenced voices of protest from the Antwerp government.

Meanwhile, the action group Straten-Generaal submitted their trajectory proposal for further research in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) on Oosterweel. The public debate on Oosterweel dwindled after 2005, which is evident in the decrease of media coverage. The results of the EIA were presented in 2007 and reconfirmed the Oosterweel trajectory as the best option. Straten-Generaal’s member, however, felt they had been cheated in terms of both the quality and the quantity of research on their trajectory. It seemed to them that they were not being taken seriously at all.

This episode hence started with a period of politicization, with the request for a second opinion, the presentation of the scale model and the concomitant complaints from the Antwerp city-government and Antwerp citizens. Next is a period of depoliticization with the project moving on to the EIA phase of decision-making. Conflict, then, initially manifested itself openly, but was repressed when policy-makers refused to further discuss Oosterweel, and died down as a significant topic of public debate after the planning procedure continued.

### **2008 -2014: Making a U-turn and getting back in line**

A new action group called “Ademloos” (literally: “breathless”) emerged in 2008. The founders of Ademloos had already been critical of Oosterweel, but became even more so after visiting one of the presentations that Straten-Generaal had organized after the latter’s EIA disappointment. Ademloos claimed that the Oosterweelconnection would bring more cars into the city, thus increasing the number of fine particles in the air and harming the health of Antwerp residents. These claims received media attention and the public debate on Oosterweel was reopened. Moreover, action groups now not only claimed that Oosterweel was a bad project, but also accused the Flemish government of intentionally dismissing any critique.

The pressure mounted on the Flemish government to address the allegations. In the summer of 2008, an additional study to compare the Oosterweelconnection to other trajectories was ordered from the research consortium “Arup/Sum”. This move was welcomed by action groups, but regarded with resentment by Flemish actors involved in the early decision-making. They felt that to backtrack now would only lead to further postponement of a project that was already long overdue.

The results of the Arup/Sum study were presented in the spring of 2009. Meanwhile, Ademloos had also collected enough signatures to hold a municipal referendum on Oosterweel in October 2009. The study concluded that the cost-benefit balance was negative for all trajectories. Hence, Arup/Sum proposed a new trajectory. Their proposal, however, incensed actors from the Flemish government who argued that Arup/Sum had been asked to compare existing proposals rather than devise new ones. Moreover, the Arup/Sum proposal violated some of the technical requirements that had been set years earlier. Lastly, Oosterweel supporters stressed that choosing a different trajectory now would amount to a loss of all prior investments. The minister responsible for the project rejected the Arup/Sum solution in favour of the Oosterweelconnection, which in turn exasperated the Oosterweel opposition.

Meanwhile, the mayor of Antwerp, a member of the Social-Democratic party residing in the Flemish coalition government at the time, publicly declared his sympathy for the Arup/Sum proposal. In the media, this was soon termed a “U-turn” (e.g.: Brinckman, 2009, p.7). Actors from other parties in the Flemish government accused the mayor of breaking earlier commitments on Oosterweel for egoistic electoral reasons. In the Antwerp municipality, however, where discontent with Oosterweel had continued to accumulate, respondents remember feeling relieved by the mayor’s new policy position.

The public discussion on Oosterweel was alive again, with a high peak in media attention in the run-up to the municipal referendum in October and much discussion on the benefits and drawbacks of the different trajectories. When 59.24% of the voters spoke out against the Oosterweelconnection, both action groups and the city of Antwerp declared that it was no longer possible to carry on with the project. However, Oosterweel supporters from the Flemish government thought differently. To the allegations of unfairness directed at them by protesters, they replied that the protesters themselves were acting unfairly by abusing the instrument of the referendum to block a highly urgent public project. Furthermore, their faith in Oosterweel’s superiority remained strong. They were unwilling to go along with what they considered a break of commitments from the Social-Democratic party.

In September 2010 the coalition parties reached a political compromise on the

Oosterweelconnection. The trajectory would be the same, but the contested overpass would become a tunnel. The city of Antwerp confirmed its commitment to this new plan. But the action groups were not at all satisfied. They argued that they had been resisting not merely overpass, but the entire Oosterweel trajectory.

Regardless, the decision-making procedure on Oosterweel continued with the now altered Oosterweelconnection. Because of the alterations a new EIA had to be conducted. Awaiting the results of the new EIA, media attention soon decreased and the public debate subsided. After a period of intense repoliticization during which the conflict over the Oosterweelconnection was highly visible, the Oosterweel project was depoliticized once more. While the conflict was far from settled in the eyes of protesters, the compromise made it seem as if consensus was reached. Oosterweel was no longer a significant topic of public debate.

#### **2014: Devious policy-makers or selfish protesters?**

In February of 2014, the results of the new EIA were released. These brought no final closure to the debate as they were interpreted very differently. The Flemish coalition parties and the parties in the city of Antwerp, who again formed mirror coalitions, claimed that the Oosterweelconnection was superior because it scored best on the aspect of mobility. Within a week of the EIA results going public, these parties stated their intent to move forward with the Oosterweelconnection. This infuriated action groups who argued that the Oosterweelconnection was not the obvious winner of the EIA: their preferred trajectory did not score badly on mobility either and scored better on liveability. The speed with which the decision had been reached also invited suspicion. They, lastly, criticized the EIA for treating the Oosterweel trajectory differently from other trajectories.

Media attention peaked in the aftermath of the EIA and the Oosterweelconnection became repoliticized as a public issue. The action groups considered the EIA fraudulent and announced that they would take the issue to the judicial arena. Policy-makers supporting Oosterweel claimed that this very fact confirmed that the Oosterweel opposition would always find reasons to object. The continued opposition was not seen as a sign of public resistance but as selfish perseverance from individual protesters.

Soon thereafter a new action group called “Ringland” entered the Oosterweel debate. Ringland argued that the only way out of the Oosterweel debacle was to build no new infrastructure for the moment but to restructure and tunnel the existing ring road. Their proposal received a significant amount of media attention and became a major topic in the Flemish elections in May. All political parties claimed to support Ringland. However, actors from the Flemish government and BAM stated in the media that tunnelling would have to be combined with the

Oosterweelconnection. Not building anything now would amount to “economic self-destruction” (as cited in Moolenaar, 2014, p. 3) because of prior investments in the process. Opposition parties, joined by the action groups Straten-Generaal and Ademloos, countered that combining the two would be technically impossible. They claimed that the governmental support for Ringland was a trick to harness electoral support, only to drop this support after re-election.

Both Oosterweel supporters and opponents felt that the very history of Oosterweel decision-making was proving them right in either wanting to close off or open up debate on Oosterweel. For example, an Oosterweel supporter from the city-government explained in the interview:

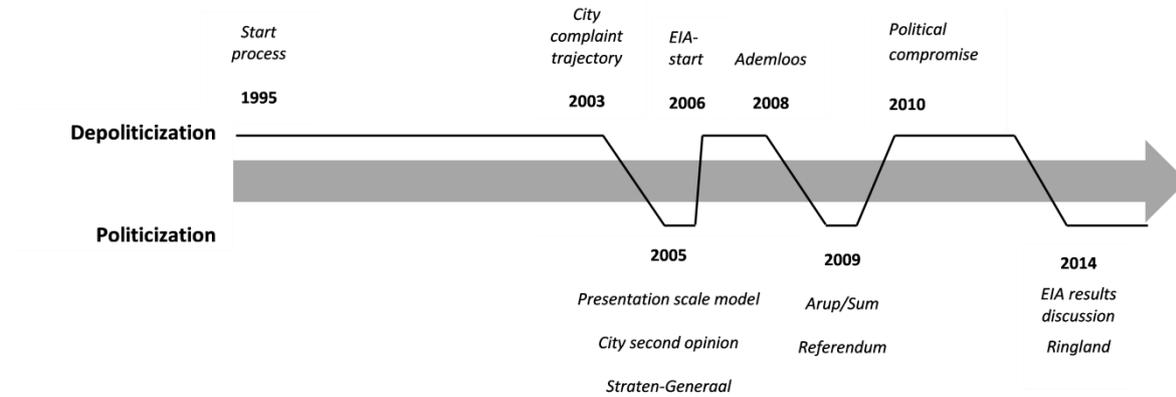
“It [revisiting the debate over the Oosterweelconnection] is like a merry-go-round. There is a solution every time, but a better solution can always be found (...) At some point you have to realize something”.

In contrast, a member of Straten-Generaal stated:

“In those first weeks after the press conference [held by Straten-Generaal in 2005] a political discourse emerged that went something like: ‘(...) it is too late [for alternatives] now and we have to move forward.’ (...) How on earth is it possible that a discourse that proved so ill-fated is still alive?”

The parties that supported Oosterweel became the dominant parties after the Flemish elections in 2014. They decided to maintain the Oosterweelconnection and to explore the options for tunnelling. As of writing, the Oosterweelconnection is still in the planning phase. In the spring of 2017, policy-makers reached a compromise with action groups on how to move forwards after a long period of intermediate intervention starting in 2015. This latter phase has not been part of the analysis.

**Fig. 2: Depoliticization and politicization in the Oosterweel policy process**



## The boomerang effect of depoliticization

This section analyses the processes of (de)politicization described in the previous section and probes deeper into how policy-makers have dealt with conflict and its consequences for the policy-making process.

### Discursive mechanisms of depoliticization and politicization

We earlier defined depoliticization as the movement of an issue from the political arenas of deliberation and contingency, to the non-political arenas of fate and necessity. The history of the Oosterweelconnection demonstrates that over the course of the policy process, various types of arguments were used to close off or open up public debate.

#### *Arguments of depoliticization*

Three types of argumentation – managerial, technical, and crisis – were used to depoliticize the Oosterweelconnection. These forms of argumentation are discussed below and summarized in Table 5.2.

#### *The managerial argument*

Managerial argumentation stressed that decisions were made after careful consideration and that the time for talk was over. In depoliticization, these arguments were used to avoid deliberation, which was seen as a time-costly activity that hampered project accomplishment. Unless execution would start, the policy process remained a “merry-go-round” with “better proposals” continuously emerging as the enemy of good ones. For example, policy-makers closed off

deliberation through managerial arguments before 2003 and between 2003 and 2005 when actors from the Antwerp municipality tried to renegotiate the location of the highway. The argumentation resurfaced again after the political agreements of 2010 and 2014. Each time, the fact that a decision had been reached already was used to plead for moving on to execution and to cease further discussion.

#### *The technical argument*

Technical argumentation was also used to depoliticize the issue. When using technical arguments, policy-makers stated that their preferred policy had superior technical qualities that rendered reconsideration senseless. For example, policy-makers closed off discussion through technical arguments in 2005, when they stated that the viability of both the city's tunnel proposal and Straten-Generaal's proposal had already been disproved in earlier research. They also used technical argumentation to disqualify the Arup/Sum research, stating that it did not live up to established technical requirements, and to cut short the reopened discussion on Oosterweel after the emergence of Ringland by referring to the EIA results.

#### *The crisis argument*

Crisis argumentation stated that because of the high urgency of the public issue, swift action was necessary and deliberation was therefore cut short. The metaphor of the "traffic infarct" looming over Antwerp was used in 2005, but also re-used throughout the policy process to activate this sense of crisis and impending disaster. Similarly, policy-makers invoked a sense of crisis by stating that the endless talks and significant financial resources already invested in the Oosterweelconnection would be a waste if Oosterweel was not realized. This argument was advanced in 2009 and combined with technical argumentation to delegitimize the Arup/Sum proposal and close off discussion. Likewise, in 2014, supporters of the Ringland proposal were told they could count on sympathy from policy-makers as long as it would not result in "economic self-destruction" by jeopardizing the Oosterweelconnection.

**Table 5.2: Arguments of depoliticization**

	1996-2003	2003-2008	2008-2014	2014
Managerial	Decision has been taken	Decision has been taken	Political compromise reached	Recommitment to Oosterweel
Technical		Research proved Oosterweel superior	Oosterweel superior to Arup/Sum	Oosterweel superior in EIA
Crisis		Urgency because of congestion	Urgency because of congestion + invested resources	Urgency because of congestion + invested resources

*Arguments of politicization*

Opponents of the Oosterweelconnection did not just accept the closing off of discussion. Instead, they successfully engaged in repoliticization by using three types of arguments – negligence, fairness, and personal. These arguments are discussed below and summarized in Table 5.3.

*The negligence argument*

Negligence argumentation stressed that important topics, which were not considered in deliberation, demanded a reopening of discussion. This kind of argumentation was used in 2005 when opposition actors argued that the policy plans insufficiently considered spatial impacts. Negligence was also argued by action-group Ademloos in regards to fine particles, as well as by Ringland when they presented their 2014 proposal as an overlooked solution that could satisfy all policy demands.

*The fairness argument*

A second type of argumentation used to politicize Oosterweel concerned fairness. This type of argumentation asserted that because of flaws relating to unfair treatment, policy outputs could not be trusted and discussion had to be reopened. Their perceived mistreatment in the first EIA prompted Straten-Generaal to become more activist and eventually spurred the organization of the referendum. The argument of unfair treatment was further reinforced when the government forged a new political compromise on the Oosterweelconnection despite having lost the referendum. The argument resurfaced in 2014 when the very speed of Oosterweel decision-

making was again interpreted as a sign of the government’s intention to silence dissent. Actors from within the city-government also advanced the fairness argument: they complained that their voices of dissent had long been silenced, which created a build-up of frustration and contributed to their support for the “Arup/Sum” proposal, partly explaining this so-called “U-turn.”

*The personal argument*

Finally, personal argumentation was advanced by Oosterweel opponents to reopen discussion. This type of argumentation focused on the ascribed characteristics of politicians that would immediately make any of their claims suspicious. We mostly see this argumentation in the later stages of the policy process, and particularly in 2014 when doubts were repeatedly cast on the sincerity of the Flemish government’s support for Ringland. Oosterweel opponents claimed that the support was a trick on the part of the government to increase their electoral support and that the history of the Oosterweel process proved the untrustworthiness of those pushing for Oosterweel.

**Table 5.3: Arguments of politicization**

	2003-2008	2008-2014	2014
Negligence	Lack of attention for spatial impact	Lack of attention for fine particles	Lack of attention for possibility tunneling
Fairness		Ignoring Arup/Sum and retaining Oosterweel after referendum	Quickness decision on Oosterweel after EIA
Personal			Political statements are untrustworthy

**Making Oosterweel (in)amendable**

Whether for managerial reasons, technical reasons, or the threat of impending disaster, policy-makers could portray any attempt to redeliberate on Oosterweel as irrational and, hence, ill-advised (see also: Wolf & Van Dooren, 2017a). As a result, like in the Aalborg case covered by Flyvbjerg (1998), “antagonistic confrontations [were] actively avoided” (p.231). However, in the case of Oosterweel, those resisting the project nevertheless succeeded in mobilizing counterarguments and in portraying the Oosterweelconnection as contingent rather than as set in stone. In these effort, too, appeals to rationality played an important role. Media only significantly picked up on the arguments against Oosterweel after protesters were able to

mobilize evidence of the alleged health-dangers brought on by Oosterweel and after they were able, through the Arup/Sum study and through the referendum, to present counter-proposals backed up by evidence and by tangible measurements of support. Oosterweel-critics managed to overcome allegations of being irrational by asserting that their proposal was not less, but more rational than the Oosterweelconnection.

Even if policy-makers tried to disengage from conflict by presenting Oosterweel as beyond debate, the analysis does not reveal malicious intent on the part of policy-makers to do so simply to get their way. Rather, the case reveals an entrenched view on conflict as troubling the waters of good projects and thus points to the non-intentionality that may characterize depoliticization. In the case of Oosterweel, political commitments and research already “proved” the project as worthy, and thus unsuitable for wider discussion. Policy-makers, who measured success as being able to finish this important public project, therefore pushed for implementation over conversation and saw resistance as a roadblock on the way to the finish line. This only exacerbated when delay set in and choosing a different option would amount to that delay being amplified (see also: Wolf & Van Dooren, 2017b).

### **The boomerang effect of depoliticization**

The analysis demonstrates that the efforts to shut down debate by stressing the fixity of plans in no way ended it. Rather, we argue, these moves of depoliticization had a boomerang effect that ultimately increased conflict, defined as manifest beliefs about the incompatibility of the parties’ goals.

First, avoiding conflict by closing off debate does not mean that the debate is over. Like a boomerang, conflict may disappear from view only temporarily. It is understandable that policy-makers would rather move an already lengthy policy-making procedure forward than reengage in public debate. However, in the case of Oosterweel, conflict simply resurfaced in a different way. This risk of conflict resurging seems especially high in policy-making processes on megaprojects that take a long time to plan and build. Moreover, disengagement through depoliticization also presents a missed opportunity to harness the positive aspects of conflict. In this case, the voices that critiqued the Oosterweelconnection reflected a serious engagement from both the city administration and citizens. The politicization of the Oosterweel issue through negligence argumentation brought new, creative, ideas into the political discussion. Both the tunnel proposal from the city and the proposal from Straten-Generaal, for example, reflected a type of engagement that did not just resist existing plans, but also presented creative alternatives. These voices were, however, ignored rather than invited at the table. By steering clear from conflict, policy-makers failed to reap this engagement and creativity.

Second, also like a boomerang, the more energy spent on getting rid of conflict, the more forcefully it returns. In the case of the Oosterweelconnection, the conflict did not simply disappear after 2005, but resurfaced later, and more vehemently. The protest shifted from negligence arguments to an emphasis on the unfairness of the policy process and, later, on the personality traits of politicians. The frustration of being continually dismissed by policy-makers increased the conflict: those resisting Oosterweel no longer objected only to the original plans, but also to a policy process that they perceived as unfair and serving only the interests of alleged untrustworthy policy-makers. As a result, parties increasingly felt that not only were their infrastructure objectives incompatible, but also their goals for structuring the policy process, as well as the alleged personal, selfish, objectives motivating the “other” party. Policy-makers also stressed that it was not they, but the Oosterweel opponents, who were being unfair. Policy-makers, too, engaged in personal argumentation by stating that it was in the nature of protesters to resist Oosterweel and by casting doubts on the trustworthiness of those politicians resisting Oosterweel. Thus, as more energy was spent on depoliticization, the conflict grew in a way that encouraged distrust of process and persons –the negative aspects of conflict- and silenced its positive aspects.

## **Conclusion and discussion**

Through an in-depth case study of the Oosterweelconnection conflict in Antwerp, this article concludes that efforts to close off public debate through depoliticization may be counterproductive in the longer run. Depoliticization can increase conflict in a way that fosters its negative aspects, i.e. distrust and hostility towards the other party, at the expense of the positive sides of conflict, i.e. public engagement and creativity.

The implications for the PA literature are fourfold. First, the analysis demonstrates that policy-makers are prone to conflict avoidance because they see conflict as something bad. This echoes Lan’s (1997, p. 32) argument made over two decades ago that “As a matter of course, many public administrators adopt a decision rule of conflict avoidance.” It also reinforces his call for the academic and practical need to give more attention to conflict in PA.

Second, and relatedly, the analysis does not find that policy-makers necessarily avoid conflict to further their self-interest, and thereby strengthens the conclusions of authors such as Kuzemko (2016), who highlight that depoliticization may not be as intentional as is often implied in the depoliticization literature. Rather, it concludes that policy-makers depoliticize because they view conflict as irrational and, hence, negative. As a consequence, their preferred policy is presented as the only rational course of action (see also: Flyvbjerg, 1998; Stone, 2002). This confirms that what is called an “anti-political” sentiment, by which is meant the characterization of political conflict and conduct in highly negative ways, is perpetuated not only by citizens but also by

policy-makers themselves (Hay & Stoker, 2009). Even if depoliticization is not an intentional strategy, when policy-makers equate one type of policy with being the only sensible course of action, this does complicate resistance to that policy, as opponents have to be able to present evidence of their rationality in order to be taken seriously.

Third, that policy-makers are prone to avoiding conflict is all the more problematic because it (a) may not work, (b) inhibits the possibility of reaping conflicts benefits, and (c) can trigger the theoretical mechanisms of a boomerang effect. To the existing argument against conflict avoidance in much PA literature, i.e. that it harms democratic inclusivity, we thus add a more practical argument. Conflict avoidance may be counterproductive for policy-makers who want to implement a project, especially when they are trying to realize projects that will take many years to complete. The term boomerang may sound familiar to scholars of transnational advocacy who use the term “boomerang pattern” (Keck & Sikkink, 1999) when talking about the influence of advocacy groups. Our analysis demonstrates that the idea of conflict triggering a boomerang mechanism is also useful for PA. However, while the transnational advocacy literature studies the boomerang pattern as resulting from strategic action of advocacy groups, this work highlights the affective dimensions of conflict that bear on civic actors and multiply their reasons for resistance rather than spur their resignation.

Finally, the analysis confirms that depoliticization and politicization often interact dynamically, and that depoliticization can trigger repoliticization (see also: Beveridge & Naumann, 2014). It also offers various types of discursive moves that can be used to (de)politicize. The arguments of depoliticization (managerial; technical and crisis) overlap with those presented by Flinders & Wood (2014) in their discussion on discursive depoliticization. Particularly in the case of politicization arguments (negligence; fairness and personal) this article makes a contribution, as the topic of politicization has received far less attention than the topic depoliticization. This typology of (de)politicization arguments may be further expanded.

Beyond these implications, the article also suggests at least three issues for future research. First, while the analysis explores the consequences of conflict avoidance, it investigates neither what happens when policy-makers do engage with conflict nor what such engagement could or should look like. Exploring these issues is particularly important given the increasing calls in PA for public participation, which are often rife with conflict about the nature of and solution to public problems. Second, while the analysis shows that citizens can muster the power necessary to repoliticize issues, future research could explore the extent to which institutional, contextual, and other differences enable or constrain (de)politicization. For example, the ability to organize a referendum was critical to the ability of Oosterweel-opponents to politicize the issue (see also: Beveridge & Naumann, 2014). Finally, future research could explore how the reasons for policy-

makers to (dis)engage with conflict relate to their “theories in use” on policy-making, and in turn, how this relates to the academic theories in PA. In the case of Oosterweel, “evidenced based” and “managerial” thinking were particularly salient theories in use. Further research into this topic, and what the PA field could do to promote better theories-in-use, could be highly relevant.

We would like to end by stressing that for over a decade, opponents of the Oosterweelconnection have proposed different solutions to deal with congestion, urban planning and public health. More attention to how we can foster, rather than marginalize, such engagement triggered by conflict is needed in public administration literature and practice.

# 6. Conflict as troubling the waters? How steering for results can impede the public administrator as conflict arbiter

*E.E.A. Wolf*

*Forthcoming as book chapter in Better or worse relations: Essays in conflict and collaboration*

## **Introduction**

Conflict has a bad connotation in the world of policy-making. While collaboration is widely celebrated (see for example: Van Slyke, O’Leary, & Kim, 2010), conflict is seen as problematic. With the public administrators job often implicitly or explicitly portrayed as achieving cost-effective results, conflict is seen as standing in the way of them achieving this. This negative view of conflict, obscures the positive functions that conflicts can also serve. As illustrated by the various contributions to this volume, conflict is not all bad. In fact, it often precedes human betterment (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2017). Some of the most beloved characteristics of our Western democratic systems, such as universal suffrage and labor rights, did not appear out of thin air. They only came about after hard-fought battles.

Conflicts can change things for the better due to the *engagement* and *creativity* that they evoke. If public policies are resisted, it means that people actually care about what happens in the public domain (M. Hajer, 2003; Laws et al., 2014; Mouffe, 2009; Rosanvallon, 2008; Verloo, 2015). With political apathy often considered a widespread problem, the engagement that conflicts elicit should be welcomed rather than feared. Not only does conflict equal engagement, but conflicts can also prompt creativity (Carnevale, 2006; Coppens, 2014; Coser, 1956; Cuppen, 2011). Thoughts once taken-for-granted are questioned when conflicts arise, thus making it possible for new ways of seeing to develop. But neither the engagement, nor the creativity associated with conflict, can come to fruition as long as public administrators understand conflict in wholly negative terms. And, consequently, avoid, ignore, or shut down conflict whenever and wherever possible.

This chapter uses the conflict over the multi-billion-euro “Oosterweelconnection” highway in Antwerp (Belgium) to investigate how public administrators deal with conflict. It argues that, because public administrators are often focused on bringing their projects to a successful finish,

further debate on the merits of their projects is cut short. But their refusal to engage in further discussions, may not only make existing conflicts more destructive, but may also inhibit them from taking advantage of conflict's constructive aspects. I argue that public administrators should be taught the practical skills to be better conflict-arbiters, and the ethics to go with these skills, so that they do not shy away from conflict, but rather learn to deal with conflict constructively. Conflict may ultimately serve, not threaten, their core task: implementing good policies.

### **Steering for results: the administrator as manager**

It is the object of administrative study to discover, first, what government can properly and successfully do, and secondly, how it can do these proper things with the utmost possible efficiency and at the least possible cost either of money or of energy. (W. Wilson, 1887, p. 197)

These were the words of Woodrow Wilson, one of the founding fathers of the academic field of Public Administration (PA). As his statement demonstrates, scholars of PA usually study what the government does, and how the government can do things better. The upshot of this focus on governmental results has been a body of literature that is largely managerial. However, when administrators make decisions on how to achieve the best results, they are also settling political conflicts. Public administrators have a significant amount of power to wield in terms of who gets what when and how (Lasswell, 1936). The managerial focus in the field of PA, however, has come at the expense of explicit academic attention to how public administrators should operate as the arbiters of political conflicts (see also: Lan, 1997; Lodge & Wegrich, 2012).

That the main task of the public administrator lies in realizing managerial results can be traced back to the split between "politics" and "administration", introduced by such authors as Wilson (1887, quoted above), Goodnow (1900) and Weber (1946). The Weberian approach to PA, for example, prescribes a strict separation between the work of politicians who make policies, where conflict is required, and the technical work of civil servants who execute policies, where conflict should be avoided (Weber, 1948). Qualities that Weber associates with politicians are passion and charisma, while administrators are thought of as operating with impersonal detachment. Reinforcing this idea of administrative work as results-oriented and non-political is the split made in the traditional "stages approach" to the policy process, as first introduced by Lasswell (Nakamura, 1987). Politics, according to the stages approach, belongs to the policy-making stage, where politicians formulate public policies. Once politicians reach a decision on which policy to fund, the chosen policy moves on to the implementation stage, where public administrators are meant to execute the orders of their political superiors effectively and efficiently. Again, the split between policy-making and policy-implementation establishes a view of political conflict as something that is and should be contained. Once implementation commences, political conflict should ideally be over and done with.

Contemporary PA literature resists the strict separation between the work of politicians and administrators, as well as the strict separation between policy-making and policy-implementation. We know that administrators cannot help but make political decisions on a regular basis as they do their daily work. The literature on front-line bureaucracy, made famous by the work of Lipsky (1980), has taught us that police officers, for example, continuously make decisions about the extent to which offenses should or should not be punished. Welfare workers, too, continuously decide on who should or should not receive governmental support. These administrators must make daily decisions as to who gets what when and how for which they cannot rely on protocol alone. Nor is the fact that administrators make political decisions seen as problematic. If these tasks were shifted to politicians, the workload of the latter would become unmanageable. Moreover, administrators are often more familiar with the citizens that policies purport to serve than are politicians. They are therefore usually better equipped to make small-scale decisions on how to serve public goals. In sum, the notion of the public administrator as a non-political figure is recognized by contemporary PA literature as being empirically incorrect and normatively untenable (see also: Stone, 2002; Svava, 1985, 2006).

Nevertheless, the legacy of the public administrator as someone who is first and foremost a manager can still be felt today. We rarely think of public administrators as the arbiters of conflict. Even less so do we see conflict as something that may serve, rather than impede, the work of public administrators.

The *New Public Management* (NPM) school of thought may be taken as an example. Work in the NPM tradition usually aims to incorporate private sector management techniques into public policy-making to improve performance (Hood, 1991). Political conflict should, according to NPM, come into play only when politicians are determining political goals, while the implementation of policies should be guided by concerns of effectiveness and efficiency. Conflict, however, is often highly inefficient. Not surprisingly, existing research demonstrates that NPM strategies often deny or repress political conflict in policy implementation (Burnham, 2001; Diefenbach, 2009, p. 895; A. Gray & Jenkins, 1995, pp. 91–92; Watson & Hay, 2003). The value of policy conflict is also underappreciated by PA approaches that resist NPM's idealization of private sector techniques. *Public Value Governance* (PVG), for example, aims to maximize the creation of public value when responding to public problems (Benington & Moore, 2011). Although it acknowledges that administrators must engage in politics to get things done, PVG still underplays the political side of administrative work and generally looks for techniques to steer clear of conflict (Dahl & Soss, 2014; Hartley et al., 2015). Nor does the “*evidence-based*” (EBP) stream in the PA literature (Boswell, 2014) have much patience for the benefits that can come from conflicts. Here, the emphasis is on letting evidence settle political questions. Lastly,

PA approaches that are *collaborative or participative* in nature, such as “joined-up government,” “collaborative governance,” and “networked governance,” also do not fully appreciate conflict. To be fair, these literatures do give tacit attention to conflict. However, with collaboration as the ultimate aim, conflict is still seen mostly as a problem that needs to be regulated through managerial techniques. Very little attention is paid to why we should celebrate political difference rather than discipline it (Behagel & Arts, 2014; Davies, 2009; Eriksson, 2012; McClymont, 2011; Mouffe, 2000; O’Toole & Meier, 2004; Skelcher, Mathur, & Smith, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2005). Of course, this very brief review of contemporary PA approaches, summarized below, is far from exhaustive. It does serve as an illustration, however, of the lack of attention in the field of PA to the constructive possibilities of policy conflicts. Conflicts are generally seen as standing in the way of the administrator as manager.

**Figure 6.1: Approaches to conflict in PA literature**

<b>PA approach</b>	<b>Focuses on</b>	<b>Conflict as</b>
New Public Management	Imitating private sector	Inefficient
Public Value Governance	Maximizing public value	Best avoided by making sure that there is sufficient support for policies
Evidence Based Policy-Making	Researching costs and benefits of different policies vis-à-vis each other	Settled through research
Collaborative and participative approaches	Managing collaboration (within government and between government and citizens)	Manageable though techniques

I conclude that there is a gap in mainstream PA literature when it comes to conflict. With some exceptions, the most notable of these being from scholars at the crossroads of conflict resolution, urban planning and public administration (Coppens, 2014; Laws et al., 2014; Verloo, 2015) and in the field of critical policy analysis (Durnova, 2013; M. Hajer, 2003), conflict is seen as signalling a managerial failure and seeking a managerial resolution. However, conflicts harbour both *constructive and destructive* aspects (Kriesberg, this volume). Constructive conflict, as discussed earlier, prompts engagement and creativity and enables changes for the better. Destructive conflict, on the other hand, results in increasing levels of distrust which can translate into parties either ceasing interaction entirely, or interacting as enemies in a zero-sum game (Glasl, 1982; Kriesberg & Dayton, 2017; Laws et al., 2014; Pruitt. et al., 2003, pp. 70–71). Yet the administrator as manager receives hardly any instruction from the PA literature on how to engage with conflict to reap its constructive sides, or diminish its destructive sides. With conflict

seen as innately problematic, it seems that the best the public administrator can hope for is policies that remain as uncontested as possible.

## **The Oosterweelconnection conflict**

That their project would remain uncontested, was what public administrators in charge of constructing the Oosterweelconnection highway had hoped for. Before further analyzing how they dealt with conflict, let me first provide the reader with a case background (see also: E. E. A. Wolf & Van Dooren, 2017a, pp. 453–455).<sup>i</sup>

The economically important Antwerp region in Belgium has long dealt with traffic congestion. To improve the traffic flow, actors from the Flemish government<sup>ii</sup>, the province of Antwerp and the city of Antwerp started sketching out plans for a new highway beginning in 1995 (Verelst, 2009a). The proposed infrastructure would consist of a tunnel under the Scheldt River and an overpass over largely non-operational docks close to the inner city. It was named the Oosterweelconnection, or “Oosterweel” for short, because the highway was located in the Oosterweel area of Antwerp.

The Flemish government feared local resistance, so before it would commit funds to the project, it was deemed important that local actors show that they spoke in unison. Various private meetings between important political and economic actors from the city of Antwerp were organized between 1995 and 2000. In 2000, the governor of the Antwerp province organized a one-day public meeting to which many different stakeholders from the province of Antwerp were invited. These included representatives from civil society organizations. During this meeting, the highway plans were disclosed to gauge public support, which was deemed sufficient. The Flemish government agreed to fund the highway.

After this commitment, decisions still had to be made on the implementation of the trajectory and the construction. To that end, in 2003 the Flemish government decided to establish a special purpose entity named “BAM.” Meanwhile, several engineering studies were carried out to prepare for construction. As the plans for the Oosterweelconnection were taking shape, some working in the Antwerp city-government started to voice doubts about the location of the highway. However, these doubts were deflected by their city council (for administrative actors) or their political party (for political actors). It was emphasized that political commitments had already been made and that it was too late to voice criticism.

In 2005, the Flemish government presented a scale model of the Oosterweel project to political actors from both the Flemish parliament and the Antwerp city council. Public debate on the drawbacks of the Oosterweelconnection began soon thereafter. The scale model revealed

Oosterweel's possible impact on Antwerp's city-center. In response, the municipality of Antwerp wanted to investigate whether the planned overpass could be replaced by a tunnel, and ordered additional research into this possibility. This was resented by administrators from the province of Antwerp, the Flemish government and BAM, as earlier studies had already indicated that a tunnel would exceed the allocated budget. Ordering an additional study so far along in the planning process would, in their view, amount to a loss of valuable time. Moreover, if the new highway were not built very soon, acute traffic congestion (termed by them a "traffic infarct") could ensue that would greatly damage the Flemish economy and all its citizens. When the study confirmed that a tunnel would indeed be more expensive than an overpass, the municipality backed down and spoke in favor of constructing the Oosterweelconnection as originally planned.

A few months later, however, an action group called "Straten-Generaal" organized a press conference in which they proposed an alternative trajectory that would locate the highway further away from the city center. They asserted that the current highway would have an adverse impact on the urban development of Antwerp. Claiming that years of research had already proven the superiority of the Oosterweelconnection, the Flemish government continued moving the planning processes forward regardless. Straten-Generaal submitted their alternative proposal to be further researched in an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). They calculated that by doing so, they would at least have their proposal thoroughly investigated. However, when they read the results of the EIA in 2007, they were greatly disappointed in both the quality and the quantity of research on their trajectory. Straten-Generaal decided to take up arms against the Oosterweelconnection more vigorously. The EIA had proven to them that merely participating in the normal planning procedures would never result in their voices being taken seriously.

In 2008, an action group called "Ademloos" (literally, "Breathless") joined the growing civic opposition to the Oosterweel project. Ademloos focused on the danger of fine particles in vehicle exhaust fumes, arguing that the higher number of cars that would be brought into the city would increase air pollution. Their argument was backed up by medical experts and garnered significant media attention. With two action groups resisting the Oosterweelconnection, the pressure mounted on the Flemish government to give into their pleas for additional research into other trajectories. That summer, the Flemish government commissioned a "final" independent study from the "Arup/Sum" research consortium. This move was resented by Flemish actors involved in the early decision-making. They felt that to backtrack now, after so many years of administrative processes, would only lead to further postponement of a project that was already long overdue. Meanwhile, Ademloos began collecting signatures to call for a municipal referendum on the Oosterweelconnection.

The next year (2009) saw both the presentation of the Arup/Sum study and the Antwerp municipal referendum. The study concluded that no existing plan adequately balanced costs and benefits and instead proposed a new trajectory strongly resembling the Straten-Generaal proposal. However, the Arup/Sum proposal was brushed aside by administrators from the BAM and the minister responsible because it allegedly failed to meet some of the technical requirements set years earlier. Moreover, changing course now would also mean that the whole planning process would have to be redone, amounting to a huge waste of resources. Lastly, the Arup/Sum study further demonstrated the urgency of the traffic problems, and the need for a fast solution, a demand that could allegedly only be met by building Oosterweel as planned. Action groups were furious about this interpretation of the study. Arup/Sum proved to them that their critique, which had been dismissed for many years, was justified. Moreover, they found it suspicious that the government used the argument of time to plead for Oosterweel, which, they believed, should certainly not be pushed through just for the sake of moving the process forward. Following the study, and in the lead-up to the referendum, the mayor of Antwerp also became increasingly critical of the Oosterweelconnection. As he was a member of the social-democratic party presiding in the Flemish government at the time, this meant consensus was now also breaking down within the government. The other political parties in the coalition government felt betrayed by the so called “U-turn” of the mayor and his party.

On 18 October 2009, the Antwerp public voted down the Oosterweel connection with 59.24% against. However, the referendum was non-binding; it merely advised the city on how to judge the existing planning permit for the Oosterweel project. Moreover, those in favor of the project questioned the referendum’s legitimacy. They felt that the Oosterweelconnection did not concern only Antwerp, but rather the whole of Flanders. Decision-making was suspended and committees were formed in order to return to political consensus. In September 2010, the coalition parties reached a compromise on the Oosterweelconnection together with the city of Antwerp. The trajectory would remain the same, but the contested overpass would become a tunnel. The action groups were furious. They claimed that they had protested the trajectory, not the overpass as such. The alterations to the Oosterweelconnection did force the government to redo its planning processes, which included conducting a new EIA. In the meantime, the action groups continued to protest.

In February of 2014, the results of the new EIA led to yet another conflict over how to interpret them. The Flemish government and the city of Antwerp felt that the Oosterweelconnection was the winner of the EIA, as it scored highest with regard to mobility criteria. Consequently, action groups were literally asked to stop their protest in the name of the public interest. The action groups, however, felt that their trajectory had a better overall score. They were also suspicious of

the speed with which the government again decided to move ahead with Oosterweel. How could they have interpreted the ambiguous EIA results so quickly? Finally, they felt that the EIA had been biased against non-Oosterweel trajectories. Feeling that they had only one option remaining, they decided to take the issue to the judicial arena.

In the lead-up to the Flemish elections of 2014, the debate started to shift. A new action group, “Ringland,” joined the protest. Instead of taking sides on the Oosterweel connection, Ringland attempted to shift the focus of the discussion. The group argued that before building *any* new infrastructure, the current ring road in the inner city should be converted to a tunnel, which would enable the land to be reclaimed for urban use. Both the proponents and opponents of Oosterweel supported this idea. But they still did not see eye to eye. Coalition parties and public administrators from the Flemish and the Antwerp governments claimed that tunneling would have to be combined with the Oosterweelconnection. To build nothing now would amount to a massive waste of resources. Action groups and opposition parties claimed that it was technically impossible to combine both. Each accused the other of lying, and each saw the perseverance of the other as selfishness. Action groups were labelled by public administrators as a “vocal minority” that rendered invisible the “silent majority” that Oosterweel was serving. Public administrators were labelled by action groups as being set only on implementing their favored policies, no matter the costs. At the time of writing, the planning process for the Oosterweelconnection remains ongoing. After intermediary intervention, the action groups and the government seem to have reached a compromise on combining the Oosterweelconnection with tunneling the existing ring road. However, construction has not yet begun. This most recent period of reconciliation has not been part of the analysis.

## **The failed attempts to manage away conflict**

### **How administrators disengaged from conflict**

In the case of the Oosterweelconnection, public administrators dealt with resistance in at least three ways. They acted as technocratic administrators, as efficient administrators, and as protective administrators. None of these ways, however, permitted for a view of conflict that recognized its constructive aspects.

#### ***The technocratic administrator: setting the policy substance through evidence***

The first way in which administrators handled conflict was technocratic in nature. Faced with resistance, they portrayed the decision for the Oosterweelconnection as a technical one, based on the burden of proof that Oosterweel would be the best design to battle congestion. This happened in 2005, when the action group Straten-Generaal proposed a different location for the highway, and again in 2014, when the EIA results were presented as the ultimate proof of Oosterweel’s

superiority. In 2009, the Arup/Sum report was discounted based on technical considerations, thus similarly portraying the Oosterweel project as technically superior to other proposals.

By portraying the decision in favor of the Oosterweelconnection as technical, the policy substance was set in stone by presenting it as beyond discussion. Furthermore, depicting Oosterweel as a technical decision made any resistance seem irrational. Public administrators argued that the current project had resulted from years of research and optimization. The opposing proposals remained unsubstantiated in comparison. To revisit the choice for the Oosterweelconnection would make no sense at all. Moreover, as the alleged burden of proof in favor of the Oosterweelconnection grew over the years, so too did the frustration public administrators felt with the continuing opposition.

***The efficient administrator: setting the policy process through commitments and deadlines***

The second way in which administrators handled conflict focused on efficiency. Faced with resistance, they presented any alternative to carrying on with the Oosterweelconnection as a massive waste of resources. Public administrators from the Flemish administration and the province of Antwerp adopted the role of efficient administrator towards critics who worked in the municipality of Antwerp. Objections to the Oosterweelconnection were muffled (before 2005) or delegitimized (in 2005) because they were delivered too late. Commitments had already been made and it would be too costly to backtrack now. This message was delivered again in 2009 in response to the Arup/Sum proposal, when any alternative was presented as too costly in terms of time and money. Then, in 2014, administrators were supportive of tunneling the existing ring-road only in so far as it could be combined with the construction of Oosterweel.

By characterizing any pleas to rethink the Oosterweelconnection as a waste of resources, the authorities shut down any space for conflict. The policy process was set by stressing that the time for talks was over, that in the many years of decision-making there had been enough debate already, and that it was now time to carry on swiftly with the planning process. Deadlines needed to be adhered to and commitments needed to be upheld. The desire for haste and for more rigorous commitments only increased as delay mounted (after 2005) and commitments were broken (in 2009). By setting the policy process in stone, any resistance to the Oosterweelconnection that would alter the process was automatically thought of by administrators as an attempt to undo the project.

***The protective administrator: setting the public interest***

The third way in which administrators handled conflict focused on protecting what they saw as the public interest. Faced with resistance, they presented the Oosterweelconnection as the remedy to traffic congestion, a problem so severe and urgent that it demanded a quick solution

rather than more debate. We see administrators closing down conflict because of the alleged public interest in 2005, when the reopened debate on the Oosterweelconnection was condemned because of the looming traffic jams. It occurred in 2009 when the municipal referendum was portrayed as an instrument illegitimately abused by protesters from Antwerp to block a highly urgent public project. In 2014, administrators even publicly asked the protesters to stop their resistance in the name of the public interest.

By equating Oosterweel with the public interest, and hence rendering it inflexible, the space for conflict was closed down. Revisiting the Oosterweelconnection was presented as a risk too great to take, lest the traffic problems escalate to disastrous proportions. Moreover, equating Oosterweel with the general interest also resulted in any resistance to Oosterweel being labeled as hostile to the greater public. With administrators convinced that they were the ones protecting the public interest, they were unwilling to drop their project because of protest from an alleged vocal minority.

### **How disengaging from conflict made it worse**

Public administrators in the Oosterweelconnection case dealt with conflict from various angles. However, each time the focus was on moving forwards with the planning process, rather than on engaging with conflict. Obviously, at least two parties are needed for a conflict to continue. Nevertheless, due to the privileged institutional position of public administrators, the way in which they handled conflict set the tone of the conversation to a large extent. There are no indications that administrators had any malicious intent in disengaging from conflict. Rather, the case reveals an entrenched view of conflict as troubling the waters of good projects. When research and political commitments had proven the project was “worthy,” most public administrators saw it as their main task to get the Oosterweelconnection finished on time. There are similarities with their take on conflict and the views one regularly encounters in contemporary PA literature. The focus on evidence is reminiscent of EBP; the focus on efficiency reminds us of NPM; and the idea that the public administrator is best equipped to protect the public interest is reminiscent of PVM. However, the efforts to shut down conflict in no way ended it. By trying to set in stone policy substance, policy process, and the public interest, the constructive sides of conflict were wasted, while the destructive sides of conflict increased.

### ***Setting in stone the policy substance can reduce the tolerance for ambiguity***

It may be tempting to fall back on research as the arbiter of conflict. However, the Oosterweelconnection demonstrates that evidence alone cannot settle political questions. When dealing with complex public problems, there is seldom one answer to determining causes and resolutions. When one policy is presented as the technically superior one, this can trigger those holding a different opinion to begin collecting evidence to substantiate their claims.

Evidence then becomes a weapon in proving a position, rather than an instrument of comparison. And as all parties amass more evidence to prove their positions, their tolerance for ambiguity decreases. They become more convinced of their own truth and less willing to listen to the position of others, who are increasingly viewed as liars (E. E. A. Wolf & Van Dooren, 2017a). By acting technocratically, public administrators did not take advantage of the creativity that the clash of opinions on Oosterweel brought about. While the conflict over the Oosterweelconnection triggered much research, leading to new, creative proposals to combine mobility, livability and health in cost-effective ways, these findings were not used to promote communication, but rather to attack the other party. As a result, the destructive aspects of conflict grew. Each party became more distrusting of the policy proposals of other parties, and less willing to listen to what they increasingly considered lies.

***Setting in stone the policy process can make the policy process suspect***

It makes perfect sense that public administrators in charge of a project try to maintain control of the project by setting deadlines and obtaining commitments from important stakeholders. However, when efforts to set the policy process in stone dominate the confrontation with resistance forces, conflict may turn destructive rather than disappear. That their critique was muffled only contributed to the growing resentment towards Oosterweel within Antwerp's city government, culminating in the 2009 "U-turn." The insistence on moving forward with the planning process also roused the suspicion of protesters, who felt as if important decisions were pushed through. In response, critics of Oosterweel became increasingly distrustful of the policy-making process. Again, by trying to set the policy process once and for all, the opportunity to profit from new ideas to fight congestion was wasted. Meanwhile, the very insistence on haste made opponents of the Oosterweelconnection increasingly suspicious of not only the policy substance, but also the policy process itself (see also: E. E. A. Wolf & Van Dooren, 2017b). When actors become distrustful of the policy process, conflict becomes much harder to settle. In the Oosterweel case, discussion increasingly focused on procedural rather than substantive issues, parties increasingly conspired against each other rather than interacting with each other, and they did so outside of the policy-making institutions (including legal action) rather than within them.

***Setting in stone the public interest can make enemies out of opponents***

It is laudable when public administrators see it as their task to protect the public interest. But when the public interest is equated with one policy option, it is a small leap to label those opposing that policy as obstructionist operating against the public interest. Public administrators had been working on the Oosterweelconnection since the late 1990s. It makes sense that as time went on, they increasingly equated serving the public interest with finishing the project and were

hesitant to pause. It is also understandable that, as resistance to the Oosterweelconnection grew, and administrators increasingly felt that they were being wrongfully attacked from different sides (protesters, politicians who had a change of hearts, and the media), they came to view the opposition in an increasingly hostile way. But defining the public interest in a particular way and claiming that only the Oosterweelconnection could serve it only made the conflict more destructive. As a result of feeling ignored by administrators, protesters increased their opposition to the Oosterweelconnection. As public administrators labeled protesters a selfish vocal minority, protesters also became increasingly hostile towards public administrators. The conflict turned relational. In addition to distrusting the policy substance and the policy process, parties also became distrustful of each other. When a conflict turns relational, its constructive aspects become invisible. Engagement becomes nothing more than selfish stubbornness. And new, creative proposals which might be able to bridge various policy positions, are not considered solely because they come from the other party.

### **Arriving at better conflicts**

Public administrators are right to strive for results, and when they are made responsible for a project, it makes sense that striving for results translates into a desire to see their project to a finish. With their eyes set on the finish line, they may see conflict as troubling the waters of good projects. But public administrators should not just get things done for the sake of getting them done. They should get the right thing done. This is hardly a new insight for the field of PA (see for example the literature on PVG or: Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000), but because conflict is frequently seen as signaling failure, getting the right things done is insufficiently linked to public administrators operating as capable conflict arbiters.<sup>iii</sup> Getting the right things done may mean many different things to many different people. This should not be ignored just for the sake of completion and results. When citizens voice concerns, these moments should be celebrated as the rare examples of interaction between government and citizens that they are. Public administrators may use them to listen to the creative ideas that an engaged public brings to the table. If, on the other hand, citizens feel like their concerns are made light of, brushed aside, or delegitimized, and when they feel like this happens repeatedly, they may not only see the government in increasingly hostile ways, but may eventually pull back altogether.

Even if one does not entirely accept that the engagement and creativity brought on by conflicts should be celebrated, the Oosterweel conflict still demonstrates one very important reason to engage with rather than disengage from conflict: disengaging from conflict does not necessarily make conflict disappear, and may even exacerbate it. If you are mainly out to achieve results by getting projects finished, you still will not get there as long as resisting citizens thwart your efforts. In the case of the Oosterweelconnection, a conflict that was mainly about policy

substance escalated to a processual and finally a relational conflict. It became more destructive as distrust increased and energy was increasingly spent on fighting the other party rather than on discussing the policy proposals at hand.

But how can public administrators deal with conflicts constructively, when theories of public administration offer them so little guidance? We need PA literature that does better at recognizing that public administrators are the arbiters of many everyday conflicts about what it means to implement good policies, and implement them in the right way. And we need to teach these administrators the skills to navigate such conflicts in constructive ways, as well as the ethics to go with these skills.

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, PA literature too often sees conflict as either problematic, or as unavoidable but manageable through the right techniques. The first take on conflict may prompt administrators to disengage from conflict whenever possible. However, the second approach may also be problematic when conflict is consciously managed in such a way that the preferred policy of public administrators is set up to trump any alternative. This occurs when participative or collaborative procedures are used to manipulate and coopt resistance, as discussed in the chapters by John Burdick (this volume) and Rubinstein, Sanchez and Lance (this volume). This too may ultimately increase the civic distrust of government and their policy-making institutions, and also curtails the positive aspects of conflicts.

It is not the case that we have a lack of knowledge concerning the skills and ethics that a good conflict arbiter needs: we can integrate what we know about dealing with conflict constructively from conflict resolution literature. Some scholars working on the boundary of conflict resolution, planning and public administration have already started on this enterprise (Coppens, 2014; Laws et al., 2014; Verloo, 2015). Scholars of public administration would do well to follow their example. With a well-honed set of skills and ethics on how to handle conflicts, conflict may ultimately serve, not threaten, the implementation of good policies.

---

<sup>i</sup> For more detail on my research, see: E.E.A. Wolf & Wouter Van Dooren, “How Policies Become Contested: A Spiral of Imagination and Evidence in Large Infrastructure Projects”, *Policy Sciences* 50, no. 3 (2017); Wolf & Van Dooren, “‘Time to move on’ or ‘taking more time’? How disregarding multiple perspectives on time can increase policy-making conflict, *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, <http://doi.org/10.1177/239965441771224>

<sup>ii</sup> In Belgium, spatial planning is not governed on a federal level, but on a regional level by the separate regional governments of Flanders, Walloon, and Brussels. In the case of Oosterweel, the Flemish government has jurisdiction.

<sup>iii</sup> Denhardt & Denhardt called for a reconceptualization of public administrators as conflict arbiters in 2000. But when they revisited their model 15 years later, they dropped the word conflict altogether, instead focusing exclusively on collaboration. This exemplifies, again, the negative view of conflict and the lack of attention to its constructive aspects.



## 7. Conclusion

This last chapter of my dissertation has four parts. First, I answer the overarching research question presented in the introduction. I then discuss some questions triggered by my conclusions that would provide fruitful directions for future research. The third section reflects on the possible implications of these conclusions for policy practice: what could it mean in practice to make policies that deal more productively with policy conflict? I then conclude with my final thoughts.

### Answering the research question

The first chapter of this dissertation introduced the reader to the overarching question that has guided my research efforts for these past four years. Chapters 2 through 6 each provided partial answers. This conclusion will now connect all these partial conclusions with each other. In other words, let us now finally answer the following question:

*How can we make sense of the dynamics of conflict escalation in public policy conflicts and how should governments deal with these dynamics?*

We have defined conflict as the process that arises when two or more persons or groups manifest the belief that they have incompatible objectives. Building on this definition, conflict escalation was defined as an increase in the number of objectives that parties manifestly believe are incompatible with the objectives of the other parties in the conflict.

In the case of the conflict over the Oosterweelconnection highway, there are three theoretical mechanisms of escalation at play. These mechanisms help us make sense of the fact that what started out as a debate over highway proposals eventually escalated to a conflict between parties that viewed each other as enemies. Evidence, time and efforts to protect the public interest each played an important part in conflict escalation.

In the public debate over the Oosterweelconnection, evidence was used by the parties to prove their policy positions. Chapter 2 introduced the theoretical mechanism of a spiral-like motion in the framing process: when claims are only accepted when they are backed up by evidence, a dynamic can be triggered in which parties go back and forth between new claims and new evidence, getting more enmeshed in their own policy positions along the way. Rather than settling the conflict, however, research further polarized the positions. The tolerance for ambiguity decreased and the parties became increasingly convinced that they alone were speaking the truth. If you are convinced of your own truth, then those that think differently must be lying. By framing one's own position as authoritative through the use of evidence, evidence

becomes a weapon to attack other parties rather than an instrument in the dialogue between parties.

Time also figured heavily in the public debate. Pleas to either speed up decision-making or pause the policy process were present from the very start of the debate and became more pronounced and more urgent as the conflict over Oosterweel dragged on. Chapter 3 analyzed different perspectives on time (procedural, impact and political) and introduced the theoretical mechanisms of conflicting time perspectives growing further apart in a binary debate on decision-making tempo. When citizens plea to pause decision-making for fear of making haphazard choices on important policy issues, while administrative actors argue against pausing for fear of delay, which they equate with failure, demands for structuring the planning procedure contradict each other. Not acknowledging such tensions and instead prioritizing only one of these perspectives can make the parties that hold a different perspective feel increasingly suspicious of the policy procedure. In the Oosterweel case, administrative actors were unwilling to risk further delaying a project that they felt was long overdue. However, their refusal to pause made citizens worried about Oosterweel's impact that much more suspicious about the project. This resulted in increased efforts to pause decision-making, in turn further fueling the administrative desire to keep up the decision-making tempo, which increased still further as delay actually set in. As time dragged on, the public debate was increasingly preoccupied with the issue of how to structure the policy process. The conflict escalated from substantive to procedural, as the parties increasingly believed that not only were their infrastructure objectives incompatible, but so too were their goals for structuring the policy process.

Chapter 4 focused on the escalation to relational conflict. It argued that the unintended effect of policy-makers equating the Oosterweelconnection with serving the public interest, and seeing themselves as the guardians of the public interest, was to label resistance to the Oosterweelconnection as an obstruction. Using the SCPD framework, I presented a tragic dynamic of policy-makers inadvertently bringing resistance against them into being. I argued that the very fact that resisting citizens felt that their worries were not being taken seriously contributed to the increased intensity of their activism. As citizens started to use means outside of the conventional planning procedures, policy-makers felt further threatened by what they labeled as a powerful but underserving vocal minority that was characterized as the enemy of the deserving but powerless silent majority that their Oosterweelconnection was serving. As each party became more convinced that the other party was only out to further its own self-interest, the conflict escalated to a relational level: parties increasingly believed that not only were their infrastructure goals incompatible, along with their goals for structuring the policy process, but so too were the personal (supposedly selfish) motives for individual actors to engage in the conflict.

Chapters 2-4 help us better understand the escalation from substantive, to procedural, to relational conflict in the process of policy-making. Chapters 5 and 6 further explore the governmental side of things: how do governmental actors deal with conflict and what are the consequences of their actions? Together, these chapters answer the second part of the research question.

Chapter 5 examines the extent to which policy-makers opened or closed the space for deliberation on the Oosterweel project. Through the theoretical lens of (de)politicization, this chapter demonstrates how the Oosterweel project was decided on in 2000, and how after that time there was very little tolerance for further deliberation. Whenever actors questioned the project, inside or outside of the government, those in charge of the project used arguments of depoliticization to close down the space for deliberation and legitimize the continuation of Oosterweel in the planning procedure. However, rather than ending the conflict, these efforts to depoliticize Oosterweel had what I termed a boomerang effect. Efforts to depoliticize Oosterweel and continue the planning process made conflict disappear, but only temporarily. Moreover, as more effort was expended on closing down conflict each time it re-appeared, the conflict further escalated, as also demonstrated in chapters 2-4. Furthermore, by disengaging from conflict, policy-makers made it impossible to reap the benefits of the creative engagement citizens brought to the substantive debate on highway proposals, i.e. the positive aspects of conflict. At the same time, their disengagement did foster distrust towards the policy procedure and distrust between the parties, as each felt increasingly beleaguered by the other. The negative aspects of the conflict thus increased at the expense of its positive aspects.

What does all this mean for the public administrator faced with a contested policy? Chapter 6 focuses less on the arguments used in dealing with conflict and its consequences, as did chapter 5, and more on the role that public administrators take on when policies become contested. It argues that public servants in charge of a policy often strive for results and that, with their eyes on the finish line, they interpret conflict as troubling the waters of a good policy. They therefore try to steer clear of conflict (negating it by appealing to evidence, deadlines, or the public interest) whenever possible, rather than facing public debate about a contested piece of policy head-on. Nor is it surprising that civil servants hold such a negative view of conflict. PA literature itself paints a picture of conflict as mostly problematic and standing in the way of execution and collaboration, rather than valuing its positive aspects and exploring how to utilize these. I argue that we need to recognize better that public administrators are the arbiters of many everyday conflicts about what it means to implement good policies and implement these in an optimal way. We need to provide administrators with a set of tools and ethics not only to get projects

done, but to also act as competent conflict arbiters. This may help them to take better advantage of conflicts as opportunities for democratic interaction with an engaged and creative public.

## **Future academic research**

What do these conclusions mean for further academic research? Which avenues of investigation seem promising, and what gaps in my current conclusions could future research address? The individual chapters 2-5 each contain separate conclusions that elaborate on what the findings presented in those chapters mean for the academic literature used for these chapters. I will not repeat these conclusions here. Rather, I would like to take a step back and reflect on the kind of questions that my dissertation as a whole invites further exploration of, or leaves unaddressed. These are bundled under three broad labels: governmental actors, citizens and institutions.

### **Policy conflict and governmental actors**

First of all, the research findings paint a picture of the governmental tendency to shy away from conflict rather than dealing with conflict head-on. This invites the question of how to understand those conflict-averse tendencies. One answer that my dissertation raises is that, both theoretically and practically, governmental success is seen to be equivalent to delivering output. Completing projects, then, signals success, while not completing them signals failure. Such unidimensional assessment of governmental performance makes it understandable that any hesitation or critique towards a policy is viewed as a threat by those responsible for said policy. It is for this reason that chapters 5 and 6 call for a reassessment of conflict and of the qualities that public administrators should exhibit when dealing with conflict.

Still, many questions remain or are triggered by these conclusions, and many of these point to the larger question of where these theories-in-use that governmental actors use to deal with conflict come from. I will put forth three possibilities that I believe are worthwhile to further investigate. Firstly, there are obvious similarities between the theories-in-use of policy-makers and academic theories of policy-making, as described in chapter 6. Is this a coincidence? Or are governmental actors indeed exposed to academic theories on good policy-making in the course of their careers and, if so, how and by whom? It also raises the question of possible differences between, for example, older generations and younger generations, who are more likely to have been exposed to more contemporary theories. Are there differences in attitudes towards conflict and do these result in different ways of handling it? A second possibility I see is that these theories-in-use come from learned experience and risk-averse behavior by public administrators. Something that I have not explored in depth is the difference in perspectives between politicians and public administrators on how to deal with public conflict. However, if public administrators are kept on a short leash by their political superiors, it seems more likely that they will exhibit risk-averse behavior and prefer to defuse conflict if possible. This is also backed by the conclusion

of chapter 5, where I show that there seems to have been little room for maneuver when it came to the Oosterweelconnection within the Antwerp administration. Not allowing conflict, however, only contributed to simmering resentment. The conclusions of chapter 5 furthermore state that public administrators from Antwerp were not alone in feeling like their hands were tied when it came to Oosterweel. Antwerp politicians, too, felt like they were tightly constrained when it came to the Oosterweelconnection. This was attributed to the high party discipline within the political parties they belonged to, which opens up a third possible explanation for conflict-averse behavior. If politicians are tightly bound to adhere to the party line, then the possibilities are limited for them to allow and engage in critical public deliberation on policies already decided on politically. Further investigating where theories-in-use come from, and the importance of contextual differences in political-administrative relations and in political party discipline, could help us to better reflect on these theories-in-use and perhaps improve them.

### **Policy conflict and citizens**

Secondly, the research findings paint a picture of a resisting public that felt marginalized by how governmental actors responded to their worries, and increased their resistance in response. I am aware that the picture painted is fairly optimistic, one of civic perseverance in the face of governmental unwillingness to concede. Again, I see three possibilities for more critically assessing the relationship between policy conflict and citizens.

As explained in chapter 4, this dissertation focuses on overt conflict (or, to follow our definition of conflict, “manifest beliefs”), which does not take into account the citizens who did not succeed in having their voices heard. It would, firstly, be interesting to further investigate how privileges feed into highly visible policy conflicts such as the Oosterweel conflict: are there citizens with strong feelings on the Oosterweelconnection that we simply did not hear from because they could not mobilize the same kind of capital to get their voices heard? When does this lead to privileged interests becoming in some way oppressive towards less privileged ones, e.g. by succeeding in getting an unwanted tram line relocated to a different part of town inhabited by citizens with a lower socio-economic status and less capability to put up a fight. What role should governmental actors play to counter such power imbalances between citizens? In other words, we have made a plea for public administrators to become competent conflict arbiters, but what does their responsibility to not privilege some interests over others mean for the types of skills and ethics they should possess? A second question on which my results invite further reflection is how privilege impacts the becoming of conflict in the first place. Are there conflicts that simply do not happen? After all, less privileged citizens may not be able to counter governmental unwillingness to take them seriously or they may not even bother to try due to alienation. We have seen that many of the mechanisms of escalation depended on the civic

ability and willingness (participating in the EIA, organizing a referendum) to engage with democratic institutions. Again, what does all this mean for the skill and ethics set of the competent administrative conflict arbiter? Thirdly, to what extent do dissidents within the government impact civic resistance? There were points in the Oosterweel conflict, particularly in the lead-up to the referendum, when actors from within the Antwerp government were resisting Oosterweel almost as fiercely as action groups were. How does the public administrator as conflict arbiter deal with the different factions within the government that might seek coalitions with critical citizens, or even try to instrumentalize civic resistance to get their way? Future researchers should think about the best way to go about answering the above questions: the field of social movement studies, and within this broad field the literatures on environmental justice (Schlosberg, 2007) and contentious politics (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007) in particular, might be good places to start.

### **Policy conflict and institutions**

Finally, all chapters highlight how important the institutions of policy-making are for the way in which policy conflicts play out. Whether it is the obligatory EIA that needed to be completed before construction on Oosterweel could start, or the possibility of organizing a referendum on the Oosterweelconnection, democratic institutions to a significant extent structured the conflict. While this dissertation points out their importance, such institutions are never really the focal point of its analysis. Future research should explore the extent to which institutions enable and constrain the possibilities for fostering the helpful aspects and negating the negative aspects of conflicts.

Firstly, all three theoretical mechanisms of escalation in the case of Oosterweel were clearly mediated by institutional processes. Evidence was important for the obligatory EIA. The EIA and other procedures impacted the time perspectives of governmental actors and their demands regarding the pace. And the responsibility policy-makers felt they had to defend the public interest, and the threat they saw from the resisting citizens, seems to have come partly from the fact that the project was not publicly presented until after the most important decisions had already been made. The fact that institutions mediate these escalation processes also offers the possibility to change these institutions for the better. Future research may explore different ways to deal with evidence in procedures such as the EIA, ways that further dialogue instead of inhibiting it. Mediation literature, in particular the literature on “joint fact-finding” (Karl, Herman, Susskind, & Wallace, 2007), may be a good place to start. On a related note, different institutions may be of different important depending on the issue in question. The EIA, for example, is only relevant for issues of spatial planning. It could be interesting the explore how different types of conflict activate different institutional environments and how these

environments mediate the conflict trajectory. Future research may also explore how to structure the planning process in a way that offers more flexibility to absorb conflict, so that governmental actors feel less obliged to push for haste, and offers more maneuvering room to change policies that are already decided on. Secondly, and related to my previous point, I think it would be worthwhile to investigate what we can learn from the management of High Reliability Organizations (HROs) (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2008) when thinking about how to structure megaproject decision-making. Like HROs, megaprojects must deal with an insecure environment (because they take a very long time to decide on and to implement) and the societal consequences (in terms of money, as well as human and environmental impact) are highly significant when they fail. The academic literature on HROs recommends building a large amount of redundancy into the decision-making procedures and to loosely couple various subsystems. In the case of Oosterweel, the reverse was true: the policy-process was efficiently planned and the project was decided on as part of a larger political deal made in 2000. I think it could be very interesting to further explore the extent to which megaprojects can be treated as HROs and what we can learn from HRO's when it comes to embedding redundancy and loose coupling in decision-making processes. I further elaborate on the benefits of redundancy and loose coupling in the section on policy implications.

Finally, future research should not only address restructuring existing institutions, but should also explore building new institutions to deal with conflict. Citizen participation is often invoked as the panacea to deal with civic critique. However, as chapter 6 describes, citizen participation does not necessarily allow for more conflict and can even function as a way to manipulate or coopt citizens. Are there ways to organize citizens' participation that allow and perhaps even invite conflict? The literature on citizen participation and collaborative governance (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015) may provide good places to start for exploring how participation interacts with conflict. Even if citizen participation succeeds in fostering conflict, there is never any guarantee that new conflict will not develop later on. The chance of new conflict emerging in the future seems particularly high when it comes to megaprojects, as these necessarily take a long time to plan and implement. Should we devise special procedures to mediate conflict in such cases? In the case of the Oosterweelconnection, at least, mediation has delivered successful results. If we want to somehow embed the possibility of mediation in our policy processes, when should these procedures be invoked and who should be able to invoke them? Conflict literature may offer insight on when and how to start mediation procedures (Susskind & Ozawa, 1984).

## **Policy practice**

Having discussed promising avenues for future research, let us move on to what my conclusions may indicate for policy practice. The first section of this chapter, which answered my research

question, ended with the expression of my hope that if administrators were better equipped to deal with conflict, they might come to view it as an opportunity instead of a problem. At the same time, I do not wish to seem naïve: of course there are many practical constraints against public administrators embracing public debate over contested policies. And this is assuming they would even want to do so. Nevertheless, I would still like to reflect on the lessons this dissertations might teach us for dealing better with policy conflict in practice. After all, if we improve on policy-making even slightly, this is better than improving nothing at all. It should be kept in mind that these lessons come from a thorough consideration of my findings, and should be taken as reflections rather than authoritative claims. Furthermore, this section borrows from the Dutch book that my advisor and I wrote on the lessons Oosterweel might teach us for decision-making in Flanders (E. Wolf & Van Dooren, 2017). Having reviewed some ways in which I think policy practice could be improved, I briefly reflect on how these lessons look through the prism of the recent de-escalation of the Oosterweelconnection conflict under the auspices of the intendant.

### **The problem with building public support**

One of the major conclusions of this dissertation is that policy-makers in the Oosterweel conflict were not very eager to engage with public debate, preferring disengagement if possible. This does not mean that policy-makers do not think at all about appeasing citizens. Indeed, tangible efforts were expended in the Oosterweel conflict towards appeasement. The “Staten-Generaal,” for example, organized in 2000 by the governor of the Antwerp province, was explicitly organized to gauge and further increase public support for the Oosterweelconnection. However, the very preoccupation with building public support (in Dutch: “maatschappelijk draagvlak”) is also symptomatic of the governmental intolerance towards public resistance. Behind the criteria that policies have public support lies the desire to execute policies unencumbered by resistance.

Of course, the criteria of public support can function as a heuristic for taking into account the opinions of the most important stakeholders in a policy process. Very often, however, particularly in cases of conflict, it seems to function not as a heuristic, but as a rhetorical device to delegitimize those that critique a policy. Certainly, in the Oosterweel policy process, the Staten-Generaal was referred to many times as providing “proof” for public support of the Oosterweelconnection. The public support claim is used not only by policy-makers. Both policy-makers and action groups asserted that they had public support, and faulted the other party for their glaring lack of it. The claim of public support thus functioned as a device that parties used to put their own opinions above those of others and rob them of legitimacy.

Indeed, when I asked in the interviews how one gauges whether they have public support, my question was usually met with silence. Both policy-makers and members of action groups had to

admit that there is ultimately no way to know whether a proposal has public support. Sometimes you think you have it, for example because you organized a meeting like the “Staten-Generaal.” However, just because those present at the meeting were supportive of a proposal does not mean that you have an accurate picture of how those not present think about a policy. And even those who seemed supportive may not actually have been as supportive as they appeared. Moreover, even if they were, even if they were not just supportive but highly enthusiastic, such feelings can wane slowly or quickly over time.

The idea of building “public support” suggests that policy-makers can manufacture some kind of stable foundation for policies. Not only can this not be done, as explained above, but we should not even *want* to do this. The desire to build public support often exposes itself as a method to avoid further discussion, in that it can be used as an excuse not to allow public deliberation later in the policy process. Policy-makers can claim that their proposal has the public support that counter-proposals lack and that they are therefore warranted to continue the planning process. In this way, public support often justifies avoidance of conflict.

The preoccupation with public support again reveals a mostly negative view of conflict, conflict as something that troubles the waters of good policies, instead of the more optimistic view of conflict that this dissertation defends. As my conclusions state, expending most of our energy on avoiding conflict rather embracing it does not make conflict go away and may feed the negative aspects of conflict at the expense of the positive ones. Are there other ways to think about how to deal with resistance that do not rely on a predominantly negative view towards conflict?

### **Justice as an alternative**

I propose that it might be a good idea for policy-makers to focus less on building public support and more on treating voices of resistance justly. This means that policies should both satisfy the demands of formal rules and laws (formal justice), and take into account civic feelings of having been treated fairly (informal justice). Formal justice is already a major concern of policy-makers, as disregarding formal justice amounts to rule-breaking, but informal justice seems less of an explicit policy concern. Striving to satisfy informal justice would mean that significant efforts are expended on trying to make sure that civic actors, as well as intra-governmental actors, feel that their concerns are taken seriously and that they are treated fairly.

Demands for informal justice do not seem to have been satisfied in the Oosterweel conflict. Action groups felt treated unjustly, because in their opinion their worries had at best not been taken seriously and at worst been an object of ridicule. But governmental actors, too, felt unjustly treated. Within the Antwerp administration, various actors felt as if they had been robbed of agency regarding the Oosterweelconnection. This in turn generated distrust towards the Flemish

government and the BAM, whose claims actors from the Antwerp administration often felt they had to double-check to verify their truth value. Even those that had been tasked with Oosterweel's execution felt unfairly treated as the conflict dragged on. One administrator, for example, told how she was verbally attacked at a public meeting by a group of protesters who had clearly gathered there with the explicit purpose of voicing their unhappiness. She, however, was only doing what she had been assigned to do by her political superiors. Such events too, trigger feelings of injustice, which may fuel further distrust towards civic resistance.

It would, in my view, be wise to take this affective dimension of justice into account better when making policies. After all, perceived injustice may not only be an initial source of conflict, but may also become an additional source that escalates conflict and fuels its destructive aspects by activating distrust. In the case of the Oosterweelconnection, conflict escalated and the distrust towards the policy process and between the parties increased as the conflict dragged on.

Moreover, feelings of injustice could lead to outcomes worse than angry citizens and policy-makers. If one feels treated unfairly over and over again, this may lead to disillusionment, and eventually alienation. If citizens feel unjustly treated by the institutions that they depend on to have their voices heard, they may eventually turn their back on these institutions altogether. If we want to profit from conflicts by taking advantage of the creative plans an engaged public brings to the table, we should fear the distrust and ultimate alienation that may be brought on by feelings of being treated unjustly.

### **Taking account of justice in policy-making**

Taking better account of informal justice in the policy process may help us reap the creative engagement that conflict can activate and prevent parties from becoming increasingly distrustful towards and alienated from the decision-making process. But what would taking better account of justice mean for the way in which we make policies? Here we may draw on the organizational justice literature (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Yee Ng, 2001), which distinguishes three types of informal justice: distributive (is the outcome of a conflict perceived as fair?); procedural (is the procedure that led to the outcome perceived as fair?) and interactional justice (were the interactions between parties perceived as fair?). Feelings of injustice can result from all three of these dimensions. I propose to translate these three types of justice into the policy domain. In the following section I argue that, in order to deal in more productive ways with resistance towards public policies, we need policies, procedures, and interactions that are just.

#### *Making just policies: a political debate on what constitutes a fair share*

It is generally accepted that for policies to be just, all of the members of a society should receive a fair share of their costs and benefits (Rawls, 1999). What exactly constitutes this fair share is

always a political question, settled through a political debate on how to divide scarce resources. The Oosterweelconnection, however, was often presented as a technical rather than a political choice. By presenting the choice for the Oosterweelconnection as purely technical, the project was set in stone early in the policy process and became difficult to argue with later on. Alternatives were claimed to be technically inferior to Oosterweel and hence irrational. Alternative proposals that claimed to distribute the costs and benefits more fairly were disregarded rather than absorbed into the policy debate. I have argued that this ultimately contributed to action groups gathering their own evidence, and research becoming a weapon for parties to attack the policy positions of the other parties. Research was not utilized as a tool to foster dialogue, but, on the contrary, ultimately hampered dialogue.

This is unfortunate because policy-making is fraught with complexity and insecurity. It is often not entirely clear up front what the costs and benefits of a planned policy will even be, let alone how best to divide these costs and benefits. In the case of devising infrastructure policies, for example, it is often far from clear whether mobility will truly improve by building new roads, or whether new roads will instead just attract more traffic. Nor is it always clear whether new roads will lead to more pollution, or whether smart technology can counter such effects. Likewise, it is difficult to know whether the planned budget will be sufficient to complete the project, and if not who will have to pay for the difference. To make wise policy choices we need all the knowledge and creative imagination we can get.

It is for this reason that technocratizing a policy decision is counter-productive. It inhibits the possibility to take advantage of policy critique to make policies that are as fair as possible. Instead of being disregarded, critique should be absorbed into the political, not technical, policy debate. And instead of setting one policy in stone very early on, we should keep open the option of choosing between different alternatives for as long as possible. This enables us to change a policy for the better in a world that is ever-changing. In the case of Oosterweel, the damaging effects of fine particles on the respiratory health of those living near highways became an issue of public concern only after 2005. This was long after Oosterweel had been decided on. It would, in my opinion, be a very unwise choice to simply disregard insights such as these because they arrive “too late,” particularly when construction has not even commenced yet.

I thus argue that we can make more just policies if we open up the political debate on the distribution of costs and benefits to public scrutiny early on, and keep open the room for maneuver for as long as possible. The opposite happened in Oosterweel: one solution was decided on very early in the process; public debate about the fair distribution of costs and benefits was avoided by making the problem a technocratic one. However, if we want to make policies

that place a high priority on justice by keeping options open for as long as possible, we need policy procedures that promote this. In other words, just policies need just policy procedures.

*Designing just procedures: transparent and open decision-making*

We have seen that, as the Oosterweel-conflict dragged on, civic critique was no longer merely aimed at the Oosterweel project, but also increasingly at the decision-making procedure. Different time perspectives led to different demands for structuring the policy process, and these demands further diverged as time went on. Policy-makers were afraid of delay, which they equated with failure. They therefore wanted to keep up the decision-making tempo. Those critical of Oosterweel felt that the project was being “shoved down their throats.” As action groups became more distrustful of the policy procedure, they increasingly started to resist these procedures instead of voicing their complaints within them.

If policy procedures are perceived as just, participants feel that decisions are reached in a fair way, regardless of what those decisions are. Feelings of being justly treated come not only from what the government does, but also from how it does this. Academic research demonstrates that people can accept outcomes of conflicts that are not in their favor as long as they feel that these decisions were made fairly (Colquitt et al., 2001; Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Tyler, 2000).

Just procedures may be promoted through transparency.<sup>1</sup> In the case of Oosterweel, many decisions were made away from the public eye, which did little to counter the perception that decisions were made arbitrarily. The pacing of decision-making, too, seemed arbitrary to Oosterweel critics and further heightened their suspicion, as did the outcomes of many of the procedures citizens used to voice their complaints, such as the EIA. In addition to transparency, openness to critique may also promote the feeling that decisions were reached justly. If those that voice their critique feel that their critique was taken into account, this may increase their faith in those decisions themselves. In Oosterweel we saw the opposite: for a long time, neither citizens nor critical actors from within the government felt that their worries were taken into account at all. Just policy-making procedures, then, are transparent and open towards actors both inside and outside of the government apparatus.

Time is often a factor that seems to inhibit transparency and openness. Those in charge of a policy may feel that their success is measured by their ability to implement a given policy quickly and efficiently. Being transparent about how and why you decide what you decide, and open to critique, may be seen to come at the expense of finishing a project quickly and inexpensively. However, as Oosterweel demonstrates, once actors become distrustful of the policy procedure and start to resist it, time and money are also adversely impacted.

Still, it would be wise to think about how to organize time so that rather than inhibiting them, it may instead promote procedures that are sufficiently transparent and open. One way to do this could be to design procedures that have high redundancy and little tight coupling, particularly in the case of projects as risky and impactful as the Oosterweelconnection. If procedures are planned less efficiently, governmental actors may feel less constrained by deadlines and tight budgets. Redundancy makes it easier to react to a changing environment, and may therefore encourage public administrators to allow further debate about contested policies. Without deadlines breathing down their necks, policy-makers may be more willing and able to ensure that the participants in a policy debate trust that decisions were not reached arbitrarily. Loose coupling may also improve the ability to react to changing environments. If different parts of one project are tightly coupled it is very hard to change some parts of it without endangering the whole project. This may decrease the willingness of policy-makers to change anything at all. In the Oosterweel project, contestation focused on only a small part of the bigger project. However, as long as this one part remained contested, the rest of the project had to stay on hold.

Procedures with high redundancy and loose coupling may conflict with the demands of the public private partnerships (PPPs) through which infrastructure is often planned and built. PPPs require that public and private parties enter into a contract early on in the policy process, a contract from which it is hard to diverge later on. The fact that contracts had already been signed was one of the arguments used by governmental actors to argue against any alterations to the Oosterweelconnection. PPP contracts, moreover, usually do not allow for much transparency or public scrutiny due to the commercial confidentiality of private firms. As the PPP often seems to impair transparency and openness, one could question whether the PPP format is really suited to plan and construct high-risk and high-impact projects such as Oosterweel.

*Engaging in just interactions: learning how to wage conflicts*

Just policies build on just policy procedures that include transparency and openness. Procedures in and of themselves, however, accomplish nothing. It is the people in these procedures that must ultimately make the difference. They must want to treat the other parties justly. And these other parties must feel like they are being treated justly. The degree to which people feel justly treated on a personal level during interactions with others determines the degree of interactional justice. As Oosterweel has demonstrated, feeling unjustly treated on a personal level can significantly impact future interactions.

Action group members can feel ridiculed when they speak in parliament and see politicians rolling their eyes. Public administrators can feel threatened if citizens verbally attack them during public meetings. In the course of the Oosterweel conflict, the conflict itself turned increasingly relational. Governmental actors became convinced of the selfish intentions of a vocal minority,

while action groups saw policy-makers as fraudulent and devious, out to push through Oosterweel no matter the costs. It seems important not only for governmental and civic actors to be mindful of treating the other fairly: during the Oosterweel decision-making process, intra-governmental relations were plagued by distrust as well. In these interactions, too, it is important that actors not feel personally ridiculed, attacked or marginalized, but feel like they are treated justly on a person-to-person level.

At the same time, because of the very fact that governmental actors and citizens do not interact with each other as frequently as intra-governmental actors do, it may be particularly worrisome if feelings of injustice permeate these former interactions. If a citizen interacts with a policy-maker, that policy-maker at that moment represents the whole apparatus of government to the citizen in question. As personal contact with a policy-maker is rare for many citizens, feeling unjustly treated in that interaction can severely impact how citizens judge their governments. The reverse is, of course, also true: a bad experience of a well-meaning administrator with an angry citizen may also contribute to a negative judgment of protesters in general.

The promotion of just interactions depends on skills such as listening and reflectivity. If administrators become better arbiters of conflict, which I argue for in chapter 6, they may also become better equipped to promote just interactions. Advancing interactions that prioritize justice also demands that policy-makers respond appropriately to the emotions that are part and parcel of the engagement elicited by conflicts. Citizens may be sad or angry when they are confronted with policies that they fear, and they have every right to be. It is up to policy-makers to advance the skills necessary to reap the benefits of engagement, preferably without leaving citizens distrustful of or alienated towards the government. If policy-makers become better at waging conflicts, citizens may feel more justly treated in their interactions with them. Moreover, policy-makers may feel more confident themselves in facing critical citizens, and less personally affronted if an interaction turns sour despite their best efforts.

#### *The pyramid of just policy-making*

The three dimensions of just policy-making build on each other. Together, they form what can be likened to a pyramid. Decent relationships and interactions between the people that participate in policy-making make up the foundation of the pyramid. Just procedures, in turn, build on just interactions. Procedures designed to promote transparency and openness are likely to accomplish very little if the actors in these procedures treat each other as enemies. Just policies, the top of the pyramid, build on just procedures. If the interactions and procedures of policy-making are seen as just, a fair debate on the distribution of costs and benefits is promoted. Moreover, the outcome of that debate is more likely to be accepted.

### **Justice under the auspice of the intendant**

In 2015, the Flemish government found itself in something of a predicament. It had backed the proposal of the action group Ringland to tunnel the existing ring road. However, it had also stressed that any proposal to tunnel Antwerp's ring road needed to be combined with the construction of the Oosterweelconnection. What combining the two would look like in practice, however, and whether it was even feasible to combine the two, remained entirely unclear. The government decided to appoint Alexander D'Hooge, a Flemish professor of architecture who had taught courses at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, as a so-called "intendant" (in Dutch: "overkappingsintendant"). His task was to bring all of the relevant parties, inside and outside of the government, together in order to devise a solution to the Oosterweel impasse that would satisfy all the various demands.

The very title of intendant comes with many connotations in Flanders. It is a term usually reserved for the cultural sector, where an intendant determines the creative direction an art center should follow, without being an artist herself. Similarly, the intendant in the case of Oosterweel was tasked with acting as a neutral mediator, who also had the ability to construct a creative vision of urban development. On 15 March 2017 the parties (action group members and actors from the Flemish and Antwerp governments) reached and publicly signed an agreement on how to continue the Oosterweel policy process.

What happened here? Do some of the lessons presented in the previous section apply to the process initiated by the intendant? In the following section I briefly reflect on how the process of conflict de-escalation initiated by the appointment of D'Hooge as intendant corresponds to the demands of just policy-making. This reflection is based on the information on that process as it was covered in the media.

#### *Engaging in just interactions*

D'Hooge saw it as his task to "spread the love" (Moens, 2017). In his eyes, all the parties to the conflict were heroes. After all, each of them had put years of effort into trying to accomplish what they felt would be best for Antwerp. Forming decent relations between parties was a priority from the very start of the negotiation process. In interviews, D'Hooge explained how great the personal distrust was that parties initially felt towards each other; distrust which took significant time to diminish. Great strides had to be taken to get the parties to truly trust that they were talking to each other in a safe space, a space in which they need not fear expressing their opinions honestly, even when those opinions conflicted with the opinions of those they represented.

Personal hostilities did not suddenly disappear. When the draft of a study from the Ringland action group was leaked to the press in September 2016, the personal trust that had painstakingly been developed over the previous months took a hit. “We are so sick of this,” the action groups Straten-Generaal and Ademloos stated publicly. “In June we felt that, after many years, we had finally succeeded in creating a new, more open, culture. But this leak inflicts a lot of damage on that process. It represents a major step backwards” (Molenaar, 2016). The negotiations, however, were able to overcome the leak and move forward. If personal relationships between people improve, they also become more resilient. Good intentions become visible again, and not every disappointment is immediately met with increased animosity.

#### *Designing just procedures*

Decent relationships are a start. However, procedures also have to allow for some flexibility to discuss policy options. The room for maneuver was tightly restricted at the beginning of the negotiation process. The Flemish government stressed that the trajectory of the Oosterweelconnection was non-negotiable. A change of trajectory, however, was what action groups demanded. Nevertheless, the action groups decided to participate in the process. A proposal presented by D’Hooge in November 2016 was met with little enthusiasm by the action groups. This proposal, in their eyes, still maintained the most problematic aspects of the Oosterweel trajectory. They lamented the lack of flexibility: “We note that the intendant is still determined to stick to the decision made by the Flemish government. Our trajectory is still not treated fairly” (De Boeck, 2016). If they could not even hold a dialogue on the trajectory choice, the action groups feared that the negotiations were doomed to fail.

In January 2017 the context changed fundamentally. The auditors of the Council of State, which the action groups had appealed to because they felt that the EIA had treated their proposal unfairly, voiced a substantial critique of the EIA. If the Council of State followed the advice of the auditors, which it usually does, the EIA would have to be redone, meaning years of additional delay. The action groups took advantage of their strengthened position in the negotiations. They promised that if an agreement were reached, they would retract their appeal to the Council of State. Meanwhile, the action groups had also gathered enough signatures to hold a new referendum on the Oosterweelconnection if necessary. These developments changed the work of the intendant in two ways: he was now allowed to open up the dialogue on the trajectory choice and he was faced with a clear deadline, as the Council of State was expected to reach a decision in the spring of 2017. With renewed flexibility, combined with the pressure of a deadline that was now important to *all* the parties in the process (and thus amounts to an alignment of time perspectives), negotiations progressed quickly.

### *Making just policies*

Decent personal relations and trusted procedures allow parties to have a fundamental discussion on what constitutes a fair distribution of costs and benefits. On March 15, action group members and governmental actors together presented their agreement. To spare the inner city of Antwerp, the Oosterweel highway was downgraded to a road for local traffic only. 1.25 billion euros was reserved for tunneling the Antwerp ring road. Straten-Generaal retracted its appeal to the Council of State. Some points of discussions remained, but the contours of the agreement were met with enthusiasm, both from the negotiating parties themselves and from public opinion more generally.

Ever since the Oosterweel parties presented their agreement in the spring of 2017, various pleas have been made to make more frequent use of intendants when faced with policy issues that are resistant to settlement. The call for intendants demonstrates the desire to introduce new people and more flexibility into policy impasses that seem intractable. However, we must remember that significant flexibility seems to have been allowed only after action groups were able to put pressure on the Flemish government. Flexibility is thus not a given: it does not magically appear when a new face is appointed as intendant, but has to be explicitly organized and allowed. Had the action groups not been able to appeal to the Council of State, the trajectory choice might still be non-negotiable, and the policy impasse ongoing. The plans by the Flemish government to curtail the ability of citizens to appeal to the Council of State may be worrisome in this respect.

### **Final thoughts**

I hope that the four years I have spent researching the Oosterweel conflict have resulted in a dissertation that paints a vivid picture of the many meanings Oosterweel has come to hold, the amount of energy Oosterweel has activated (and absorbed) and the real emotions Oosterweel has stirred (positive and negative) on all sides of the conflict. It would be a pity, in my opinion, if one of the biggest public projects in the recent history of Flemish decision-making were remembered only in terms of failure, as something best forgotten as quickly as possible. This would make us blind to the many good things Oosterweel has also brought about, and would impede learning from the events that occurred.

My hope is that this dissertation might also have taught the reader something about dealing productively with policy conflict more generally. We are currently living at a time when our societies seem highly divided over issues that are certainly not restricted to infrastructure planning. Whether the issue at stake is that of migration, integration, labor market reform or climate change, to name just a few, many of our most urgent policy issues seem more complex than ever. And the cleavages between the different visions of how to tackle these issues sometimes appear so deep that they may seem almost unbridgeable. The question of how to deal

productively with conflict, without ignoring or silencing those that hold a different opinion, thus seems pressing. Hopefully, this dissertation has inspired the reader to reflect on how policy-making can engage with and take advantage of resistance, whenever possible, instead of further alienating those that we do not understand and those that do not understand us. And make them a part of the never-ending effort to strengthen our democracies instead of condemning them as democracy's enemies.

---

<sup>i</sup> I am aware that there is a large academic literature on the concepts of transparency. Here, however, my goal is not to plead for transparency in the academic-conceptual sense, but in its commonsense everyday usage of being transparent about how decisions were reached.

# References

2016: Feiten en cijfers. (2016). Cijferboekje 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.portofantwerp.com/nl/publications/brochures-kaarten/cijferboekje-2015>

Adam, B. (1990). *Time and social theory*. Cambridge: Polity press.

Adam, B. (2008). Of Timescapes, futurescapes, & timeprints. In Paper presented at Lüneburg University (pp. 1–9). Retrieved from [http://131.251.0.86/socsi/resources/Lueneburg Talk web 070708.pdf](http://131.251.0.86/socsi/resources/Lueneburg%20Talk%20web%20070708.pdf)

Arkes, H. R., & Blumer, C. (1985). The psychology of sunk cost. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 35(1), 124–140. [http://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978\(85\)90049-4](http://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(85)90049-4)

Arthur, W. B. (1989). Competing technologies, increasing returns, and lock-in by historical events. *The Economic Journal*, 99(394), 116–131.

Bateson, G. (1987). A theory of play and fantasy. In G. Bateson (Ed.), *Steps to an ecology of mind: Collected essays in anthropology, psychiatry, evolution, and epistemology* (Original work, pp. 183–198). Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc.

Behagel, J. H., & Arts, B. (2014). Democratic governance and political rationalities in the implementation of the water framework directive in the Netherlands. *Public Administration*, 92(2), 291–306. <http://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12059>

Benington, J., & Moore, M. H. (2011). Public value in complex and changing times. In J. Benington & M. H. Moore (Eds.), *Public value: Theory and practice* (pp. 1–30). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Beveridge, R., & Naumann, M. (2014). Global norms, local contestation: Privatisation and de/politicisation in Berlin. *Policy and Politics*, 42(2), 275–291. <http://doi.org/10.1332/030557312X655918>

Bevir, M. (2004). Interpreting British governance. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 6, 130–136.

Bevir, M. (2006). How narratives explain. In D. Yanow & P. Schwartz-Sea (Eds.), *Interpretation and method: Empirical research methods and the interpretive turn* (pp. 281–290). New York: ME Sharpe.

- Boswell, J. (2014). "Hoisted with our own petard": evidence and democratic deliberation on obesity. *Policy Sciences*, 47(4), 345–365. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-014-9195-4>
- Bressers, N., van Twist, M., & ten Heuvelhof, E. (2013). Exploring the temporal dimension in policy evaluation studies. *Policy Sciences*, 46(1), 23–37. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-012-9169-3>
- Brillouet, W. (2014, February 12). Regering moet kiezen: mobiliteit vs leefbaarheid. *Gazet van Antwerpen*, p. 16.
- Brinckman, B. (2009). Unanimiteit helemaal aan scherven. *De Standaard*, p. 7.
- Broto, V. C. (2013). Symbolic violence and the politics of environmental pollution science: The case of coal ash pollution in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Antipode*, 45(3), 621–640. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2012.01059.x>
- Brummans, B. H. J. M., Putnam, L. L., Gray, B., Hanke, R., Lewicki, R. J., & Wiethoff, C. (2008). Making sense of intractable multiparty conflict: A study of framing in four environmental disputes. *Communication Monographs*, 75(1), 25–51. <http://doi.org/10.1080/03637750801952735>
- Burdick, J. (2017). The role of coercion in collaboration. In L. Kriesberg & C. Gerard (Eds.), *Better or worse Relations: Essays in conflict and collaboration*. Routledge.
- Burnham, P. (2001). New Labour and the politics of depoliticisation. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 3(2), 127–149. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0261018306059769>
- Burnham, P. (2014). Depoliticisation: Economic crisis and political management. *Policy and Politics*, 42(2), 189–206. <http://doi.org/10.1332/030557312X655954>
- Burningham, K. (2000). Using the Language of NIMBY: A topic for research, not an activity for researchers. *Local Environment*, 5(1), 55–67. <http://doi.org/10.1080/135498300113264>
- Campbell, J. L. (1998). Institutional Analysis and the Role of Ideas in Political Economy. *Theory and Society*, 27(3), 377–409. <http://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006871114987>
- Cantarelli, C. C., Flyvbjerg, B., van Wee, B., & Molin, E. J. E. (2010). Lock-in and its influence on the project performance of large-scale transportation infrastructure projects: Investigating the way in which lock-in can emerge and affect cost overruns. *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, 37(5), 792–807. <http://doi.org/10.1068/b36017>

- Carnevale, P. J. (2006). Creativity in the outcomes of conflict. In D. Morton, P. T. Coleman, & E. C. Marcus (Eds.), *The handbook of conflict resolution* (pp. 414–435). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Claeys, M. (2005, September 7). Schuif de Oosterweelbrug dan noordwaarts. *De Standaard*, p. 36.
- Claeys, M. (2013). *Stilstand. Over machtspolitiek, betweterbestuur en achterkamerdemocratie*. Leuven: Uitgeverij Van Halewyck.
- Colquitt, J. A., Conlon, D. E., Wesson, M. J., Porter, C. O., & Ng, K. Y. (2001). Justice at the millennium: a meta-analytic review of 25 years of organizational justice research. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86(3), 425–45. <http://doi.org/10.1037//0021-9010.86.3.425>
- Contributors, O. (2016). Openstraatmap. Retrieved March 17, 2016, from <http://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=5/51.500/-0.100>
- Coppens, T. (2011). Conflict and conflict management in strategic urban projects. Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.
- Coppens, T. (2014). How to turn a planning conflict into a planning success? Conditions for constructive conflict management in the case of Ruggeveld-Boterlaar-Silsburg in Antwerp, Belgium. *Planning Practice and Research*, 29(1), 96–111. <http://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2013.872912>
- Coser, L. A. (ed. . (1956). *The function of social conflict* (Vol 9). Routledge.
- Cuppen, E. (2011). Diversity and constructive conflict in stakeholder dialogue: considerations for design and methods. *Policy Sciences*, 45(1), 23–46. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-011-9141-7>
- Dahl, A., & Soss, J. (2014). Neoliberalism for the common good? Public value governance and the downsizing of democracy. *Public Administration Review*, 74(4), 496–504. <http://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12191>
- Davies, J. S. (2007). The limits of partnership: An exit-action strategy for local democratic inclusion. *Political Studies*, 55(4), 779–800.
- Davies, J. S. (2009). The limits of joined-up government: Towards a political analysis. *Public Administration*, 87(1), 80–96. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9299.2008.01740.x>
- De Baere, M. (2009, March 7). Hoe de Lange Wapper crashte aan een keukentafel in Borgerhout. *De Morgen*, p. 26.

- De Boeck, A. (2016, November 15). Nieuw Oosterweel-plan van 9 miljard krijgt onvoldoende. *De Morgen*. Retrieved from <https://www.demorgen.be/binnenland/nieuw-oosterweel-plan-van-9-miljard-krijgt-onvoldoende-bdf1a281/>
- Demeester-De meyer, W. (2009, October 16). Wivina Demeester vindt dat Oosterweel past bij een ambitieuze stad. *De Morgen*, p. 26.
- Denhardt, R. B., & Denhardt, J. V. (2000). The New Public Service: Serving rather than steering. *Public Administration Review*, 60(6), 549–559.
- Deutsch, M. (2011). Cooperation and competition. In P. T. Coleman (Ed.), *Conflict, interdependence and justice: The intellectual legacy of Morton Deutsch* (pp. 23–40). Springer Science + Business Media.
- Dewulf, A., Craps, M., & Dercon, G. (2004). How issues get framed and reframed when different communities meet: a multi-level analysis of a collaborative soil conservation initiative in the Ecuadorian Andes. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 14(3), 177–192. <http://doi.org/10.1002/casp.772>
- Dewulf, A., Gray, B., Putnam, L., Lewicki, R., Aarts, N., Bouwen, R., & van Woerkum, C. (2009). Disentangling approaches to framing in conflict and negotiation research: A meta-paradigmatic perspective. *Human Relations* (Vol. 62). <http://doi.org/10.1177/0018726708100356>
- DiAlto, S. J. (2005). From “problem minority” to “model minority”: The changing social construction of Japanese Americans. In A. L. Schneider & H. M. Ingram (Eds.), *Deserving and entitled: Social constructions and public policy* (pp. 81–103). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Diefenbach, T. (2007). The managerialistic ideology of organisational change management. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 20(1), 126–144. <http://doi.org/10.1108/09534810710715324>
- Diefenbach, T. (2009). New public management in public sector organizations: The dark sides of managerialistic “enlightenment.” *Public Administration*, 87(4), 892–909. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9299.2009.01766.x>
- Donovan, M. C. (1993). Social Constructions of People with AIDS: Target Populations and United States Policy, 1981–1990. *Policy Studies Review*, 12(3/4), 3–29. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-1338.1993.tb00548.x>

- Donovan, M. C. (1997). The problem with making AIDS comfortable. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 32(3–4), 115–144. [http://doi.org/10.1300/J082v32n03\\_05](http://doi.org/10.1300/J082v32n03_05)
- Durnova, A. (2013). A tale of “fat cats” and “stupid activists”: Contested values, governance and reflexivity in the Brno railway station controversy. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, (October 2013), 1–17. <http://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2013.829749>
- Edelman, M. (1977). *Political language: Words that succeed and policies that fail*. New York: Academic press.
- Eeten, M. J. G. van. (2001). Recasting intractable issues: The Wider implications of the Netherlands Civil Aviation Controversy. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 20(3), 391–414.
- Eeten, M. Van, & Roe, E. (2000). When fiction conveys truth and authority. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 66(1), 58–67. <http://doi.org/10.1080/01944360008976084>
- Elliott, M. (2003). Risk perception frames in environmental decision making. *Environmental Practice*, 5(3), 214–222. <http://doi.org/10.1017/S1466046603035609>
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>
- Eriksson, K. (2012). Self-service society: Participative politics and new forms of governance. *Public Administration*, 90(3), 685–698. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9299.2011.01996.x>
- Eshuis, J., & van Buuren, A. (2014). Innovations in water governance: The importance of time. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 80(2), 401–420. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0020852313514518>
- Falter, R. (2005, September 24). Diesel over de dokken. *De Tijd*, p. 13.
- Fay, B. (1996). *Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science*. Blackwell.
- Fischer, F. (2000). *Citizens, experts, and the environment: The politics of local knowledge*. Duke University Press.
- Fischer, F. (2003). *Reframing public policy: Discursive politics and deliberative practices*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Flinders, M., & Buller, J. (2006). Depoliticisation: principles, tactics and tools. *British Politics*, 1, 293–318. <http://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bp.4200016>

Flyvbjerg, B. (1998). *Rationality and power: Democracy in practice*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2004). Phronetic planning research: theoretical and methodological reflections. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 5(3), 283–306. <http://doi.org/10.1080/1464935042000250195>

Flyvbjerg, B. (2008). Curbing optimism bias and strategic misrepresentation in planning: Reference Class Forecasting in practice. *European Planning Studies*, 16(1), 3–21. <http://doi.org/10.1080/09654310701747936>

Flyvbjerg, B. (2009). Optimism and misrepresentation in early project development. In T. Williams, K. Sunnevag, & K. Samset (Eds.), *Making essential choices with scant information* (pp. 147–168). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2014a). What you should know about megaprojects and why : An overview. *Project Management Journal*, 45(2), 6–19. <http://doi.org/10.1002/pmj>

Flyvbjerg, B. (ed. . (2014b). *Megaproject planning and management: essential readings*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.

Forester, J. (2009). *Dealing with differences. Dramas of mediating public disputes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Frame, B. (2008). “Wicked”, “messy”, and “clumsy”: Long-term frameworks for sustainability. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 26(6), 1113–1128. <http://doi.org/10.1068/c0790s>

Gamble, A. (2000). *Politics and fate*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Glasl, F. (1982). The process of conflict escalation and the role of third parties. In G. B. J. Bomers & R. B. Peterson (Eds.), *Conflict management and industrial relations* (pp. 119–140). Dordrecht: Springer Science + Business Media.

Goetz, K. H. (2014). Time and power in the European Commission. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 80, 577–596. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0020852314543436>

Goetz, K. H., & Meyer-Sahling, J.-H. (2009). Political time in the EU: Dimensions, perspectives, theories. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 16(2), 180–201. <http://doi.org/10.1080/13501760802589198>

Goffman, E. (1986). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Goodnow, F. J. (1900). *Politics and administration: A study in government*. New York: Mac Millan.

Gottweis, H. (ed. . (2007). Rhetoric in policy making: Between logos, ethos, and pathos. In F. Fischer, G. J. Miller, & M. S. Sidney (Eds.), *Handbook of public policy analysis: theory, politics, and methods* (pp. 237–250). Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.

Goyvaerts, P. (2014, February 17). No Title. *Gazet van Antwerpen*, p. 35.

Graham, S., & Healey, P. (1999). Relational concepts of space and place: Issues for planning theory and practice. *European Planning Studies*, 7(5), 623–646. <http://doi.org/10.1080/09654319908720542>

Gray, A., & Jenkins, B. (1995). From public administration to public management: Reassessing a revolution? *Public Administration*, 73(1), 75–99. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9299.1995.tb00818.x>

Gray, B. (2003). Framing of environmental disputes. In R. J. Lewicki, B. Gray, & M. Elliott (Eds.), *Making sense of intractable environmental conflicts* (pp. 11–34). Washington: Island Press.

Gusfield, J. R. (1981). *The culture of public problems: Drinking-driving and the symbolic order*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Hajer, M. (2003). A frame in the fields: Policy making and the reinvention of politics. In *Deliberative Policy Analysis: Understanding governance in the network society* (pp. 88–110). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hajer, M. A. (2005). Coalitions, practices, and meaning in environmental politics: From acid rain to BSE. In D. Howarth & J. Torfing (Eds.), *Discourse theory in European politics* (pp. 297–315). Basingstoke: Palgrave macmillan.

Hall, P. (1982). *Great planning disasters*. Berkely: University of California Press.

Hall, P., & Taylor, R. (1996). Political science and the three new institutionalisms. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=c49290e1-f7be-480f-ab4a-5356722cc458@sessionmgr4001&vid=2&hid=4112>

Hartley, J., Alford, J., Hughes, O., & Yates, S. (2015). Public value and political astuteness in the work of public managers: The art of the possible. *Public Administration*, 93(1), 195–211. <http://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12125>

Harvey, D. (1996). *Justice, nature & the geography of difference*. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Inc.

Haverland, M., & Yanow, D. (2012). A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Public Administration Research Universe: Surviving Conversations on Methodologies and Methods. *Public Administration Review*, 72(3), 401–408. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2011.02524.x>

Hay, C. (2007). *Why we hate politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hay, C. (2014). Depoliticisation as process, governance as practice: What did the “first wave” get wrong and do we need a “second wave” to put it right? *Policy and Politics*, 42(2), 293–311. <http://doi.org/10.1332/030557314X13959960668217>

Hay, C., & Stoker, G. (2009). Revitalising Politics: Have We Lost the Plot? *Representation*, 45(3), 225–236. <http://doi.org/10.1080/00344890903129681>

Healey, P. (2004). The treatment of space and place in the new strategic spatial planning in Europe. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 28(April 2002), 45–67. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.0309-1317.2004.00502.x>

Healey, P. (2007). *Urban complexity and spatial strategies. Towards a relational planning for our times*. Oxon: Routledge.

Hendriks, G. (2010, October 4). Burgeroorlog om nieuw station Stuttgart. [Www.nos.nl](http://www.nos.nl). Retrieved from <http://nos.nl/artikel/189170-burgeroorlog-om-nieuw-station-stuttgart.html>

Hisschemöller, M., & Hoppe, R. (1995). Coping with intractable controversies: The case for problem structuring in policy design and analysis. *Knowledge and Policy*, 8(4), 40–60.

Hood, C. (1991). A public management for all seasons? *Public Administration*, 69, 3–19.

Hudson, R. B., & Gonyea, J. G. (2012). Baby Boomers and the shifting political construction of old age. *Gerontologist*, 52(2), 272–282. <http://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnr129>

Ingram, H., & Schneider, A. L. (2006). Policy analysis for democracy. In M. Moran, M. Rein, & R. E. Goodin (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of public accountability public policy* (pp. 169–188). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ingram, H., & Schneider, A. L. (2015). Making distinctions: The social construction of target populations. In F. Fischer, D. Torgerson, A. Durnova, & M. Orsini (Eds.), *Handbook of critical policy studies* (pp. 259–273). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

- Jenkins, L. (2011). The Difference Genealogy Makes: Strategies for Politicisation or How to Extend Capacities for Autonomy. *Political Studies*, 59(1), 156–174. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2010.00844.x>
- Kahneman, D. (2011). The outside view. In *Thinking, fast and slow* (pp. 245–254). New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Kahneman, D., & Lovallo, D. (1993). Timid choices and bold forecasts: A cognitive perspective on risk taking. *Management Science*, 39(1), 17–31.
- Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (1979). Prospect theory: An analysis of decision under risk. *Econometrica*. <http://doi.org/10.2307/1914185>
- Karl, Herman, A., Susskind, L. E., & Wallace, K. H. (2007). A dialogue not a diatribe. *Environment*, 49(1), 20–34.
- Keane, J. (2009). *The life and death of democracy*. London: Simon & Schuster.
- Keck, M. E., & Sikkink, K. (1999). Transnational advocacy networks in international and regional politics. *International Social Science Journal*, 51(159), 89–101. <http://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2451.00179>
- Kirkebøen, G. (2009). Decision behaviour-improving expert judgement. In T. Williams, K. Sunnevag, & K. Samset (Eds.), *Making essential choices with scant information* (pp. 169–194). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Klijin, E., & Skelcher, C. (2008). Democracy and governance networks: compatible or not? Four conjectures and their implications for theory and practice. *Public Administration*, 85(3), 587–608.
- Krasner, S. D. (1988). Sovereignty an institutional perspective. *Comparative Political Studies*, 21(1), 66–94.
- Kriesberg, L. (2017). Improving social relationships. In L. Kriesberg & C. Gerard (Eds.), *Better or worse relations: Essays in conflict and collaboration*. Routledge.
- Kriesberg, L., & Dayton, B. W. (2017). *Constructive conflicts: From escalation to resolution*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Kurtz, H. E. (2003). Scale frames and counter-scale frames: Constructing the problem of environmental injustice. *Political Geography*, 22(8), 887–916. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2003.09.001>

- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lan, Z. (1997). A conflict resolution approach to public administration. *Public Administration Review*, 57(1), 27–35.
- Laswell, H. (1936). *Politics: Who gets what, when, how*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Laws, D., & Forester, J. (2007). Learning in Practice: Public Policy Mediation. *Critical Policy Analysis*, 1(4), 342–370. <http://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2007.9518526>
- Laws, D., Hogendoorn, D., & Karl, H. (2014). Hot adaptation: What conflict can contribute to collaborative natural resource management. *Ecology and Society*, 19(2). <http://doi.org/10.5751/ES-06375-190239>
- Laws, D., & Rein, M. (2003). Reframing practice. In M. A. Hajer & H. Wagenaar (Eds.), *Deliberative Policy Analysis. Understanding governance in the network society*. Cambridge University Press.
- Leijssen, W. (2009, March 5). *Tijd. De Morgen*, p. 22.
- Lenferink, S., Tillema, T., & Arts, J. (2013). Towards sustainable infrastructure development through integrated contracts: Experiences with inclusiveness in Dutch infrastructure projects. *International Journal of Project Management*, 31(4), 615–627. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2012.09.014>
- Lieshout, M. Van, Dewulf, A., Aarts, N., & Termeer, C. (2011). Do scale frames matter? Scale frame mismatches in the decision making process of a “mega farm” in a small Dutch village. *Ecology and Society*, 16(1).
- Lipsky, M. (1980). *Street-level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- Lipsky, M. (1980). Street level bureaucracy: dilemmas of the individual in public service.
- Lodge, M., & Wegrich, K. (2012). Public administration and executive politics: perennial questions in changing contexts. *Public Policy and Administration*, 27(3), 212–229. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0952076712438724>
- Mahoney, J. (2000). Path dependence in Historical Sociology. *Theory and Society*, 29(4), 507–548.

- McAvoy, G. E. (1998). Partisan probing and democratic decisionmaking: Rethinking the Nimby Syndrome. *Policy Studies Journal*, 26(2), 274–292. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0072.1998.tb01899.x>
- McClymont, K. (2011). Revitalising the political: Development control and agonism in planning practice. *Planning Theory*, 10(3), 239–256. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1473095211399398>
- Metze, T. (2014). Fracking the debate: frame shifts and boundary work in Dutch decision making on shale gas. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, (March 2015), 37–41. <http://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2014.941462>
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, M. A. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis. An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Moens, B. (2017, June 4). M/V van de week Alexander D’Hooge. *De Tijd*, p. 2.
- Molenaar, L. (2016, September 10). Actiegroepen furieus: “We zijn het beu na dit lek over Ringland.” *Nieuwsblad*. Retrieved from [http://www.nieuwsblad.be/cnt/dmf20160910\\_02462526](http://www.nieuwsblad.be/cnt/dmf20160910_02462526)
- Mondou, M., & Montpetit, É. (2010). Policy styles and degenerative politics: Poverty policy designs in newfoundland and quebec. *Policy Studies Journal*, 38(4), 703–722. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0072.2010.00380.x>
- Moolenaar, L. (2014, May 10). ”Dit is de sleutel naar een oplossing”. *Gazet van Antwerpen*, p. 3.
- Moran, L., & Rau, H. (2014). Mapping divergent concepts of sustainability: Lay knowledge, local practices and environmental governance. *Local Environment*, 9839(October), 1–17. <http://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2014.963838>
- Morris, P. W. G., & Hough, G. H. (1987). *The anatomy of major projects: A study of the reality of project management*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- Mouffe, C. (2000). *Deliberative democracy or agonistic pluralism*. IHS Political Science Series, 72.
- Mouffe, C. (2009). *The Democratic Paradox*. London: Verso.
- Nabatchi, T., & Leighninger, M. (2015). *Public participation for the 21st century democracy*. New Jersey: Jossey-Bass.

- Nakamura, R. T. (1987). The textbook policy process and implementation research. *Policy Studies Review*, 7(1), 142–154. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-1338.1987.tb00034.x>
- Nedlund, A., & Garpenby, P. (2014). Puzzling about problems: The ambiguous search for an evidence-based strategy for handling influx of health technology. *Policy Sciences*, 47(4), 367–386. <http://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11077-014-9198-1>
- Novy, J., & Peters, D. (2012). Railway station mega-projects as public controversies: The case of Stuttgart 21. *Built Environment*, 38(1), 128–145.
- Nowlin, M. C. (2011). Theories of the Policy Process : State of the Research and. *Policy Studies Journal*, 39(S1), 41–60. [http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0072.2010.00389\\_4.x](http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0072.2010.00389_4.x)
- Nowotny, H. (1996). *Time: The modern and postmodern experience*. Polity Press.
- O’Toole, L. J., & Meier, K. J. (2004). Desperately Seeking Selznick: Cooptation and the Dark Side of Public Management in Networks. *Public Administration Review*, 64(6), 681–693. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2004.00415.x>
- Ostaijen, M. van. (2017). *Worlds between words*. Erasmus University Rotterdam.
- Pellizzoni, L. (2011). The politics of facts: Local environmental conflicts and expertise. *Environmental Politics*, 20(6), 765–785. <http://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2011.617164>
- Pierce, J. J., Siddiki, S. N., Jones, M. D., Schumacher, K., Pattison, A., & Peterson, H. (2014). Social Construction and Policy Design: A Review of Past Applications. *Policy Studies Journal*, 42(1), 1–29. <http://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12040>
- Pierson, P. (2000). Increasing returns, path dependence, and the study of politics. *The American Political Science Review*, 94(2), 251–267.
- Pollitt, C. (2008). *Time, policy, management: Governing with the past*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pruitt, D. G., Rubin, J. Z., & Kim, S. H. (2003). *Social conflict. Escalation. Stalemate. and Settlement*. McGraw-Hill Professional.
- Putnam, H. (2001). Two Philosophical Perspectives. In M. P. Lynch (Ed.), *The nature of truth: Classic and contemporary perspectives* (pp. 251–258). Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Rawls, J. (1999). *A theory of justice*. Harvard University Press. Retrieved from <http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=kvpby7HtAe0C&oi=fnd&pg=PR11&dq=A+T+heory+of+Justice&ots=ti7rv7Bba-&sig=btlO9jsUFUVo0hFNpQbn50PU1GE>

- Rein, M., & Schön, D. (1993). Reframing policy discourse. In F. Fischer & J. Forester (Eds.), *The argumentative turn in policy analysis and planning* (pp. 145–166). London: UCL Press Limited.
- Rein, M., & Schön, D. (1996). Frame-critical policy analysis and frame-reflective policy practice. *Knowledge and Policy*, 9(1), 85–104.
- Rhodes, R. A. W. (1996). The new governance: Governing without government. *Political Studies*, 44, 652–667. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.1996.tb01747.x>
- Rickards, L., Ison, R., Fünfgeld, H., & Wiseman, J. (2014). Opening and closing the future: Climate change, adaptation, and scenario planning. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 32(4), 587–602. <http://doi.org/10.1068/c3204ed>
- Rinckhout, E. (2005, September 14). Jo Crepain, architect. *De Morgen*, p. 8.
- Roe, E. (1994). *Narrative policy analysis: Theory and practice*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Rosanvallon, P. (2008). *Counter-democracy: Politics in an age of distrust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rubinstein, R. A., Sanchez, S. N., & Lane, S. D. (2017). Coercing consensus? Notes on power and the hegemony of collaboration. In L. Kriesberg & C. Gerard (Eds.), *Better or worse relations: Essays in conflict and collaboration*. Routledge.
- Saumure, K., & Given, L. M. (2008). Data saturation. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (pp. 195–196). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Schlosberg, D. (2007). *Defining environmental justice: Theories, movements and nature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schmidt, V. a. (2008). Discursive Institutionalism: The Explanatory Power of Ideas and Discourse. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11(1), 303–326. <http://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.060606.135342>
- Schmidt, V. a. (2011). Speaking of change: why discourse is key to the dynamics of policy transformation. *Critical Policy Studies*, 5(2), 106–126. <http://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2011.576520>
- Schneider, A., & Ingram, H. (1993). Social construction of target populations: implications for politics and policy. *American Political Science Review*, 87(2), 334–347. <http://doi.org/10.2307/2939044>

- Schneider, A., & Ingram, H. (1997). *Policy design for democracy*. University Press of Kansas.
- Schneider, A., & Sidney, M. S. (2009). What is next for policy design and social construction theory? *The Policy Studies Journal*, 37(1), 103–119. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0072.2008.00298.x>
- Schön, D. A., & Rein, M. (1994). *Frame reflection: Toward the resolution of intractable policy controversies*. New York: basic books.
- Schwartz-Sea, P., & Yanow, D. (2012). *Interpretive research design: Concepts and processes*. New York: Routledge.
- Siemiatycki, M. (2009). Academics and auditors: Comparing perspectives on transportation project cost overruns. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 29(2), 142–156. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X09348798>
- Skelcher, C., Mathur, N., & Smith, M. (2005). The public governance of collaborative spaces: Discourse, design and democracy. *Public Administration*, 83(3), 573–597.
- Snow, D. a., Rochford, E. B., Worden, S. K., & Benford, R. D. (1986). Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation. *American Sociological Review*, 51(4), 464. <http://doi.org/10.2307/2095581>
- Soss, J. (1999). Lessons of welfare: Policy design, political learning, and political action. *American Political Science Review*, 93(2), 363–380. <http://doi.org/10.2307/2585401>
- Soss, J. (2005). Making clients and citizens: Welfare policy as a source of status, belief, and action. In A. L. Schneider & H. M. Ingram (Eds.), *Deserving and entitled: Social constructions and public policy* (pp. 291–328). State University of New York Press.
- “Stad speelt met vuur.” (2005, March 18). *Het Nieuwsblad/Antwerpen*, p. 20.
- Stake, R. E. (1994). Case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 236–247). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Stake, R. E. (2010). *Qualitative research: Studying how things work*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Stone, D. (2002). *Policy paradox. The art of political decision making* (Revised Ed). New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Susskind, L., & Ozawa, C. (1984). Mediated negotiation in the public sector: The planner as mediator. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 4(1), 5–15.

Svara, J. H. (1985). Dichotomy and duality: Reconceptualizing the relationship between policy and administration in council-manager cities. *Public Administration Review*, 45(1), 221–232.

Svara, J. H. (2006). Introduction: Politicians and administrators in the political process—A review of themes and issues in the literature. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 29(12), 953–976. <http://doi.org/10.1080/01900690600854555>

Swyngedouw, E. (2005). Governance innovation and the citizen: The Janus face of governance-beyond-the-state. *Urban Studies*, 42(11), 1991–2006.

Swyngedouw, E. (2014). Where is the political? Insurgent mobilisations and the incipient “return of the political.” *Space and Polity*, (September), 1–15. <http://doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2013.879774>

Termeer, K., Breeman, G., van Lieshout, M., & Pot, W. (2010). Why more knowledge could thwart democracy: Configurations and fixations in the Dutch mega-stables debate. In R. J. in 't Veld (Ed.), *Knowledge Democracy* (pp. 99–111). Berlin Heidelberg: Springer.

Thibaut, J., & Walker, L. (1975). *Procedural justice: A psychological analysis*. Hillsdale.

Thomaes, R. (2009, October 16). Laat ons eindelijk beslissen. *De Standaard*, p. 72.

Thrift, N. (2008). *Non-representational theory: space, politics, affect*. Oxon: Routledge.

Throgmorton, J. a. (2003). Planning as persuasive storytelling in a global-scale web of relationships. *Planning Theory*, 2(2), 125–151. <http://doi.org/10.1177/14730952030022003>

Tilly, C., & Tarrow, S. (2007). *Contentious politics*. Colorado: Paradigm Publishers.

Timmermans, S., & Tavory, I. (2012). Theory construction in qualitative research: From grounded theory to abductive Analysis. *Sociological Theory*, 30, 167–186. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0735275112457914>

Tyler, T. R. (2000). Social Justice: Outcome and Procedure. *International Journal of Psychology*, 35(2), 117–125. <http://doi.org/10.1080/002075900399411>

van Dijk, T. (2011). Imagining future places: How designs co-constitute what is, and thus influence what will be. *Planning Theory*, 10, 124–143. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1473095210386656>

van Eeten, M. J. G. (1999a). *Dialogues of the deaf: Defining new agendas for enviromental deadlocks*. Delft: Eburon.

- van Eeten, M. J. G. (1999b). Tales from the riverland: The controversy over flooding and dike improvement. In *Dialogues of the deaf: Defining new agendas for environmental deadlocks* (pp. 39–63).
- van Eeten, M. J. G. (2007). Narrative Policy Analysis. In F. Fischer, G. J. Miller, & M. S. Sidney (Eds.), *Handbook of public policy analysis: theory, politics, and methods* (pp. 251–269). CRC Press.
- van Herzele, A., & Aarts, N. (2013). “My forest, my kingdom”-Self-referentiality as a strategy in the case of small forest owners coping with government regulations. *Policy Sciences*, 46(1), 63–81. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-012-9157-7>
- van Hulst, M. (2012). Storytelling, a model of and a model for planning. *Planning Theory*, 11(3), 299–318. <http://doi.org/10.1177/1473095212440425>
- van Hulst, M., & Yanow, D. (2014). From policy “frames” to “framing”: Theorizing a more dynamic, political approach. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 1–21. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0275074014533142>
- van Hulst, M., & Yanow, D. (2016). From policy “frames” to “framing”: Theorizing a more dynamic, political approach. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 46(1), 92–112. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0275074014533142>
- Van Slyke, D. M., O’Leary, R., & Kim, S. (2010). Conclusion: Challenges and opportunities, crosscutting themes, and thoughts on the future of public administration. In R. O’Leary, D. M. Van Slyke, & K. Soonhee (Eds.), *The future of public administration, public management, and public service around the world: The Minnowbrook perspective* (pp. 281–293). Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press.
- Verelst, J. (2009a). Een brug te ver? Hoe de Lange Wapper aan het wankelen ging. Antwerpen: Manteau.
- Verelst, J. (2009b, October 17). Campagne voeren op enthousiasme en overtuiging. *De Morgen*, p. 26.
- Verelst, J. (2009c, October 19). Patrick Janssens: “Dit wordt geen boksmatch maar een schaakspel, elke zet is van belang.” *De Morgen*, p. 2.
- Verhoeven, I. (2009). *Burgers tegen beleid: een analyse van dynamiek in politieke betrokkenheid*. University of Amsterdam.

- Verhoeven, I., & Duyvendak, J. W. (2015). Enter emotions. Appealing to anxiety and anger in a process of municipal amalgamation. *Critical Policy Studies*, 171(October), 1–18. <http://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2015.1032990>
- Verhoeven, K. (2017, March 16). Demonstratie in vitaliteit van democratie. *De Standaard*. Retrieved from [http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20170315\\_02782554](http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20170315_02782554)
- Verloo, N. (2015). *Negotiating urban conflict: Conflicts as opportunity for urban democracy*. University of Amsterdam.
- Vliementhart, R., & van Zoonen, L. (2011). Power to the frame: Bringing sociology back to frame analysis. *European Journal of Communication*, 26(2), 101–115. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0267323111404838>
- Wagenaar, H. (2011). *Meaning in action: Interpretation and dialogue in policy analysis*. New York: M.E. Sharpe.
- Wagenaar, H., & Hajer, M. (2003). *Deliberative policy analysis*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Watson, M., & Hay, C. (2003). The discourse of globalisation and the logic of no alternative: Rendering the contingent necessary in the political economy of new labour. *Policy and Politics*, 31(3), 289–305. <http://doi.org/10.1332/030557303322034956>
- Weber, M. (1946). Politics as a Vocation. In H. H. Gerth & C. W. Mills (Eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in sociology* (pp. 77–128). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (2008). Organizing for high reliability: Processes of collective mindfulness. In A. Boin (Ed.), *Crisis management* (pp. 31–66). London: Sage Publications.
- Wesselink, A., Colebatch, H., & Pearce, W. (2014). Evidence and policy: Discourses, meanings and practices. *Policy Sciences*, 47(4), 339–344. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-014-9209-2>
- Willems, T., & Van Dooren, W. (2014). (De)Politicization Dynamics in Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs): Lessons from a comparison between UK and Flemish PPP policy. *Public Management Review*, 9037(March 2015), 1–22. <http://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2014.969759>
- Wilson, R. M. S., & Zhang, Q. (1997). Entrapment and escalating commitment in investment decision making: A review. *The British Accounting Review*, 29(3), 277–305. <http://doi.org/10.1006/bare.1996.0046>

- Wilson, W. (1887). The study of administration. *Political Science Quarterly*, 2(2), 197–222.
- Wolf, E. E. A., & Van Dooren, W. (2017a). How policies become contested: a spiral of imagination and evidence in a large infrastructure project. *Policy Sciences*, 50(3), 449–468. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-017-9275-3>
- Wolf, E. E. A., & Van Dooren, W. (2017b). “Time to move on” or “taking more time”? How disregarding multiple perspectives on time can increase policy-making conflict. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*. <http://doi.org/10.1177/2399654417712243>
- Wolf, E., & Van Dooren, W. (2017). De waarde van weerstand: Wat Oosterweel ons leert over besluitvorming. *Pelckmans & Pro*.
- Wolsink, M. (2000). Wind power and the NIMBY-myth: Institutional capacity and the limited significance of public support. *Renewable Energy*, 21, 49–64. [http://doi.org/10.1016/S0960-1481\(99\)00130-5](http://doi.org/10.1016/S0960-1481(99)00130-5)
- Wood, M., & Flinders, M. (2014). Rethinking depoliticisation: beyond the governmental. *Policy and Politics*, 42(2), 151–170. <http://doi.org/10.1332/030557312X655909>
- Wu, J., & Laws, D. (2003). Trust and Other-Anxiety in Negotiations: Dynamics Across Boundaries of Self and Culture. *Negotiation Journal*, 19(4), 329–367. <http://doi.org/10.1023/A:1026094821330>
- Yanow, D. (2006). Thinking interpretively: philosophical presuppositions and the human sciences. In D. Yanow & P. Schwartz-Sea (Eds.), *Interpretation and method: Empirical research methods and the interpretive turn*. New York: ME Sharpe.
- Yanow, D., & Schwartz-Sea (ed.), P. (2006). *Interpretation and method: Empirical research methods and the interpretive turn*. New York: ME Sharpe.

## Appendix 1: List of respondents

Name	Function <sup>i</sup>
Dirk Avonts	Lid actiegroep Ademloos en huisarts en professor aan de Universiteit Gent
Cathy Berx	Gouverneur van de provincie Antwerpen
Kristiaan Borret	Voormalig stadsbouwmeester bij de stad Antwerpen
Filip Boulaert	Sinds 2014 Secretaris Generaal voor het departement Mobiliteit en Openbare Werken. Daarvoor kabinetschef voor de Vlaamse minister van Mobiliteit en Openbare Werken Kris Peeters (CD&V)
Tinne Buelens	Programmameider Masterplan Mobiliteit bij AG Stadsplanning Antwerpen
Manu Claeys	Voorzitter actiegroep Straten-Generaal
Tom Coppens	Professor Stedenbouw bij de Universiteit Antwerpen. Voorheen werkzaam bij de stad Antwerpen in stadplanning
Bruno De Borger	Lid Forum2020. Professor Economie aan de Universiteit Antwerpen en expert in mobiliteit.
Wivina De Meester-De Meyer	Raad van bestuur BAM, voormalig Vlaams Minister van Begroting (CD&V)
Bart Derison	Voorheen werkzaam bij communicatiebureau groep C dat was aangesteld om de communicatie over de Oosterweelverbinding te verzorgen
Griet Geerinck	Voormalig algemeen directeur AG Stadplanning Antwerpen
Kitty Haine	Voorheen werkzaam bij AG Stadsplanning Antwerpen
Patrick Janssens	Voormalig burgemeester stad Antwerpen (s.pa)
Koen Kennis	Schepen Mobiliteit bij de stad Antwerpen (N-VA) en raad van bestuur BAM
Christian Leysen	Lid Forum2020 en gedelegeerd bestuurder van havenbedrijf Ahlers.
Camille Paulus	Voormalige gouverneur van de provincie Antwerpen
Jaak Polen	Voormalig projectleider Masterplan2020 vanuit de Vlaamse overheid
David Stevens	Voormalig lid MER cel. Adviseur complexe projecten Vlaamse overheid
Rudi Thomaes	Voormalig voorzitter BAM en gedelegeerd bestuurder van het Verbond van Belgische Ondernemingen (VBO)
Wouter Van Besien	Vlaams parlamentslid Groen, voormalig voorzitter Groen en districtsburgemeester Borgerhout
Ludo Van	Voormalig schepen Ruimtelijke Ordening en Openbare Werken (Open Vld)

Campenhout	bij stad Antwerpen, nu schepen Sport (N-VA) bij stad Antwerpen
Wim van Hees	Voorzitter actiegroep Ademloos
Dirk Van Mechelen	Voormalig Vlaams minister van Financiën en Begroting en Ruimtelijke Ordening en viceminister-president (Open Vld).
Marc Van Peel	Havenscheper bij de stad Antwerpen (CD&V). Voormalig voorzitter van CD&V
Jan Van Rensbergen	CEO BAM
Peter Verhaeghe	Ondervoorzitter actiegroep Straten-Generaal
Jan Verhaert	Voormalig beleidsadviseur Stadsontwikkeling bij stad Antwerpen en raadgever zonder stem in de raad van bestuur BAM. Nu directeur Mobiliteit bij stad Antwerpen
Peter Vermeulen	Projectverantwoordelijke en verantwoordelijk voor studiegroep bij actiegroep Ringland
Karel Vinck	Voormalig voorzitter BAM
Bart Weekers	Vlaams Ombudsman
Bart Van Camp	Kabinetschef Vlaams Minister Ben Weyts die bevoegdheid heeft over Mobiliteit en Openbare Werken (N-VA). Voormalig regeringscommissaris bij de BAM
David Van Herreweghe	Voorzitter BAM, voormalig ondervoorzitter BAM en kabinetschef Dirk Van Mechelen (Open-VLD)

<sup>i</sup>To prevent information on the various functions of respondents from getting lost in translation, I describe their functions in Dutch.

## Appendix 2: Topic-list for second part of interview

Topic	Example questions
Public support	What is public support? How do you know you have it?
Knowledge	Was there sufficient knowledge present in the policy-process? Can you give an example?
Juridicization	What role did judicial processes play in the policy-process of the Oosterweelconnection? How do you feel about that?
Participation	What is your opinion on letting citizens participate in policy-processes such as the Oosterweel policy-process?
Political parties	What role did political parties play in the Oosterweel policy-process? How do you feel about that?



# Abstract

Through a case-study of the policy process over the contested Oosterweelconnection highway in Antwerp, this dissertation investigates how conflicts over public policies escalate and how governments should deal with conflict escalation. It concludes that when governmental actors try to negate conflict by setting in stone policies early in the decision-making process, rather than embrace conflict as a natural and possible productive part of policy-making and -implementation, conflict can actually increase and escalate. The dissertation highlights three mechanisms of conflict escalation.

Firstly, in the Oosterweel case, evidence was used in an attempt to put an end to conflict. Evidence did not end the conflict, however, but rather reduced the tolerance for ambiguity, making it more difficult for parties to appreciate policy positions that differed from their own. Secondly, in the Oosterweel case, further debate on alternatives to Oosterweel was ceased in order to satisfy procedural deadlines. Pressing for haste, however, did not benefit quick decision-making but instead made the policy-making procedure increasingly suspect. When parties distrust the policy-making procedure, and a substantive conflict escalates to a procedural one, it also becomes more difficult to settle conflict within these procedures. Finally, equating the Oosterweelconnection with serving the public interest and labelling those opposed to Oosterweel as obstructing the public interest also did not bring a solution to the public problem of traffic congestion any closer. Rather, because action groups felt dismissed by policy-makers, they took up arms more vigorously. As the conflict dragged on, parties were increasingly fighting each other, and a substantive conflict became not only procedural but also increasingly relational.

The dissertation concludes that governmental actors should focus less on quick project completion when they make and implement public policies, particularly policies of the megaproject kind. Instead, they should take advantage of conflicts as opportunities to talk with and listen to an engaged and creative public about how to make policies that best serve the many possible interpretations of what the public interest is.