

Do it yourself, together.

A discourse analysis on how people talk about local initiatives for renewable energy

Abstract

This study aims at examining the ways people communicate about energy transition, by analyzing the discourse of different stakeholders in a case of a local initiative for renewable energy. When moving from traditional to renewable energy, social acceptance of new technologies is of central importance, as public opposition can have extremely negative consequences for transition projects (Wuestenhagen, Wolsink & Buerer 2007). In order to get insights into the frames used by citizens when talking about energy transition, we chose a successful case of a local energy initiative from the northern of the Netherlands committed to supporting citizens in generating their own energy.

Drawing on a corpus of online data, we conducted a discourse analysis from a discursive socio-constructivist perspective (Edwards 1994; Potter 1996) in order to examine examples of active social engagement in which local initiatives and citizens contribute to sustainability by generating their own energy (Bosman et. al 2013; Schwenke 2012). The main aim was to identify the frames that play a role in the discourse about successful local energy initiatives and allow us to better grasp the dynamics behind this type of upstream social engagement movements.

Our results stress out the need for local initiatives to develop a discursive strategy that specifically distances itself from centralist approaches by stressing out the local aspect of energy transition, in opposition to national government approaches, as well as the social aspect of jointly improving the environment. The frames found are thus aimed at establishing contrasts in relation to institutions and approaches in which the public has gained distrust, on the one hand, and at constructing new collective identities with a shared vision, on the other. These results shed a light to the ways in which energy transition can be framed in order to increase local acceptance for renewable energy projects.

1) Changing Roles, New Experts: The role of local energy initiatives in the energy transition

There is an urgent need in insuring the societal acceptance when adopting forms of sustainable energy. Resistance against new projects can in fact lead to an unexpected end of the project or to a significant increase in its costs (Wuestenhagen, Wolsink & Buerer 2007). Research shows that communication between different stakeholders and particularly the ways in which the different aspects of the energy transition are framed can play a central role in gaining and maintaining public acceptance (Heiskanen et al. 2008). It thus becomes central to identify the ways in which communication around such projects occurs, as understanding the public's concerns helps predict future opinion (Best-Waldhofer, Brunsting & Paukovic 2012).

At the moment, authorities wishing to engage in sustainable energy projects lack insight into how citizens develop dominant *frames* through their interactions with the environment. Citizens usually pose as experts in the debate on energy transition but the role of expert is shrouded in ambiguity. Small-scale, readily identifiable and objective experts from organizations such as knowledge institutions now find themselves in the company of hundreds of others. Mol aptly illustrates how the new term 'expert' should be interpreted: "As against the singularity of the single truth voiced by the anonymous, objective 'expert', it has been argued that there are many experts with different professional and social backgrounds at all: the word 'lay expert' was invented. And since each of these experts is a different person and comes on the scene from somewhere different, none of them is objective. [...] They look at the world from different standpoints. This means that they see things differently and represent what they have seen in a diversity of ways" (Mol 2005: 76-77). In addition to the expert role, citizens adopt other strategies in order to demonstrate their approval or opposition to new forms of sustainable energy (overview in Scrase & Ockwell 2010). These are often created and changed in the interaction with each other and can thus be influenced by means of a targeted communication strategy.

In other words, citizens create their realities and identities, choosing their own experts and sources, and acting as they see fit. This observation, Klijn argues, leads to the development of new forms of interaction between the public and the local government: "Such scenarios have led policy practitioners and scholars to seek new forms of governance which connect citizens' groups and societal actors to public policy and thus create the necessary support that is failing as a consequence of the diminishing connections between citizens and traditional organizations" (Klijn 2009: 119). This leads to various types and forms of formal and informal policy networks.

For some time now, policy communication in the Netherlands, similarly to other contexts, has no longer been the domain of the government. While in the previous millennium we still saw the public agenda being largely determined by politicians and not by the media or private individuals (Kleinnijenhuis 2003), in recent years a multi-layered, inconsistent pattern of public participation has taken its place. With Beunders in mind, we see that new powerful actors, new identifications and new interactions in networks are being created (Beunders et al. 2008). Van den Brink (2002) has identified an increasingly vocal public that places ever-higher demands on the government and on other people. These developments have contributed to a much more critical assessment of government actions: "we [...] witness a more critical attitude towards public authorities and their policy proposals" (Klijn, 2009: 119). In other words, public confidence in the government has been placed under increasing pressure.

In the energy domain a new and powerful trend with a strong dynamics has risen. This concept of upstream social engagement (Klandermans, 1996) is hard to grasp for local governments and companies and thus often remains untapped. Research results point out to the fact that new energy projects are frequently only accepted by citizens when they explicitly stress their trust in the purpose and necessity of energy transition and in the government as upholder of public interest (Whitmarsh et al. 2011). In the Netherlands, however, a large proportion of the population claims to be worried about the future energy supply. Further, and given the lack of agreement on the ways the transition towards renewable forms is being done (Hansen & De

Vriend 2013), citizens are joining forces to organize successful initiatives in order to gain and commercialize their own sustainable energy.

There is thus a growing number of local energy initiatives who act as mediators between the citizens of a certain region in their access to new forms of energy, offering an alternative to centralized and traditional forms of energy. Distrust in nuclear and gas energy forms, reinforced by general disbelief in central governments has thus lead to a new but growing trend of generating local and sustainable energy. But how do these local initiatives communicate with the general public? And how successful is their approach? What lessons can be learned by looking at these small-scale projects?

The present study intends to shed light on the ways in which communication around local energy initiatives takes place, by zooming in on the interaction between citizens and local energy initiatives. It aimed at answering the following overarching research question:

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

We conducted a discourse analysis on a successful local energy initiative from the Northern of the Netherlands as a case study in order to gain access to the frames and discursive strategies used by the different participants in the discourse. Our methodological approach will be described in the section below and it will be followed by the results of our analysis.

2) A Discursive Psychological Perspective on Framing

For the discourse analysis we use insights from discursive psychology (Potter & Wetherell 1987, Potter 1996, Te Molder 2009), placing language and conversation centrally at a micro level. We also make use of socio-constructivist public administration insights (Deetz, 2000; Boje, 1988; Czarniawska, 1997; Hosking, 2004), focusing more at a macro level on the context within which conversations take place.

Once the main data has been gathered, the use of frames is examined at a micro level. Framing is here defined as the presentation of facts in such a way that a particular interpretation of an incident becomes likely. For both descriptive and analytic purposes, a solid definition of framing processes can be found in psychology, linguistics and discourse analysis, communication and media studies and policy studies (overview in Benford and Snow 2000).

In order to filter out frames with respect to energy transition, we approach the notion of frame first and foremost from a discursive perspective. Discursive means 'from the point of view of a discussion', 'reasoning' or 'reaching a comparative assessment step by step'. Discursive psychology, as described by Potter (1996; 2004) forms the basis of our vision on framing. Potter argues that people always (and usually unconsciously) have a goal in conversations (and therefore in language). This interactional goal is to convince others of the 'self-explanatoriness' of a particular reality. Frames then arise in discursive social interaction. At the same time, people give meaning to the world around them by means of frames. They use these to construct 'issues' (e.g. Putnam and Holmer, 1992; DeWulf et al., 2004), 'identity of the self and others' (e.g. Wetherell, 1998; Bartel and Dutton, 2001; Hardy et al., 2005), and 'relationships and social

order' (e.g. Donohue, 1998; 2001). People do not only construct frames in interaction, they make use of frames to attain their interactional goals as well. Frames typically highlight only certain aspects of a subject and ignore others (Benford and Snow 2000). Approaching frames from a discursive psychological perspective can thus reveal their functions within the conversation between different stakeholders in energy transition processes.

In a particular setting (in our case, by placing online articles and reactions to these articles), people try to convince others that *their* version of reality is the valid one. They therefore choose words that fit into their own subjective reality. On that account, frames are created as part of a conversation (Van Woerkum and Aarts 2008). They imply interaction and steer a conversation. According to Veen et al. (2012), "By using discursive psychology researchers try to find out what talk does, not what is reflected in talk. Talk is seen as a social practice. Questions and answers given do not reflect the mental state of the persons in the interaction, they are used to manage social relations between speakers". For this reason, we treat frames as social realities that are constructed in talk in various ways. One could think, for example, of the roles (and associated responsibilities), which we (often implicitly) assign ourselves and others in interaction (Edwards 1998; Snejder 2006). This is also about visions; people may construct these as natural realities by means of language. A better understanding of how such realities are built up in a natural environment (and furthermore can vary from context to context) produces rich insights for the communication professional or the local government that has to develop a target strategy.

3.1) A Socio-constructivist Perspective on Framing

In the first part of our research we find ourselves confronted with a large volume of potentially interesting data. From a social constructivist point of view we see that this data has been gathered from highly relevant places: opinion pages in national daily newspapers, online companion pieces of pages, blogs and specialist forums. In a public administrative sense, we see *discourse* conducted by experts in what is for them a natural setting. By a 'natural setting' we mean that the interaction or discourse has taken place without the intervention of researchers and there is no question of the data being manipulated. By 'experts' we mean not only those actors who are involved professionally in the discussion, but we also see – above all and in accordance with the lay expert – unusual suspects who rely on their *expertise* in the debate (Mol 2005).

In order to study such data, we will place the first part of the study within a socio-constructivist vision of framing. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe offer a number of methodological starting points with which this type of research must comply: first and foremost they argue that "human interests are the main driver, [...] explanations aim to increase general understanding of the situation; research progresses through gathering rich data from which ideas are induced" (2001: 30). Moreover, they establish that concepts should incorporate stakeholder perspectives, whereas the analysis reports on the 'complexity of whole situations'. The progression from the specific to the general is usually done based on 'theoretical abstraction'; reality is presented based on "small numbers of cases chosen for specific reasons" (*ibidem*).

In our view, each *discourse* forms part of a larger context that is difficult to grasp. This context is

expressed by people: they use language to give meaning to their daily activities and to the world around them. Theoretically we regard the language of those involved as a constructive force: “emphasizing language as a system of distinctions which are central to the construction process, arguing against grand narratives [...]” (Deetz 2000: 145). What the researchers must do, therefore, is reveal “the power/knowledge connection and the role of claims of expertise in systems of domination” (*ibidem*). The energy transition expert, for example, claims expertise in the area of complex energy transitions. Citizens, on the other hand, may perhaps call themselves ‘experience experts’. Finally, we also examine the role of mass media and the internet in the construction of these processes of meaning in our study: “emphasizing the fluid and hyper-real nature of the contemporary world and the role of mass media and information technologies, and stressing narrative/ fiction/rhetoric as central to the research process” (*ibidem*).

We are particularly interested in the language, and the power of images and assumptions that are shared through language. Easterby-Smith et al. support this approach by referring to Czarniawska and Boje and Whetten: “The verbal medium is crucial to understanding behaviour [...] and hence the researchers should pay particular attention to collecting stories about what takes place” (Czarniawska 1997; Boje and Whetten 1981, Easterby-Smith et. al., 2004: 50)

3.2) Data collection: From ‘many’ to ‘manageable’ online interactions

In order to be able to perform a discourse analysis, each article in the analysis must be thoroughly studied and analyzed by a group of researchers in an iterative process. In an ever-richer media landscape, this gives rise to some practical problems: online, we have to deal with the *big numbers* as many stakeholders are currently addressing issues of energy transition. As a primary source of our study, we have used messages and responses to these messages on one particular case – the Grunneger Power local energy initiative based in the province of Groningen in the Northern of the Netherlands – on Dutch news sites and social media. We studied the number of interactions, not older than four years. In order to reduce such data reliably to a relevant set, we designed a framework that consists of three steps.

- 1) In the first step we reduce the data set to a manageable number on the basis of *quantitative indicators*. Throughout this step the substance of the messages is not yet considered.
- 2) During the second step we make a *longitudinal media analysis* of each of the case. In this step we gain an insight into the *development of the debate, the principal actors (and their positions)* and the *arguments that these actors use*. A selection is also made during this step of illustrative messages and interactions.
- 3) The *third step* concerns the *discursive analysis*, which elaborates on the previous two steps and gives an insight into *the use, development and effects of frames*. The challenge is to reduce this data set to a manageable number. We will now explain how our *framework* fits together.

3.2.1) Quantitative selection

One important aspect for the first quantitative selection step is that we assume that *at the time of intensive public communication and the period shortly afterwards, dominant actors, arguments and frames can be identified in the public debate*. This assumption is supported by Vasterman, who argues that it is characteristic of a *media hype* (to be recognized by a 'peak' in the communication) that the underlying cause can be framed in an effective way: "A key event can be a genuine event, independent of news coverage, like car accidents or earthquakes, but it might also be an interview, a speech, an official warning (regarding health risks) or, as often happens in scandals, a startling disclosure by investigative reporters. The question is: can the event be framed in such a way that it draws more attention?" (Vasterman 2005: 513).

In today's landscape we see that media keep an ever-closer eye on each other, and so during a hype dominant frames can be quickly found in various sources. As a result, a media peak allows a better identification of dominant frames, even when a relatively limited number of news items are found within such a hype.

Vasterman also argues that within such media hypes, highly engaged actors will participate in the public debate: "This huge news hunt generates all kinds of responses in society, varying from individuals reporting similar experiences to statements from official sources and interest groups, using the opportunity to promote their views or to announce actions" (Vasterman 2005: 515).

Based on this assumption, we first made a selection from the data set of articles and responses. We therefore identified the *decisive* moments were in the study period when public communication took off (a 'peak' in the time line). From these periods and those immediately afterwards, we took a cross-section of the news items. This has already reduced the number of communications considerably, while we – based on the above assumption – still have the essence of the debate in our data set.

3.2.2) Combined selection process and dataset

As we have described above, during the first step the data set is divided up based on 'peaks' that we observe in the messages. The starting points for the second selection step are these same peaks. Within each peak we make a selection of articles, which comprise the nub of the communication in that phase of the public debate. This selection serves as the basis for the longitudinal media analysis, which we will discuss in the next paragraph. We make the second selection step based on the quantitative and qualitative selection criteria listed below. This is the first time that we actually look at the substance of the messages. We are primarily interested in:

- Articles who have 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 that originate from 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.

- We give extra attention where possible to articles, which give rise to many responses ('comments').

Based on the above criteria, we reduced the set of interactions to a more manageable number (a total of 119 articles for the Grunneger Power case, see table below for an overview).

Table 1 – Overview of analyzed data for the Grunneger Power case study

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
	NUjj.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

It is on the basis of this data set – and the contextual knowledge that has been acquired in the above two steps – that the discourse analysis was carried out in which we identified 1) dominant actors, 2) the position they take in the debate, 3) the arguments they use to support their position and 4) the frames with which they try to influence the views of others and 5) the discursive strategies applied by the different stakeholders in order to do so. At the end of the analysis we described the main discursive dilemmas identified in the debate.

3.2.2) A note on the local energy initiative Grunneger Power

Located in the Northern, Groningen is one of the twelve provinces of the Netherlands. This region is the main source of the national gas supply since the 60s. However, since in 2012 regular earthquakes caused by the intense gas exploitation started to occur, extensively damaging property and causing a crash in the real-estate market, distrust in the national government and the gas exploitation companies has enormously increased (van der Voort & Vanclay 2015).

Grunneger Power is a local energy of the Groningen region and was set up in March of 2011 with the aim of providing advice to citizens on how to generate their own sustainable energy,

focusing mainly on solar panels. In addition, they distribute green electricity and gas to their clients and invest their profits in further sustainable projects. Their approach has been extremely successful, in particular as a reaction to the growing distrust in the region in the gas extraction.

4) Frames and discursive strategies around local energy initiatives

The analysis of the online data on the local energy initiative Grunneger Power has led to the identification of four main frames that characterize the ways in which citizens and initiative interact with each other. The first frame that we found in the discourse – which we have labelled *'do it yourself, together'* – is related to the idea that engaging in forms of energy transition is more likely to be successful if done collectively. As we will show in the examples below, we identified a number of strategies with which Grunneger Power conveys the idea that if people decide themselves to engage in sustainable forms of energy, everything that follows can easily be done together. This directly addresses the public's resistance towards installing solar panels due to fear of technical complications by offering collective support of a group of people who have the necessary experience. We also found an echoing of this idea in the public's reception of GP strategy.

The second identified frame relates to the way in which GP presents itself as an alternative to centralized multinationals by offering a tailored local answer. We have termed it *'the answer to the world of multinationals'*. This frame is directly related to the growing distrust of the public in large energy companies and is, once again, shared by the citizens who engage in the interaction. We found several strategies by means of which a distancing is achieved in terms of the ways in which the company's ideology is described, in terms of its organizational structure and also in relation to its economic ambitions.

The third frame – *'everyone can join us'* – is related to the way in which energy transition is presented by recurring to the services of the initiative. The idea that alternative energy forms are accessible to everyone is thus stressed out. We see in the data that Grunneger Power uses different strategies in order to highlight how easy it is for everyone to generate their own energy and how accessible their services in this process are. The citizens engaging in the interaction also mirror this idea in the discourse.

The last frame pertains to the ways in which the economic profit that can be achieved by adopting sustainable energy forms is addressed by both Grunneger Power and the public. The idea that *'your roof is worth money'* is often found in the data and is reinforced by other instances in which the possible gain from investing in solar energy is underlined. Several discursive strategies are applied in order to demonstrate the ways in which sustainable energy forms can lead to economic advantages.

But how do these frames surface in the data? How does the local energy initiate discursively give forms to its message? And how do citizens engage with it? The ways in which these frames are constructed in the discourse by the different stakeholders and the discursive strategies used will be presented and discussed in the two examples below.

4.1) ‘Do it yourself, together’

In assuring public acceptance for the local energy initiative, a dominant frame found in the data is the idea that a wider group of people is already engaged in the process of energy transition and that this collective provides the necessary support for each individual to equally do so. Let us see how this is discursively done in the following fragment of an interview with Grunneger Power taken from a newspaper article:

Fragment 1:

1. *Worldwide you see the number of solar panels grow at an amazing speed.*
2. *This rises steadily every year. In the Netherlands people from one street are*
3. *rising themselves to get solar panels together with other people. This is the*
4. *social effect that we have always targeted and is now becoming reality¹.*
(GP, Groninger Internet Courant, 22-04-2013)

In principle, the ideas of the “self” and the “together” are opposite poles in a dichotomy of the individual on the one side and the group on the other. So-called dichotomizing strategies stress out the incompatibility of the own point of view in relation to the view of the other. Grunneger Power, however, discursively deconstructs this contrast on by using de-dichotomizing resources (Aarts et al. 2015). In the example above we observe this is in lines two and three: “people (..) are rising themselves (...) together with other people”. Joining the “self” and the “together” is aimed at bridging the distance between the poles, thus creating space for intermediate solutions. In this case, an attempt is made to let the poles of the individual and of the collective group come closer to one another and form a new collective identity (Dascal 2008). The idea is that the “doing it yourself” can be better achieved by “doing it together”. By referring to a supporting collectivity, Grunneger Power reinforces its claim of supporting individual citizens.

Another strategy used by Grunneger Power for to presenting themselves can be see in their use of script formulations (Edwards 1994; Sneijder & Te Molder 2005). These rhetorical devices are often proposed to convey the idea that a given course of events is typical or routine. We see this in the example in line 2 in the expression “this rises steadily every year” and also in line 4, in “we have always targeted”. By suggesting that something repeatedly occurs in the same way, the suggestion is put forward that there is already a strong trend taking place and that will probably continue to exist and increase in the future. Such formulations strength the image of a movement in which each citizen to participate and thus contribute to increase the credibility of Grunneger Power.

In addition, Grunneger Power recurrently presents itself as a whole. This is mostly done through the use of the pronoun “we”, as in line 4 of the example: “the social effect we have always targeted”. On the one hand, this “we” refers to the initiative as a company, as in the example, thus suggesting the idea of a homogenous company in which every member shares the same opinion and vision. On the other hand, in other instances of the data, the use of “we” also refers to a new whole consisting of Grunneger Power and the citizens, who together generate green

¹ Original quote in Dutch: “Je ziet wereldwijd het aantal zonnepanelen groeien met een snelheid waar je u tegen zegt. Dat gaat elk jaar over de kop. In Nederland staan mensen uit een straat zelf op om samen met andere mensen zonnepanelen aan te schaffen. Dat is het sociaal effect dat we steeds beoogd hebben en dat zich nu waarmaakt.”

energy. By showing that there is a coherent and homogeneous group already engaged in generating their own solar energy, Grunneger Power's approach becomes reinforced as the urgency of also participating in a collective movement is put forward. In addition, by suggesting that a considerable amount of people has successfully made the step of installing solar panels, the simplicity in also doing so is underlined.

The example above also offers evidence of another recurrent stagey often found in the data. Grunneger Power frequently presents facts in a non-neutral way by specifically accentuating certain characteristics. In this case, we see in line 1 that the emphasis is put on the size of the solar energy movement – "Worldwide you see the number" – but also its power is reinforced by mentioning the "amazing speed" with which it happens. By embedding their own claim in the context of a much larger and growing movement, its veracity is clearly strengthened.

But how is the reaction of the larger public to the kind of messages Grunneger Power is sending out? How do citizens engaging in the interaction respond to the strategy adopted by the initiative to present itself and support its claim? In the fragment below we present a typical reaction:

Fragment 2:

1. RT @ahuijsen: [#Tegenlicht]
2. @VPRO. I feel the urge: I also want to fill up
3. my roof with solar panels? #energyrevolution²
(Twitter, 19 June 2013)

In the original quote, the initial expression "I feel the urge" is expressed by a commonly used fixed idiom in Dutch (literally translated it would read "my hands are itching"). Fixed expressions are regularly used as rhetorical means to tap into well-known and socially shared ideas or actions. In such idiomatic expressions the meaning is more than, or distinct from, the sum of its individual components (Kirkpatrick & McLellan 2012). Presenting well-known constructions is a quick way of reaching people. In this case, the expression conveys a sense of impatience and is easily recognizable as such for the readers. It evokes in the reader the idea of "I also want to take part".

In statements about extraordinary situations, people mostly use a group opinion so as to show that others or a lot of people also share the opinion or wish the same things (Hutchby & Wooffitt 2008) and that it therefore makes sense to find it or want it as well. Since it is impossible to quote all the different voices that expressed its opinion, a position within the group opinion is taken. In line 2, the speaker also takes a position within a group's opinion by saying "I also want". By taking on a position in a collective opinion, the speakers' own wish becomes reinforced.

Finally, through the choice of the verb "fill up" to describe the transition to solar energy an

² Original in Dutch: RT @ahuijsen: "[#Tegenlicht] @VPRO. Mijn handen jeuken: ik wil ook mijn dak volplempen met zonnepanelen! #energiereductie".

emphasis is put on the effortless with which it can be done. The lack of technical terminology is thus also typical for Grunneger Power and is often repeated here by the citizens. Using easily comprehensible language is also a means of quickly addressing the readers by avoiding establishing a contrast between the public as lays and Grunneger Power as technical expert.

5) Summary of results

Grunneger Power frequently uses discursive resources to construct a *collective*. On the one hand, the initiative is put forward as a whole without hierarchy, and in which all members share the same opinion. Often this group “we” is used to mean “we at Grunneger Power, as a consistent and homogenous cooperative”. On the other hand, Grunneger Power also constructs the image of being a collective together with the citizens, by which the use of “we” means “we all together with each other”. The image evoked here is that of a whole, a collective that can solve problems faster and has more power than individuals only. The effect that seems to be reached is that the motivation to be a part of this collective is increased.

Linked to this idea is the discursive strategy of the *de-dichotomisation* (Aarts et al 2015), by means of which two opposite poles or positions are constructed as a whole. In this case, a bridge is built between the individual (“do it yourself”), who must decide to switch to solar power and the “together”, meaning all the people who have already adopted solar energy and can help in the transition. This strategy is therefore aimed at the bridging of the distance between the individual and the collective. Together, these two strategies evoke the image of “Do it yourself, together”. Grunneger Power’s claim thus becomes reinforced in the discourse.

In addition, Grunneger Power also regularly *contrasts* to strengthen its own position. The local initiative is thus contrasted to the national approach to energy. The efforts of multinationals to earn large sums of capital are paralleled to the disinterest in economic gain of Grunneger Power. In this way, explicit *dichotomies* (Aarts et al 2015) are often created, suggesting that there is an “us/together”, which is in the opposite position to the “they/the multinationals”. These poles are constructed in a way that they are incompatible. With such strategies, Grunneger Power distances itself from the common approach from centralistic energy companies that are faced by the public with great distrust, in particular in the Groningen region and since the beginning of the earthquakes.

Grunneger Power's message - but also the way in which the public echoes it – is characterized by *simple language*, containing little terminology. The language used is quick and easy to understand and there are many idiomatic expressions are used which are easily recognizable.

Another discursive strategy often used are so-called “*categorizations*” (Potter 1996). Energy transition is not presented in a neutral manner but rather framed in terms an “energy revolution” or a “global movement”. In addition, in other instances in the data we also found that the politics of the company are described as “vision” and its customers as “citizens”, “people”, “members” or simply as a part of the “we”. Key elements are thus explicitly categorized to distance the initiative’s activities, aims and stakeholders from traditional categories which are commonly distrusted by the general public. Grunneger Power thus

presents its services as embedded in a larger movement. This strengthens the claim and increases credibility. Moreover, by categorizing energy transition as a revolution, an image is evoked of a powerful movement that is actually strong enough to make this change feasible. The effect is that the own position is reinforced by the larger movement in which it is embedded and thereby becomes legitimized. Citizens also show the strength and repeat the image of independence and self-sufficiency that Grunneger Power constructs.

Associated with this last aspect is also the use of *maximizing language means* (Potter 1996), by highlighting that energy transition is of global dimension, or that the number of solar panels is rapidly increasing. This also contributes to strengthening the position of the initiative as it creates the image it is inevitable to avoid these trends. Grunneger Power just supports the citizens in doing what everyone is already doing and will continue to do so.

6) Conclusions: Which discursive problems are found in talk around local energy initiatives?

From the perspective of Grunneger Power, the main discursive issue we found in our analysis is related to increasing credibility, by creating trust and preventing the initiative from being accused of being expensive, biased, or covetous. The discursive approach used is thus one aimed at persuading citizens to participate in local energy and eliminating all fears out of the way. From this perspective, Grunneger Power's dilemmas are constructed in two different main ways.

a) We are different

In the discourse Grunneger Power tries to distance itself from other (ordinary) energy companies. Here the lack of importance in economic profit is often stressed while a focus is put on the collective and social importance of energy transition. Furthermore, the local approach and the participative structure of the cooperative are underlined. It is also often shown that there is no hierarchy in the initiative's internal organization. In explicit contrast to common energy companies the ideology behind the company is also framed in the context of a general social interest.

b) It's bigger than the individual

The particular position of Grunneger is discursively embedded in future trends such as the global growth of solar panels, thus highlighting the cooperation with citizens for a better society. The constructed corporate identity thus becomes the motto: "together we make the world better". Grunneger Power's claim is hereby reinforced by specifically addressing the issue of becoming a better person by joining the initiative.

7) Implications

This study provides a greater understanding of the way that people communicate about energy transitions. It also shows that a local initiative can be seen as dynamic elements within society.

They express dissenting views, and launch new initiatives through various forms of traditional and electronic media. This process can be very instructive. Communications professionals can better understand how energy transitions develop among those in their environment if they are aware of the types of interactional problems, and the types of responses, that can result from raising the energy transition issue. Moreover, this might also help communications professionals to achieve better outcomes in their dealings with local initiatives and citizens. A discursive approach is valuable in this respect because it shows how certain themes in communication can deal with policy development. This approach can lead to a better hold on these themes in practice and can provide another perspective to widespread failure of interaction between government and citizens. The government is often unable to understand what the citizen means, because their interactional problems are not recognized. Knowledge of their doubts on an issue, can help the organization to acquire a better understanding of objections – from inside and out – against a particular policy. A discourse analysis of the interactional contributions of local initiatives and citizens may give a rich and structured insight, including the strategies, interactional problems and reactions of the actors involved.

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