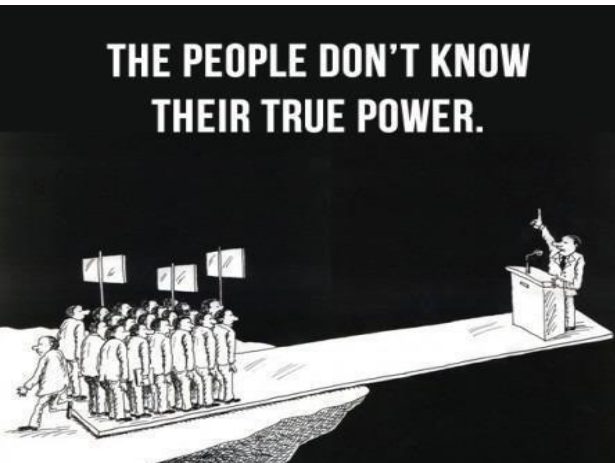


ENGAGING
PEOPLE
IN A DISENGAGED
WORLD

Engaging people through local initiatives:

a discourse analysis on sustainable energy



Joana Duarte
Irene Kelder
Marije Zegwaard
Annette Klarenbeek



**Hanzehogeschool
Groningen**
University of Applied Sciences



Lectoraat
Communication &
Sustainable Society

**E:M+
MA**

EXPERTS IN MEDIA
EN MAATSCHAPPIJ

Local energy initiatives (LEIs)



GRUNNEGER
POWER



33.509 Zonnepanelen in Groningen!

- ❁ *Positioning: sustainability & public communication*
- ❁ The **social dimension** of the transition to a low carbon economy is a key challenge.
- ❁ The establishment of **local energy initiatives (LEIs)** has recently been attracting attention.
- ❁ It is of great importance to draw lessons from **best practices** when LEIs have made a substantial contribution to green in local energy systems.

How people talk about energy

✿ This study is about:

- How people communicate about local energy initiatives
- How local initiatives present themselves

✿ Aim:

- Identify successful **frames in conversations**

(Edwards 1994; Potter 1996)

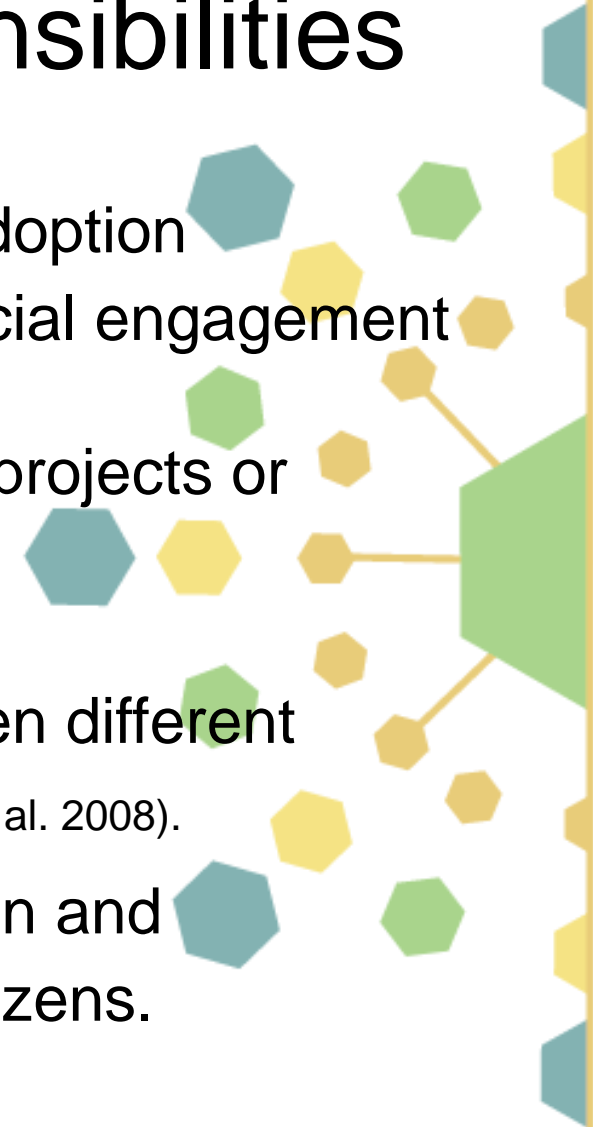
✿ How:

- **Case study** around a local energy initiative by means of a **discourse analysis** of online interaction.



Changing roles & responsibilities

- ❁ **Societal acceptance** is necessary for adoption sustainable energy (NIMBY) → active social engagement (Bosman et. al 2013; Schwenke 2012)
- ❁ **Resistance** leads to unexpected end of projects or increase of costs (Wuestenhagen, Wolsink & Buerer 2007).
- ❁ **Understanding communication** between different stakeholders becomes **crucial** (Heiskanen et al. 2008).
- ❁ It is key to identify ways of communication and **understanding implicit concerns** of citizens. (Best Waldhober, Brunsting & Paukovic 2012).
- ❁ Engagement with citizens as a **grassroots'** activity.



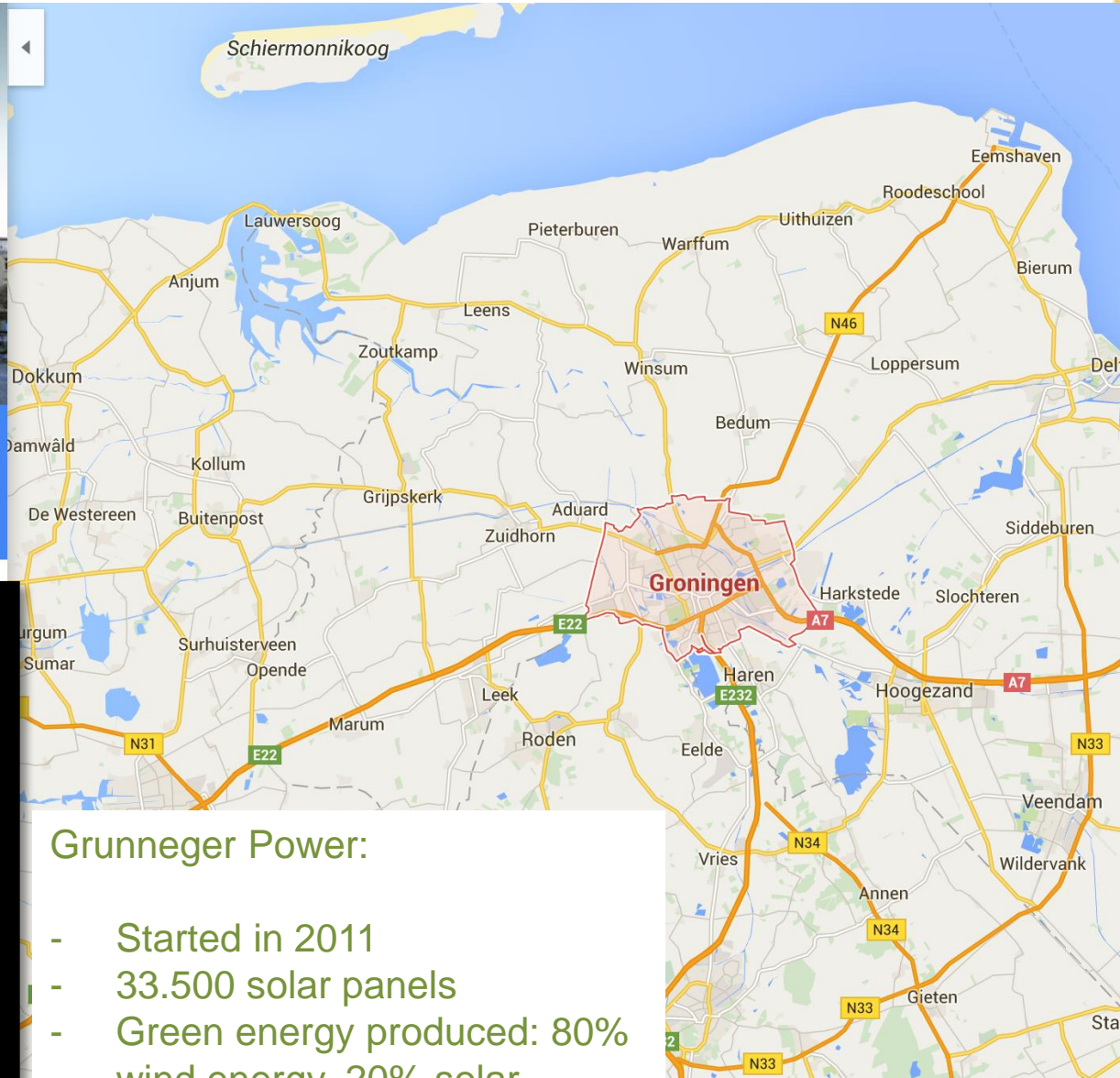
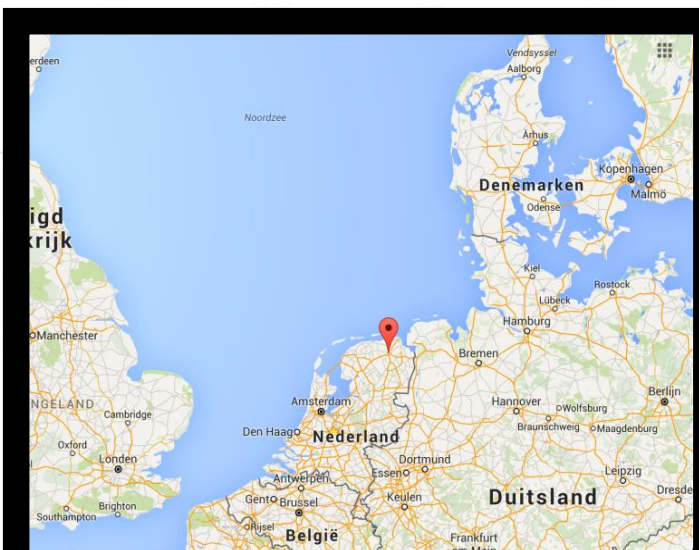
Citizens as stakeholders

- ✿ Citizens choose their own sources and **experts** (growingly: peer communication)
- ✿ So: 'objective' experts are accompanied by hundreds of **lay experts** (Mol 2005)
- ✿ **Social media** offers a massive platform for citizens to engage in interaction with each other.
- ✿ Citizens adopt soft **strategies** of approval (or opposition) to new forms of sustainable energy.

How do different stakeholders communicate around successful local initiatives for sustainable energy?



CASE: Grunneger Power

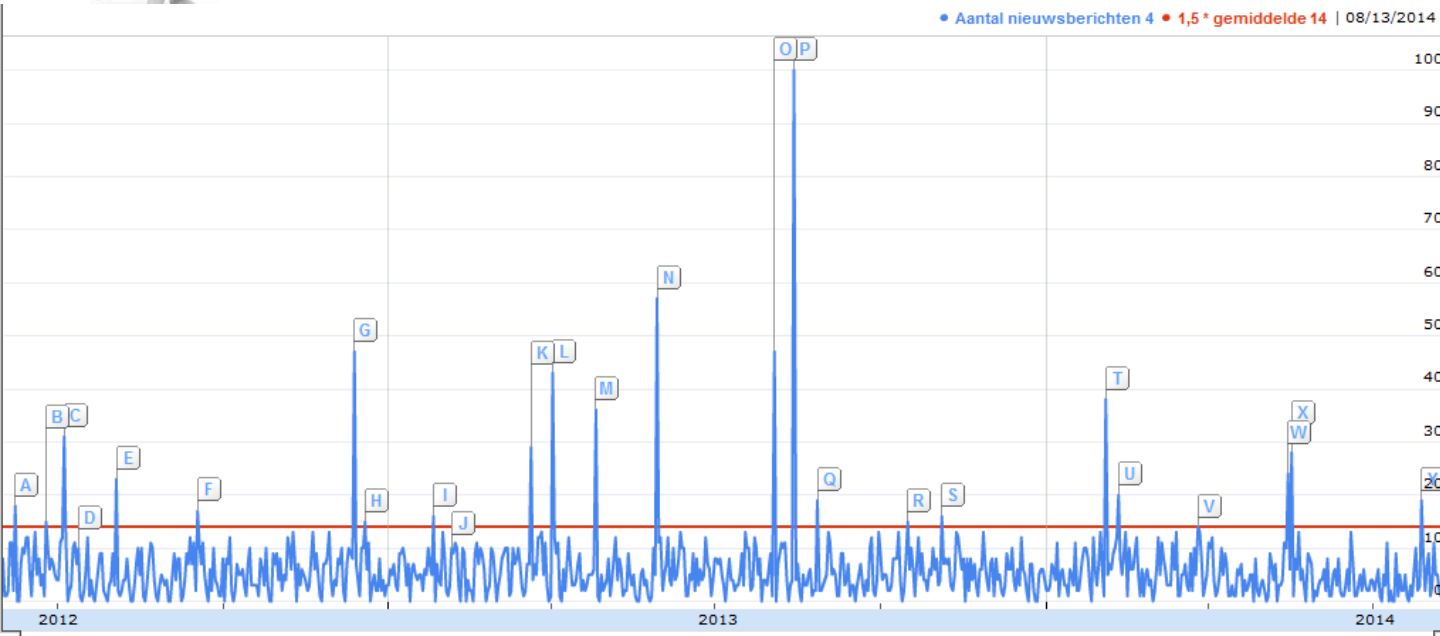


Grunneger Power:

- Started in 2011
- 33.500 solar panels
- Green energy produced: 80% wind energy, 20% solar

Online analysis: Grunneger Power

- ✿ **The first step:** after using social media monitoring tool Coosto for obtaining data, we filtered the data set, based on 'peaks' in the online discourse

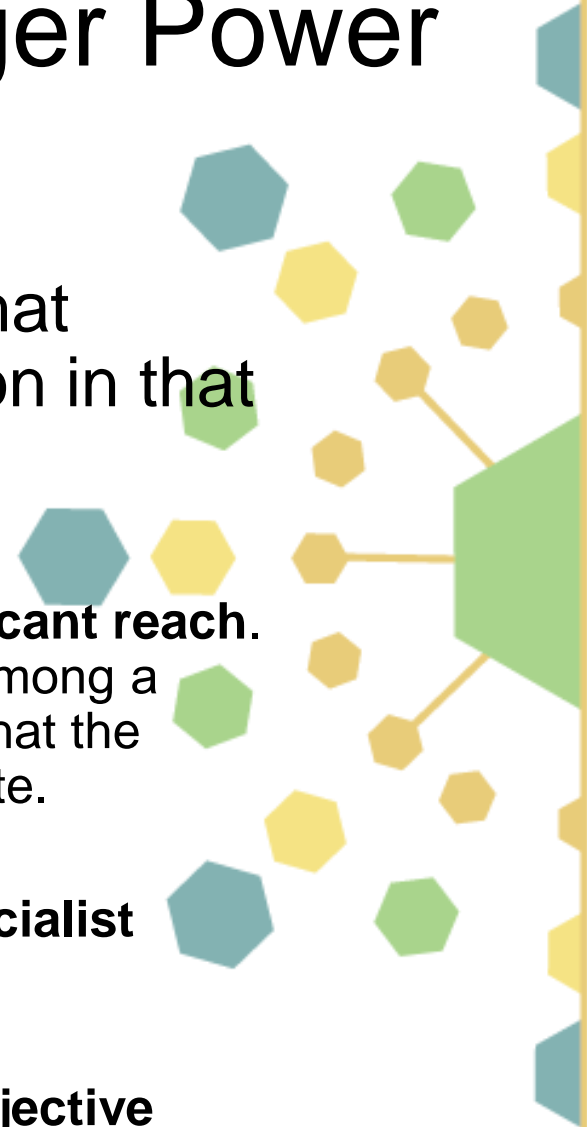


Online analysis: Grunneger Power

The second selection step:

✿ Within each peak we select articles, that comprise the nub of the communication in that phase of the public debate.

- Articles which appeared in **media with a significant reach**. This can be among the 'wider' public, but also among a smaller group of specialists, in order to ensure that the article *can* have an influence on the public debate.
- Articles referred to by both the **regular and specialist media**
- Articles in the data set that adopt a strongly **subjective** position, but also articles which represent a **broader** tone.



Online analysis: data

Period	Newspapers		Social media	
From 22-03-2011 to 08-11-2014	Dagblad v/h Noorden	4	Facebook	8
	OOGTV	2	Facebook reactions	7
	RTVNoord	1	Twitter	45
	Groninger Internet	2	Twitter reactions	30
	Courant	1	Hyves	2
	Regiokrant Groningen.nl	3	Youtube	1
	Noorderkrant	2	Blog	3
	NUjij.nl	1	Opinion column	1
	VNG Magazine	1		
	Energieoverheid.nl	1		
	Kennisplatform Energie.nl	1		
	Provincie Drenthe	1		
	ECNNoordseVeld	1		
	Windvogel.nl	1		
	<i>Reactions</i>			
Total = 119		22		93

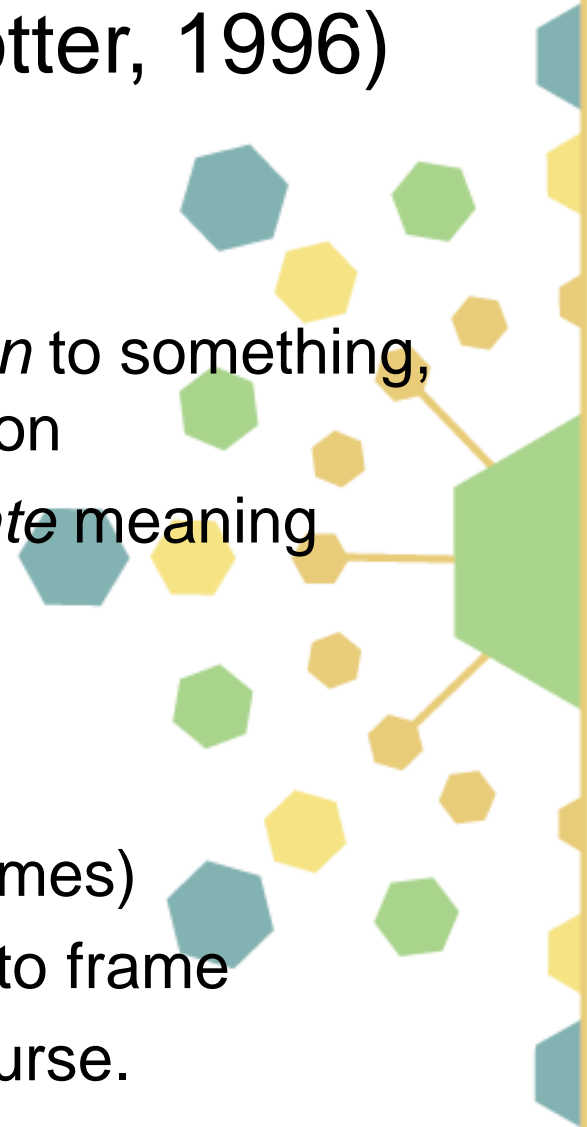
Discourse analysis (Potter, 1996)

✿ Discursive psychological perspective:

- ❑ Opinions of stakeholders are a *reaction* to something, they are part of an ongoing conversation
- ❑ Focus on the way in which actors *create* meaning while they communicate.

✿ Result:

- ❑ Description of recurring frames (or themes)
- ❑ Language constructions that give rise to frame
- ❑ Effect the frame produces in the discourse.



Results: 4 Frames

1. Do it yourself, together



2. The answer to the world of multinationals



3. Everyone can join us



4. Your roof is worth money



Example from the data

→ **Do it yourself, together**

Worldwide you see the number of people who have joined an

amazing speed. This rises steadily

Netherlands people from one side to the other

to get solar panels together with the emphasis on the speed and rise of the movement creates urgency

have always been part of a much larger movement

Bridging the distance between the individual and the collective group (doing it yourself is doing it together)

GP as a collective entity (strengthens the claim)

Emphasis is put on the size of the solar energy movement

“Script formulations” to show the normality and long lasting effect of GP’s vision



Another example

→ **Everyone can join**

Idiomatic expression
into shared social
("my hands are itching",
sense of impatience)

Comprehensible and easily
accessible language (both
public and GP)

1. *RT @ahuijsen:[#Tegenlicht]*
2. *@VPRO. **I feel the urge: I also want to fill up***
3. *my roof with solarpanels!#energyrevolution*

(Twitter, 19 June 2013)

Concrete position is taken
within the group movement
("also")





To sum up

Local Energy Initiatives like Grunneger Power:

- ✿ Frequently use discursive resources to construct a *collective identity*.
- ✿ Use *simple language*, containing little technological terminology.
- ✿ Present their services *as embedded in a larger social movement*.

Implications for communication & sustainability:

- ✿ Results show ways in which energy transition can be framed in order to increase local acceptance for renewable energy projects.
- ✿ Fostering acceptance through constructing **collective identities**, framing energy transition as a **shared problem** and engaging in a **dialogue** with citizens on their own terms (soft concerns).

Thank you! * Hvala! * Bedankt!



j.da.silveira.duarte@pl.hanze.nl