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Understanding governmental activism

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to understand an understudied phenomenon: governmental players joining forces with non-governmental players in contentious actions against policies they want to prevent or redress. This behaviour, which we call ‘governmental activism’, problematizes important assumptions in the social movement literature on state–SMO dichotomies and on seeing ‘the state’ as a homogeneous and unified actor that solely provides the context for SMO activities. Governmental activism also problematizes assumptions on cooperation and ‘new’ modes of coordination in the governance literature. To understand governmental activism, we build on the strategic interaction perspective from social movement studies and on third-phase institutionalism from political science. In our analysis, we show the particulars of governmental activism. Our arguments are illustrated by empirical material on a case of municipal amalgamation in the Netherlands.

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On 23 March 2009, the political party Green Left (‘Groenlinks’) in Barendrecht, a Dutch municipality with almost 50,000 inhabitants that lies just below the city of Rotterdam, organized a public demonstration against plans for Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) under their soil. Some months later, all political parties had turned against the plans and the Municipal Executive of Barendrecht developed close ties with the local action group CO2isNo, meeting weekly in secret to coordinate protest efforts. In November 2009, the Municipal Executive and CO2isNo collaborated in the mobilization of a protest during a public meeting with the national ministers that advocated the CCS plan urging citizens to engage in ‘small disruptive actions’ via posters, costumes and shouting slogans. In April 2010, the new alderman cut all ties with CO2isNo and instead stimulated a new citizen group aiming at legal action (Van Aanholt, 2014).

On 21 April 2016, a group of mayors from across Europe met in Barcelona to draft a declaration demanding suspension of negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) that aims at market liberalization between Europe and the US. This Barcelona Declaration unites 60 mayors in a growing pan-European movement that is supported by almost 100 NGOs and SMOs.¹ Moreover, about 2000 local and regional authorities in countries such as Spain, Germany, France, Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands have declared themselves TTIP-free zones by adopting motions.² Until negotiations are suspended, they will raise their concerns with national politicians, work with local campaigners from NGOs and SMOs to increase awareness about the risks of TTIP and call on other local authorities to pass motions on TTIP.³

Federal immigration policies in the US require local authorities to find, detain and collaborate in the deportation of unauthorized migrants (Daamen & Doomernik, 2014; Ridgley, 2008). These practices have been challenged and resisted by urban SMOs in collaboration with local authorities who have declared themselves Sanctuary cities that obstruct immigration enforcement. The number of Sanctuary cities has grown from about 45 in 2008 to more than 200 in 2016.⁴ Similar developments can be found in the Netherlands where municipal governments, together with SMOs and NGOs, contest and resist national policies by creating a 'shadow network' that provides so-called 'bed-bath-bread' arrangements in the form of temporary housing, schooling, food and medical support (Kos, Maussen, & Doomernik, 2015, p. 8).

A striking feature of these cases is the role of politicians, civil servants and governmental organizations in organizing protest and resistance against policies proposed by other levels or branches of government. We would actually expect them to alter or redress policies through political parties, alumni networks, lobby activities or negotiations to which they have ample access, but surely not to stage protest and collaborate with SMOs or NGOs. Nevertheless, this mimicking of SMO behaviour is widespread. As the three cases indicate, we find it across different policy domains and countries. Other examples can be found in bans on fracking in the US, France, Germany and the Netherlands, in protests against wind farms, the siting of mobile phone antennas, the storage of nuclear waste, processes of municipal amalgamation or protests against new airports.

We argue that this mimicking of SMO behaviour by politicians and civil servants is a relevant occurrence in and of itself, and that it is currently neglected and under-theorized. It is an orphan that suffers from the disciplinary boundaries between the social movement and political science literatures. To mark it as an object of study, we propose to call it 'governmental activism', which we define as 'politicians, civil servants and governmental players engaging with citizens, SMOs/NGOs and sometimes businesses in contentious claim-making to alter or redress policies proposed by other governmental players.' 'Activism' is, as we will also demonstrate below, the correct noun for the phenomenon because it carries both the unconventional aspects of government behaviour as well as ostensibly conventional aspects such as lobbying, negotiation and litigation, which become protest tools under the umbrella of a contentious claim.

Governmental activism is a layered and dynamic phenomenon that cannot be reduced to a single characteristic. Based on our three examples, we can find some commonalities and some differences. First of all, governmental activism may start in political parties or governmental players (as in the Barendrecht or TTIP cases), but it may also be triggered by SMOs (as in the Sanctuary cities cases). Second, the activism may take forms that are highly unconventional for governments (organizing demonstrations, stimulating legal action groups as in the Barendrecht case), they may employ more conventional forms such as drafting a declaration, lobbying for their point of view (both TTIP) and create alternative arrangements (bed-bath-bread). Over time, instances of unconventional action may be preceded or followed by conventional action (as we will illustrate below with another case). Third, the activism may be primarily performed by government (the Green Left party in Barendrecht) or it may be a form of governance based on mutual dependencies between government and SMOs (all three cases). Fourth, the collaboration with SMOs may be very overt (all three cases) or it may be covert (parts of the Barendrecht case). Fifth, governmental activism may be highly symbolic (TTIP) or it is very tangible (Barendrecht, Sanctuary cities). Sixth, and finally, it may be widespread within the whole governmental organization (all three cases), or it may be more isolated within a few political parties or a group of civil servants (early stages of Barendrecht).

In this article, we seek to conceptualize governmental activism by drawing on social movement and political science literatures. More specifically, our question is: How do social movement and political science literatures help us understand governmental activism? To answer this question, we will first lay a theoretical foundation for understanding governmental activism. Building on this, we conceptualize the particulars of governmental activism, illustrated with empirical examples from the case of municipal amalgamation of The Hague and its environs in the Netherlands.

Theoretical foundations of governmental activism

Being an orphan of two literatures implies that governmental activism is not properly rooted and conceptualized. Our aim here is to make a modest start with theory development that metaphorically lays the foundations for this new object of study. To do so, we first need to discuss some key assumptions in both literatures that hamper our understanding and then show what helpful elements can be picked up and assembled to gain theoretical traction.

Problematic assumptions in social movement and governance literature

Numerous scholars (e.g. Jasper, 1997, pp. 103–129; Kriesi, Koopmans, Duyvendak, & Giugni, 1995, p. 40) have shown that the state can induce collective action by producing unwanted policies and threats. In general, social movement scholars have approached these threats by applying Tilly's (1978) influential distinction between states/authorities and SMOs/challengers that situates SMOs outside of the state. This rather strict divide has caused a social movement-centric focus on mobilization (McAdam & Boudet, 2012, p. 2), which ignores the possibility of protest and resistance by governmental actors. Governmental activism crosses these boundaries as parts of government become a challenger of unwanted policies and threats produced by other parts of government.

Some authors do not make the sharp distinctions between states and SMOs. The new social movement literature demonstrates governmental agency in protest via temporary affiliations between oppositional political parties and specific SMOs, but it still sees SMOs as the prime vehicle for protest mobilization (Kriesi et al., 1995; Stearns & Almeida, 2004). The institutional activism literature shows connections between governments and SMOs via politicians or civil servants who are also activists and vice versa, but it remains very movement-centric as well, and focuses on individual ties instead of collective action by governmental players (Banaszak, 2005; Pettinicchio, 2012). The issue coalition literature indicates governmental mobilizing capacity in engaging civil society actors in achieving policy goals, for example in the war on drugs in the US, but it does not pit governmental players against each other (McCarthy, 2005).

Governmental activism also problematizes the idea of the state as a 'context' that provides political opportunities or threats to SMO mobilization (Jasper, 2011). In this context perspective, political opportunities are seen as 'consistent – not necessarily formal or permanent – dimensions of the political environment' (Tarrow, 1998, pp. 76–77), or as more volatile dimensions that change with events, policies and political actors, such as media access, policy changes and shifts in political alliances (Gamson & Meyer, 1996, p. 277). Governmental activism indicates that there is no 'government' as a whole that engages with SMOs; instead, we encounter a plethora of governmental players engaged in contentious interactions with each other, with SMOs and sometimes with businesses. To appreciate governmental activism from a social movements' perspective, we thus need to 'break down the state', as has been argued recently by Duyvendak and Jasper (2015). This does not imply that governmental players no longer provide political opportunities, but require a more agency-focused approach to political opportunities, as we will argue below.

In political science, the state has been broken down, at least in the vast literature on governance processes. One common understanding in this divergent literature is that governmental players become increasingly dependent on civil society and business players to achieve their goals in relation to complex problems (Hoppe, 2010; Klijn, 2008). Hence, they engage with these players in 'governance networks' in which they share the activity of governing (Bevir, 2011, p. 2; Stoker, 1998, p. 1). Governance networks are assumed to involve new modes of coordination, often dubbed 'network governance'. The main claim of network governance is that processes of governing rely less on authority and sanctions of government (Stoker, 1998, p. 17) and more on reaching a shared public purpose through deliberation (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003; Klijn, 2008), network management (Klijn, 2008), negotiation, communication, nudging and other 'soft' policy instruments (Bevir, 2010, p. 186).

While governance networks are very much part of the empirical reality of governing, processes of network governance are highly problematic since they suggest that government is cleansed from hierarchy and power dynamics, whereas we can observe the contrary in many of these networks (Davies, 2011). Governmental activism does not sit comfortably with these assumptions either since it challenges ideas on achieving a shared public purpose through deliberation by actively resisting actual or perceived hierarchical subordination exercised by governmental players that are in favour of contested policies. In its collaboration with non-governmental players, governmental activism may involve deliberation and soft policy instruments, but it may also entail the exercise of power through creating hierarchy, manipulation and co-optation, that have been so well known in political science ever since Machiavelli (Flyvbjerg, 1998).

In order to fully comprehend governmental activism, we need to develop a theoretical perspective that circumvents the bridging of state-SMO divides by remaining movement-centric, focused on individual connections or neglecting conflicts between governmental players. Moreover, we need a theoretical perspective that breaks down the state, and recognizes that governance networks may involve the exercise of power through hierarchical subordination as well as softer forms of cooperation.

Governmental activism as contentious governance

Governmental activism needs to be seen against the background of governmental players becoming more independent from each other due to the growth of supranational authorities, for instance the EU, that allows local and regional tiers of government to surpass the national level and directly address European players with their grievances and requests (Yesilkagit & Princen, 2010). Independence also relatively increases due to decentralization processes in which authority is transferred from national to regional or local authorities (Pollit, 2005). As Kitschelt (1986, pp. 63–64) has argued, a more centralized governmental apparatus has greater capacity to implement national policies. Conversely, we can argue that a more decentralized governmental apparatus empowers regional or local branches of government to disagree with policy-making at higher levels: they have more room to enact governmental activism. Such increased governmental independence raises the potential for conflict, as no single governmental player may be powerful enough to make authoritative decisions on its own (Hajer, 2009). This implies that the agency of governmental players will become more manifest as they try to strengthen their position vis-à-vis each other to influence decision-making processes (Amenta, Dunleavy & Bernstein, 1994, p. 682; Amenta & Zylan, 1991). Another implication is that governmental players become more dependent on non-governmental players to make stronger claims and expand their influence. Hence, they see a need to engage in governance networks.

Building on this, we can see governmental activism in essence as a form of ‘contentious governance’ (Verhoeven & Bröer, 2015). Drawing on the contentious politics literature, governmental players are not only targets of or third parties to claims but also ‘initiators of claims’, seeking to alter or redress a problematic situation (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2001, p. 5; Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p.4). Initiating claims is, of course, the bread and butter of governmental players and politicians, as is sufficiently demonstrated in social problem research (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988; Spector & Kitsuse, 1987). However, claim-making in those cases is a strategy for seeking legitimacy, whereas initiating claims in contentious politics may involve ‘timid requests’, but more often ‘strident demands’ or ‘direct attacks’ (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p. 5), thus opening up a conceptual space for governmental activism in various guises.

Governance here alludes to the fact that governmental activism often entails a form of cooperation or a division of oppositional labour between governmental and non-governmental players, based on an awareness of mutual dependencies. These forms of cooperation may be built on a relationship characterized by deliberation, negotiation and communication, or the relationship may be more unequal with governmental players exercising power over non-governmental players through hierarchy, manipulation and co-optation. This approach connects to recent theories that see contingency, struggle and resistance as important drivers of deeply pluralistic and political expressions of governance imbued with power (Griggs, Norval, & Wagenaar, 2014, p. 9).

Governmental activism as strategic interaction

To comprehend governmental activism as a form of contentious governance, we have to construct a theory that fully appreciates the mutual dependencies between governmental and non-governmental players, and equally importantly takes into account the mutual dependencies between governmental challengers and their governmental opponents. Growing independence between governmental players does not mean that they cut all ties. On the contrary, governmental players are not a single issue, as most non-governmental players are, and therefore have to weigh how far they can go in their activism without harming existing relations in such a way that they can still deal with their governmental opponents on issues apart from the one they are fighting them on. Hence, judgements of how these relations change over time make a big difference to how governmental challengers behave towards their opponents. These judgements also affect interactions with their non-governmental allies. At some moments, they will maintain close ties to openly collaborate in protest while at other moments they will distance themselves, collaborating covertly at best because the relation to their governmental opponents demands conventional over unconventional forms of action. Consequently, governmental players engaging in governmental activism through contentious governance permanently face strategic questions: Should we stage protest ourselves? Should we collaborate with non-governmental players? Should we collaborate in contentious governance out in the open or in more covert ways? Is protest at the moment the best form of action for us? How far can we go in pushing our interests without destroying our ongoing relationships with our opponents on this issue? To address these topics, we propose to combine recent insights from strategic interaction theory, developed in the social movement literature (Jasper, 2006, 2011, 2015a, 2015b), with propositions from third-phase institutionalism, drawn from political science literature (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013).

As the term suggests, the strategic interaction perspective combines assumptions on strategic behaviour with a strong focus on interaction as the unit of analysis. Key actors are referred to as 'players', which are 'those who engage in strategic action with some goal in mind' (Jasper, 2015a, p. 10). These may be individuals (simple players) or teams of individuals such as informal groups and formal organizations (compound players) that share, tentatively or seemingly, the same objectives. Strategy touches on making other players believe or feel something in order 'to get others to do what you want them to' (Jasper, 2006, p. 9). This implies that players' strategies stand for the set of objectives (ends or goals) they wish to attain. However, such objectives are not clear-cut or unambiguous. Lowndes and Roberts (2013, p. 13) argue that strategy is mostly a reconciliation of competing demands based on mixed motivations. In practises of governmental activism, this can be found in the diverging perspectives of political parties or various administrators that have different ontological positions, ideas and demands, out of which a strategy develops over time (see the Barendrecht case in the introduction). Jasper argues that the circumstances, the other players and internal contention eventually determine the salience of goals over time (Jasper, 2015a, p. 10). Once a strategy materializes, governmental players are acutely aware of their dependence on the actions of other players. To reach their objectives, they need to deploy means such as persuasion, coercion and payment (Jasper, 2015a, p. 11, 2015b, p. 17).

The objectives and means are (re)produced through interactions over a longer time period. Jasper (2006, p. 6) lays out this interactive nature of strategy: 'you face other players who regard you strategically, just as you do them, and engage in a series of actions in response to others, anticipating their reaction in turn'. To act strategically entails getting into the head of the other to figure out what will be her or his next move. It requires constant alertness to new events, mistakes by opponents and changing circumstances (Jasper, 2011, p. 2). There may be a political scandal, a procedural mistake or a new player entering the situation that perhaps calls for a change of objectives or means and creates new avenues for action. A focus on interactions as the unit of analysis is very helpful to understand how changes in mutual dependencies occur and how they affect the practices of governmental activism. In the Barendrecht case, for instance, the alderman decided to cut all ties to CO2isNo and to promote another group aiming at legal action because the national parliament passed the Crisis and Recovery Act that closed down all possibilities for the municipality to undertake legal action (Van Aanholt,

2014). The fact that a possible form of interaction with the national government was cut off quickly affected ongoing interactions with Co2isNo and created interactions with new citizen players. All these interactions were guided by the same strategy: make the national government yield on its plan to capture CO2 under Barendrecht.

To study governmental activism as driven by strategic interactions, we need to approach them in close connection to institutions since governments are more restricted by them than SMOs are. Hence, we should be careful not to overestimate agency by claiming, as Jasper (2015a, p. 13) does, that ongoing interactions are the only driving force of change. At the same time, we must avoid structural determinism where political opportunities (Gamson & Meyer, 1996; Tarrow, 1998), logics of appropriateness (March & Olsen, 2006) or path dependencies (Pierson, 2000) make players do things. The recently emerging strand of third-phase institutionalism in political science (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013) proposes a way out of this problem by recognizing that institutions, comprising a range of formal rules, informal rules and narratives (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013; Ostrom, 1999), constrain and enable players, but essentially through an agentic component. Ontologically, this approach is based on Giddens' concept of the duality of structure, where institutions are 'instantiated in the action of individuals – they do not have an objective existence beyond their effects upon actors' (Giddens quoted in Lowndes & Roberts, 2013, p. 75; see Garud, Hardy, & Maguire, 2007 for a similar perspective in organization theory). Third-phase institutionalism thus builds on an 'institutionalist conception of agency' in which collectives are constrained and enabled by institutions that are of their own making and on which they 'draw' during interactions. Drawing on institutions entails that players recombine formal and informal rules and narratives 'in attempts to form or reinforce coalitions and combat their political opponents' by interpreting, adapting, bending or resisting rules and ideas (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013, p. 108; see also Jasper, 2015a, p. 14).

Applied to governmental activism, this means that governmental players may draw on formal rules, such as substantive and procedural regulations, to challenge their opponents, for instance by turning procedural requirements for hearings about policy proposals into protest meetings, as in the Barendrecht case. In the Sanctuary cities or bed-bath-bread cases, governmental players call upon human rights to justify their actions that directly go against federal and national policies on undocumented migrants. In TTIP protests, local governments draw on their jurisdiction to file motions in order to declare themselves TTIP-free zones. Governmental players may also draw on highly context-dependent informal rules. In most cases, we can argue that governmental activism will be perceived by opponents as a breach of what politicians and public administrators generally see as appropriate governmental behaviour. For governmental players performing governmental activism, their political colour and culture really influence whether they find turning a visit by two ministers into a protest meeting (Barendrecht), or not complying with regional or national regulations on undocumented migrants (Sanctuary cities, bed-bath-bread), to be morally and politically acceptable components of their strategies. A final, and also highly context-dependent, aspect of how governmental players draw on institutions are discourses, framing processes, narratives and other interpretive schemata through which they constrain and enable contentious actions (Benford & Snow, 2000; Hajer & Laws, 2006; Hulst & Yanow, 2014). They may use these interpretive schemata to legitimate their actions towards their opponents and also to mobilize non-governmental players and citizens to collaborate in resisting unwanted policies. The ongoing interactions with their allies and opponents as well as important events will affect their framing, as has been convincingly shown by Ellingson (1995).

For all three aspects of drawing on institutions, governmental players' feel for the political game (Bourdieu, 1991, pp. 177–179) seems to be an important component of judging how far one can go within existing political relationships. It is part and parcel of constantly assessing how mutual dependencies with governmental opponents change over time and what use of rules and interpretive means is opportune at one moment but out of place at another.

The particulars of governmental activism

Governmental activism does many things that SMOs do, such as: (1) using resources – which we will talk about below (McCarthy & Zald, 1977); (2) seizing and creating political and discursive opportunities (Bröer & Duyvendak, 2009; Gamson & Meyer, 1996, p. 276; Tarrow, 1996, pp. 58–60, 1998, p. 72); (3) using framing processes to convey grievances, legitimate claims and mobilize citizens (Benford & Snow, 2000); (4) employing forms of action from the SMO repertoire such as creating coalitions, organizing public meetings, demonstrations, petitions and pamphleteering (Tilly, 2004, p. 3); and (5) sustaining a campaign over time in which claimants, targets of claims and publics are linked (Tilly, 2004, p. 4).

Despite these commonalities with forms of activism organized by SMOs, we argue that governmental activism is a form of contention in and of itself that has many particulars. These are very much linked to the mutual dependencies between governmental challengers and their governmental opponents. Moreover, these particulars also depend on the institutional restrictions on the exercise of power by governments over citizens (negative freedom) as, for instance, guaranteed by the rule of law. Based on these two key features, we can see characteristics that set governmental activism apart from protests organized by SMOs. Governmental players are not single issue and thus always need to make strategic choices that take into account the multiplicity of issues on which they may also interact with the governmental opponents they face on one specific issue. Unlike squatter, occupy or anti-globalization SMOs, governmental activism cannot oppose ‘the system’ as a whole because it is part of organizations that constitute the system. Governmental players are by nature instrumental in their focus to redress policies, while many SMOs may also be geared towards self-help (identity topics) or resisting the system (Kriesi et al., 1995). Moreover, we can expect the action repertoire of governmental activism to be more limited than SMOs since the rule of law excludes them from rioting, occupying buildings or violent attacks. At the same time, we expect them to employ more conventional means for unconventional purposes.

In addition to these general differences, there are three particulars of governmental activism that we would like to further conceptualize and subsequently illustrate with examples from a case study that will be introduced below: (1) the division of oppositional labour with non-governmental actors; (2) the use of conventional means for unconventional strategies; and (3) the creation and deployment of resources.

A division of oppositional labour with non-governmental actors

Although governmental activism can function on its own, for instance a municipality organizing a demonstration of its citizens against a policy proposal, we expect in most cases that it will take the shape of a contentious governance network in which governmental and non-governmental players collaborate. We also expect such collaborations to entail a division of oppositional labour in which each player focuses on what it knows and does best, and on what is seen by a broader public as a legitimate form of action by that player. SMOs, NGOs and local action groups are experts in staging protest through all kinds of unconventional means such as demonstrations, boycotts, petitions and more radical forms of action. These players are commonly understood as legitimate actors to mobilize citizens for these forms of action. Similarly, some political parties are known to stage protests occasionally, for instance left-wing parties or other parties that also happen to sympathize with SMOs. For a governmental player, it is quite uncommon to mobilize citizens for protest, and many citizens would probably see such a line of action as illegitimate or suspicious. This is why governmental players seek collaboration with non-governmental players. The collaboration may take the form of jointly mobilizing citizens but it may also be planned together and executed by the non-governmental player. Shortly we will look at an example from a case of municipal amalgamation in the Netherlands that serves to illustrate such collaborations and other particulars of governmental activism that we will

discuss below. We use it here because it captures so many particulars of governmental activism in one case. First, we will briefly introduce the case.

The city of The Hague, home to the Netherlands' national political institutions, was on the verge of bankruptcy in the middle of the 1990s. To tackle this problem, The Hague asserted that it needed to find space to build new homes to attract middle-class residents, but there was none within the city limits. After several attempts to address this problem, the national parliament intervened in May 1997 and decided that the best solution was the amalgamation of The Hague with parts of the territory of five neighbouring municipalities (Rijswijk, Leidschendam, Voorburg, Pijnacker and Nootdorp). Some of these municipalities were already developing new housing estates that were essential for The Hague. To connect The Hague with these targeted sites, a strip of land (called 'the corridor' by the players involved) was planned to pass through some old neighbourhoods in Rijswijk, Voorburg and Leidschendam.

From the summer of 1997 to the early spring of 1998, two opposing governmental coalitions formed. The strong block of proponents consisted of the provincial authority of South Holland, mandated by the Minister of Interior to take charge of the planning process, and the city of The Hague, which was lobbying for maximum territorial gains. The governmental players opposing the plans were the five municipalities of Rijswijk, Leidschendam, Voorburg, Pijnacker and Nootdorp, later on joined by ad hoc citizen anti-annexation action groups (in Dutch 'Anti-Annexatie Comit  s', or AACs for short). Before the provincial authority announced its initial plans for municipal amalgamation in April 1998, the governmental claimants had shifted gears from negotiations and lobbying to a collective action strategy, leading to a first peak in contentious governance that lasted until the end of 1998. To legitimize their contentious behaviour, the five municipalities had developed the political slogan 'Cooperation yes, annexation no', which was consequently employed to communicate their anti-annexation frame.

After a legal error, the provincial authority had to give back its mandate to the Minister of Interior, who himself took charge of the planning process. In April 2000, he presented his plan, leading to a second wave of contention by the five municipalities and particularly by the AACs. In the end, the planning process needed to be concluded by law through parliament, which led to contestation during parliamentary debates and intensive lobbying with parliamentarians. On 1 January 2002, the law regulating the municipal amalgamation of The Hague came into effect. The outcome was a revised policy in which the new housing estates became part of The Hague, but the rest of the territory of the five municipalities remained unaffected.

Research on this case was conducted by the first author for his doctoral thesis (Verhoeven, 2009), using municipal archival material, interviews with 73 core members of the AACs, an analysis of an empirically selected corpus of 389 articles from a total of 3200 published in the regional newspaper *De Haagsche Courant* and extensive research that included interviews on the planning and decision-making process by Mok (2004). Given the illustrative purposes of the case study in this theoretical paper, we refrain from a detailed methodological account that would be expected in a full-fledged empirical paper.

Let us go back to where we were with our argument about the collaboration between governmental and non-governmental players. How did this play out in the municipal amalgamation case? In spring 1998, the five municipalities organized information evenings to inform citizens about the amalgamation plans and to mobilize citizens to start up their own local AACs, which they would provide with money and strategic advice. Within a very short time period, citizens established AACs in all five municipalities. The AACs tried to operate as independently as possible from the governmental players in order to be seen as legitimate and trustworthy by their fellow citizens. During the summer of 1998, the provincial authority was required by Dutch law to organize open information evenings about the amalgamation plan and to offer citizens the possibility to send in notices of objection. The five municipalities knew that they could draw on these rules to stage protest and as such support their claims against the plans with high numbers of citizens turning out to protest. They communicated these plans as political opportunities to the AACs who quickly picked up on them. The first information evening in late June turned into a demonstration of 4500 people, while the provincial authority

had expected a maximum of 1500 attendees. A second meeting was organized in early July, which was attended by yet another 1500 people (Verhoeven, 2009, pp. 129–130). The five municipalities also knew that the provincial authority had to disclose its plan to the public and allow them to file notices of objection. They took this as a political opportunity to gain as many notices as possible against the plan. Together with jurists from the municipalities, the AACs drafted several model notices of objection that citizens could fill out, and after an intensive three-month campaign during the summer of 1998, the AACs managed to get 23,500 such notices (roughly one-sixth of the total population of all five municipalities) (Verhoeven, 2009, pp. 133–135).

The division of oppositional labour between governmental and non-governmental players may not only vary between cases but also over time within the same case. We expect the ongoing interactions and mutual dependencies between the governmental challengers and their opponents to influence this process. As long as it makes sense for governmental players to put pressure on their opponents through unconventional means, they will continue to collaborate with their non-governmental allies. As soon as they think that the relation with the opponents will be harmed in ways that not only undercut their chances of success in the contested policy but also on other policy issues, we expect that they will either support the non-governmental players secretly or terminate all forms of collaboration with them. Again, the municipal amalgamation case serves to illustrate this point.

After the peak from spring to December 1998, a second wave of contention followed when the Minister of Interior revealed his plans for municipal amalgamation in April 2000. The governmental players were more careful in their claim-making because the minister's plan would be finalized in a law regulating the municipal amalgamation process. Nevertheless, the plan shocked three of the five municipalities since they would have to cede much more territory than under the provincial plan of 1998. Except for some information evenings, they did not organize any collective action themselves but hoped that the AACs would mobilize citizens once again. Although the minister actually had to follow numerous procedural steps, the AACs did not recognize nor seize them as political opportunities for mobilization, except for another possibility of filing notices of objection, an action form they were familiar with from summer 1998. From the end of April until mid-July 2000, the AACs managed to mobilize 28,000 citizens from four of the municipalities to file a notice of objection, which was one-fifth of their population at the time. The AACs struggled with their actions due to a lack of collaboration with the governmental players who had distanced themselves and in fact deserted their strategy of contention, by completely switching to lobbying and negotiations geared towards altering details of the plan during the parliamentary debate on the proposed law (Verhoeven, 2009, pp. 109–111).

The use of conventional means for unconventional strategies

Directly staging protest is often not a very attractive option for governmental players since it may affect their legitimacy among citizens and their governmental opponents. Besides creating a division of oppositional labour with non-governmental players, another attractive option is to employ conventional political means and policy instruments. Examples of political means are: lobbying on grievances in inner political circles that are hard to access for non-governmental players; using advantages in negotiations on other policies to put pressure on the contested issue; calling in favours from other politicians to support your claims; using public speeches, media access and social media to communicate claims to a wider public; filing motions against the proposed policy (see the TTIP example); and making the grievances part of an election campaign. Examples of policy instruments are: designing and implementing alternative policies (as in Sanctuary cities and bed-bath-bread arrangements); investigating public opinion on the issue with a survey; organizing participation of citizens through information meetings; consulting citizens in the design of alternative policies; or collaborating with citizens in the implementation of such policies. Other participatory policy instruments that may reveal public support are citizens' juries (Coote & Lenaghan, 1997) or referenda (Tierney, 2014). What all these political means and policy instruments have in common is that they are seen as legitimate forms of action that can be expected from governmental players. However,

these conventional forms of action are keenly employed for unconventional strategies in order to directly convince other politicians, to put pressure on them through mobilizing citizen support or by neglecting their policy goals through alternative arrangements. For an empirical example, we go back to the municipal amalgamation case.

In October 1998, the five municipalities organized a non-binding referendum for which they did the mobilization themselves, with some help from the AACs. They organized an intensive information campaign, publishing newsletters (75,000 copies per edition), advertisements and posters and delivering letters to each household. The day before the referendum, they organized the largest instance of mobilization during the whole process of contention. All municipal politicians and civil servants went out on the street, together with volunteers from the AACs, to literally go door-to-door, asking people whether they would come out to vote. They were rewarded by a massive turnout on referendum day. Of the 122,000 citizens older than 18 and eligible, 90,000 came to vote (a turnout rate of 73.7%) and 98% voted against the plan by the provincial authority. This turnout confirmed the support for the anti-annexation strategy and the claim-making by the governmental challengers (Verhoeven, 2009, pp. 106–109).

The creation and deployment of resources

Resources have a long history as explanatory elements of protest mobilization (McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1996; McCarthy & Zald, 1977) and the exercise of political power (Dahl, 2005 [original 1961]). A resource, according to Dahl's (2005) broad definition, 'is anything that can be used to sway the specific choices or the strategies of another individual'. The most common examples that can also be found in social movement theories are money, labour, organizational capacity, time, legitimacy and facilities (Dahl, 2005, p. 226; McCarthy & Zald, 1977). As governmental players are part of the political elite, they control larger resource pools (McCarthy & Zald, 1977, p. 1221). In relation to governmental activism, access to ample resources makes governmental players very powerful. They not only can use existing resources such as organizational capacity, but in addition can create resources by reallocating budgets and personnel through political will formation. Let us take a final look at our case study for some examples.

Resisting municipal amalgamation proved to be a resource-intensive process. The five municipalities financed the AACs, and particularly in 1998 helped them with strategic and legal advice. The municipalities also set up a 'steering committee to preserve municipal autonomy' that coordinated most actions. Communication specialists and spokespersons working for the five municipalities supported this committee by designing campaign material and action strategies, and they also provided the AACs with strategic, legal and practical advice. In addition, the five municipalities sponsored a massive poster campaign before the summer holiday of 1998 by designing and ordering 100,000 anti-annexation posters for a total estimated population of 152,000 inhabitants in all five municipalities. The AACs helped distribute the posters door to door, just before the summer holiday. Many of the posters were indeed put up in windows; pictures from that period show that in some areas, every house had the poster on display. Finally, in the days leading up to the non-binding referendum, all politicians and civil servants were engaged in the campaign. Altogether, the staging of the anti-annexation protest cost the five municipalities a total of 2.27 million euros between 1997 and 2001, most of which had to be reallocated from other budgets (Verhoeven 2009, p. 111).

Conclusions

Governmental activism is a new topic in the field of social movement studies and political science that deserves more attention. Here, we have only been able to set out a first conceptualization of this contentious claim-making behaviour by governmental players. What then characterizes governmental activism, in which governmental players join forces with non-governmental and sometimes other governmental players in contentious actions against policies they want to prevent or redress? As our

definition shows, governmental players have to be important drivers of the claim-making processes. For true governmental activism to occur, politicians and civil servants need to collectively construct their grievances against policy proposals, determine their action strategies and start to perform and collaborate in contentious interactions with (non-)governmental players. Activism needs to be rather widespread in such cases and not hinge on single individuals. Obviously, the target of the claims is another part of the government.

Moreover, governmental activism draws on institutional characteristics such as laws, procedures and policies that bind and control the behaviour of governmental players under the rule of law. In that sense, the action repertoire of governmental players is limited compared to non-governmental activists. It is exactly this difference, however, that facilitates a division of oppositional labour, as we have analysed above. In this division, the governmental players often use more conventional means, which get a new meaning in the cooperation with the non-governmental players: conventional means are used in an unconventional strategy. From the perspective of SMOs, cooperating with governmental activists is attractive given the possibilities for protest the division of oppositional labour offers them, and the compatibility of conventional and unconventional means. Moreover, governmental players can create and deploy impressive amounts of resources, which SMOs often lack.

As we have shown, social movement theory both hinders and helps the analysis of governmental activism. It is hindered by movement centrism, state–SMO dichotomies and seeing the state as a context that offers political opportunities for or creating threats to mobilization. The authors that try to overcome the state–SMO dichotomy bring useful insights to the table, but their accounts of state–SMO relationships do not do enough to elucidate governmental activism. For that, we need the strategic interaction perspective with its focus on the agency of players, which allows for a dynamic analysis of how goals, means and choices influence interactions between governmental activist players, their opponents and (non-)governmental players supporting their claims. However, since we are analysing governmental players, we need to study their activism in close connection to institutions in a way that moves between overestimating the players' agency and structural determinism. Third-phase institutionalism provides a way out by suggesting that analysis should focus on how players draw on formal rules, informal rules and interpretive schemata, all of which they perceive as constraining or enabling their strategic interactions. By combining the strategic interaction perspective with third-phase institutionalism, governmental activism can be studied in both single-case and comparative cross-case analysis.

Recognizing and conceptualizing governmental activism is not just important for scholarly reasons. In the public and political debates of our times, 'citizens' and 'state elites' are once more portrayed as opposed entities, which not only overlook forms of cooperation between states and citizens but also, and more importantly, overestimate the coherence and unity of the state. The time has therefore really come to break down the state, to see how governmental players may behave like SMOs and collaborate with a host of (non-) governmental players in contentious claim-making. We have only started to see the tip of the iceberg. It is time to dig deeper.

Notes

1. <https://www.ttip-free-zones.eu/node/142>.
2. <https://www.ttip-free-zones.eu>.
3. See several country websites via: <https://www.ttip-free-zones.eu>.
4. Numbers based on a combination of Ridgley (2008, p. 55) and <http://cis.org/Sanctuary-Cities-Map>.

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