Contentious Governance

Local Governmental Players as Social Movement Actors

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Over the past decades the role of government in policy making and implementation has changed in many countries. Incited by reforms toward new public management, marketization and privatization coupled to participatory democracy, centralized bureaucracies have given way to loosely structured, sometimes fragmented, governance networks (Bevir, 2010: ch. 4). These networks do not appear in every field of policy: they are, for example, more pronounced in social and environmental policies in the Global North and around aid-dependent policies in the Global South. As a counter tendency, securitization policies tend to strengthen central governments.

Depending on the field, policy conflicts are often embedded in networks, a process we propose to call “contentious governance.” Analytically, the idea of contentious governance unhinges mainstream social movement theorizing on the role of government in processes of contestation. The dominant political process perspective assumes that government is a more or less unified actor to mobilize against, to seek support of or to be seen as the “context” that provides opportunities for or threats to mobilization (Jasper, 2011: 5). From a contentious governance perspective, there is no “government” as such that engages with protestors; instead we encounter a plethora of governmental players in contentious interactions with each other and with other players.

The idea of contentious governance also problematizes Charles Tilly’s (1978) influential distinction between state and movements that situates movements outside of the state. Many cases can be found in which governmental players together with movements and other civil society organizations fight for the same cause. We encounter governmental players that behave “social movement-like” by mobilizing citizens to support their claims in policy conflicts with other governmental players. In these cases governmental players become movements, at least for a while, thus blurring Tilly’s distinction between state and movements.

In this chapter we will focus on episodes of contentious governance in which governmental players behave social movement-like, because these cases push our understanding of contentious governance the furthest.
More specifically, we analyze mobilization by governmental players during policy conflicts with other governmental players. Examples of this are the protests against aircraft noise in the UK (Griggs and Howarth, 2004) and Switzerland (Bröer, 2007); some cases of opposition to energy projects in the United States (McAdam and Boudet, 2012); and fierce conflicts about nuclear waste storage in Germany (Gorleben), where local governmental players sometimes oppose storage.

Our analysis will build on the strategic perspective suggested by Jasper (2015) and the introduction to this volume. We will analyze the strategic interactions between governmental players in policy conflicts and the opportunities and constraints that these interactions impose on the social movement-like behavior of the opposing governmental players. Our focus lies on how governmental players seize and create these, sometimes discursive (Bröer and Duyvendak, 2009), opportunities during strategic interactions with their governmental opponents.

We analyze two cases of contentious governance in the Netherlands to show how governmental claimants strategically interact with governmental proponents of contested policies, with bystanders, and with publics they seek to mobilize. An abundance of cases is to be found in the Netherlands where lower tiers of government mobilize against policy plans advanced by regional or national authorities. The Dutch context is very interesting to study such cases because of the tension between a strong tradition of consensus-building through negotiations (Hendriks, 2009; Lijphart, 1968) and contentious behavior that pushes the boundaries of governance practices.

The first case to be analyzed is a process of municipal amalgamation researched by Verhoeven in his doctoral thesis (2009). Municipal amalgamation, merging municipalities by the redrawing of polity boundaries, is itself part of a restructuring of governance relations. We will show how attempts to concentrate political power are opposed by governmental players. The second case focuses on local protests against the siting of mobile phone antennas (Bröer et al., 2012). Here, the conflicts over mast siting involve national and local government and the telecom industry. We will show how local governments rally for a stakeholder position, thereby enacting governance, even in the absence of legal rights.

Before we dig into the cases we will elaborate on the idea of contentious governmental players and various empirical manifestations that can be found in the literature related to this topic.
Contentious Governance and Governmental Players

Research on mobilization has been social movement centric, obscuring the role of other players in recruiting activists and framing issues (McAdam and Boudet, 2012: 2; see also Jasper, 2015). The active involvement of governmental actors to mobilization seems understudied. This needs to be addressed particularly in a situation of conflicts within dispersed and displaced policy networks or contentious governance, as we call it. To better understand governmental players in this respect we first need to be more precise on what we mean by contentious governance.

Contention is commonly understood to be a process of claims making by non-state actors in which the state is either the target of or a third party to claims. Often overlooked is the suggestion in the contentious politics literature of governmental players performing as “initiators of claims,” seeking to alter or redress a problematic situation (McAdam et al., 2001: 5; Tilly and Tarrow, 2007: 4; Tilly, 2008: 5). Of course initiating claims is part of the core business for governmental players and politicians. This is sufficiently demonstrated in social problem research (Spector and Kitsuse, 1987; Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988). However, claims making in those cases is a strategy for seeking legitimacy. In this article, we look at governmental actors that mobilize discontent.

Initiating claims in a social movement-like manner is a process that we relate to the increasing prominence of governance. We suggest that the dispersion of governance networks since the 1980s has increased the number of actors involved in policy making (Bevir, 2010), decreased power imbalances, and increased the number of arenas. While the figuration as a whole might have become more complex, the network structure allows for more room to maneuver for every single actor. The network structure also increases the potential for conflicts of interest because there is no clear hierarchy and no single compound player is powerful enough to make authoritative decisions on its own (Hajer, 2009). Lastly, governance networks are coordinated foremost by “language” or shared symbols and assumptions (Hajer, 2009).

The social movement literature provides some cues how to relate these developments in governance to mobilization by governmental players. According to Amenta and Zylan (1991: 252), the agency of governmental players largely depends on their autonomy: “The greater their autonomy, the more likely that state actors will pursue their own agendas, including the support of like-minded challenges. As bureaucrats try to expand the powers of state institutions, they may encourage movements with similar
goals.” In a governance context, governmental players experience more autonomy due to processes of decentralization, devolution of power, and deregulation. Governmental players may spur challenges that help their cause: “State civil servants can be seen as members of the polity interested in expanding their own power as well as advancing their ideas of the public interest. To promote their goals, state actors may selectively spur challenges” (Amenta and Zylan, 1991: 263). Here we clearly see the suggestion of governmental players performing as claims makers with the potential to mobilize bystanders to support their claims vis-à-vis governmental or other players. This potential may materialize whenever governmental players get stuck in policy controversies dominated by frame pluralism and stalemate (Rein and Schön, 1993: 147-150; Laws and Rein, 2003: 174; Meyer, 2005: 7). Instead of trying to reframe the situation (Rein and Schön, 1993) they can choose to behave social movement-like.

To put social movement-like behavior by governmental players in perspective we may see it as one manifestation of contentious governance next to institutional activism and facilitation through issue coalitions. Institutional activism can be found in what Lee Ann Banaszak (2005) has called “state movement intersections,” consisting of overlapping memberships. State officials may also be movement activists participating in social movement organizations or participants in unorganized or spontaneous activities by these organizations. Likewise, movement activists may become state officials while retaining their movement connections. These institutional or insider activists, Banaszak argues, influence the development, strategies, and outcomes of movements because they most often employ insider tactics. Her empirical analysis of the intersections between state officials and the women’s movement in the United States indeed indicates that institutional feminist activists focused on non-protest activities such as taking legal action and informing the movement about political opportunities, although many also participated in protest activities (Banaszak, 2005: 167-168). In addition, David Pettinicchio (2012: 502) identifies other activities of institutional activists, such as framing the problem or possible remedies; creating policies, programs or even agencies to support movement claims; creating new political opportunities for movement actors; and encouraging activism within the government. In all these actions we clearly see that institutional activists are quite proactive, that they use their access to resources and employ their influence on policy making to help the good cause (Pettinicchio, 2012: 502).

A more collective way for governmental players to become involved in contentious governance is to facilitate mobilization by and participate in
issue coalitions. Many examples can be found in the wide spread of community coalitions against substance abuse in the United States since the 1990s (McCarthy, 2005: 90-93). Governmental, corporate, and civil society elites, involved in the US “War on Drugs,” facilitate and participate in community coalitions that press for substance abuse reduction. The governmental players are either individual government officials or compound players such as law enforcement agencies or alcohol and drug prevention agencies (McCarthy, 2005: 93). Governmental facilitation takes the form of extensive funding, of moral resources such as endorsement by public figures, or of informational resources such as strategic and technical support (McCarthy, 2005: 104-105).

An early example of government-social movement coalitions can be found in Japanese anti-pollution politics between 1956 and 1976, including state agencies, opposition political parties, local governments, and the courts (Brewster Stearns and Almeida, 2004). Other examples are the affiliations between oppositional political parties and the anti-nuclear weapons movement in the Netherlands during the mid-1980s (Kriesi et al., 1995). The direct involvement of governmental players in coalitions with social movements indicates that the boundaries between government and movements sometimes become very fuzzy: working toward the same goals has led to interpenetration of governmental players and movements (Wolfson, 2001; compare Sampson et al., 2005, on hybrid events).

Compared to institutional activism and the facilitation of coalitions with movements, social movement-like behavior by governmental players is the most extreme form of contentious governance. With social movement-like behavior it does not make sense anymore to talk about a state-movement dichotomy that is bridged by state movement intersections provided by institutional activists, nor do we need to discuss the fuzziness of the boundary between governmental players and movements. Instead governmental players become social movement-like, at least for a while, by directly mobilizing bystanders to support their cause in a policy conflict. How this form of governmental activism works will be analyzed in the Dutch cases of municipal amalgamation and cell-phone mast siting.

**Municipal Amalgamation of the Hague’s Vicinity**

Processes of municipal amalgamation entail that smaller municipalities are merged partly or entirely with bigger municipalities. One of the most controversial and extensive Dutch processes of municipal amalgamation
was that of the city of The Hague and its vicinity in the period 1997-2001 (Verhoeven, 2009). In the late 1990s the city of The Hague, home to the Netherlands’ national political institutions, found itself in deep financial problems due to the flight of the middle class to neighboring municipalities and a sharp decline in tax revenues. The suggested solution was to build new homes to attract middle-class residents and develop infrastructure to support “creative industries.” The Hague needed space to implement these plans but had none within the city limits.

After several attempts to address this problem, the issue became so highly politicized that the national government and parliament intervened. In the end, in May 1997, the Dutch parliament decided that municipal amalgamation would be the best solution. In this case the five municipalities of Rijswijk, Leidschendam, Voorburg, Pijnacker, and Nootdorp would have to give up parts of their territory to The Hague. The main target of the amalgamation process consisted of new housing estates (Leidschenveen and Ypenburg), (post)industrial sites and office locations that were developed by some of these municipalities and a corridor to connect these sites with The Hague’s territory, which was planned to pass through established neighborhoods in Rijswijk, Voorburg, and Leidschendam. Over the whole 1997-2001 time period 1998 and 2000 proved to be the years in which contentious governance between proponents and opponents reached it peaks.

1998: Intense Governmental Contestation

From the summer of 1997 onward into the early spring of 1998 two opposing governmental coalitions were formed. The strong block of proponents consisted of the provincial authorities of Zuid-Holland (a regional tier of government), mandated by the Minister of the Interior to take charge of the planning process, and the city of The Hague lobbying for maximum territorial gains. The governmental claimants opposing the plans were the five municipalities of Rijswijk, Leidschendam, Voorburg, Pijnacker, and Nootdorp, later on joined by ad hoc citizen action groups, and achieving significant discursive resonance through an influential regional newspaper De Haagsche Courant. 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 the first peak in contentious governance. To legitimate their social movement-like behavior they had developed the political slogan “Cooperation yes, annexation no,” which was consequently employed to communicate their anti-annexation frame. Thus they created a discursive
opening for themselves reacting to the proponents’ “Give The Hague space” frame. Working from their anti-annexation frame the governmental claimants started out by creating opportunities for mobilization that fitted into the ongoing stream of strategic interactions with the proponents.

As soon as the provincial plan became clear, the five municipalities organized information evenings to explain what was about to happen and for citizens to voice their opinions. An estimated 2,000 citizens (from all five municipalities) attended. These meetings also functioned to mobilize citizens to start up their own local ad hoc anti-annexation action groups (in Dutch: Anti-Annexatie Comités, AACs). The municipalities stated that they would provide each AAC with resources like money and advice by public relations consultants. By doing so, they created an opportunity for citizens to become active. Citizens quickly responded, and within a very short time frame of up to three weeks AACs were established in all five municipalities. The AACs tried to operate as independently as possible from the governmental claimants as they thought that their fellow citizens might otherwise not trust them. Interestingly, this strategic distancing did not diminish the AACs importance as collaborators for the governmental claimants.

The governmental claimants created another opportunity for protest in June 1998. A survey from that period indicated that 98 percent of the total population in the five municipalities knew about the plan and 93 percent were against it. A massive poster campaign against the plan of the provincial authority visualized and further stimulated discontent. A grand total of 100,000 anti-annexation posters were printed for an estimated population of 152,000 inhabitants of the five municipalities. The AACs helped to distribute the posters practically door-to-door, just before the summer holiday. Many of the posters were indeed put up behind windows; pictures from that period show that in some areas, every house had the poster on display.

During the summer of 1998 the provincial authority had to fulfill procedural requirements concerning their plan. They had to organize open information evenings and offer the possibility for citizens to send in notices of objection. The governmental claimants reacted strategically by suggesting to the AACs that these were opportunities for protest. The AACs picked up on these suggestions very quickly. The first information evening of the provincial authority in late June was turned into a demonstration of 4,500 people, where the provincial authority had expected a maximum of 1,500 attendees. A second meeting was organized in early July, which was attended by yet another 1,500 people. The opportunity to file notices of objection against the provincial plan from June to the beginning of September was also seized by the AACs. They started an intensive campaign that lasted
three months, and succeeded in getting 23,500 notices of objection by individual citizens (roughly one-sixth of the population) over the summer holiday. By mobilizing citizens during the summer of 1998, the AACs helped the governmental claimants to retain their distance from organizing forms of protest that could easily alienate them from the powerful proponents of municipal amalgamation.

The governmental claimants were in a powerful position to create an opportunity for mobilization. In October 1998, they 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) alongside advertisements, posters, and letters delivered 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 called upon, 90,000 came to vote and 98 percent voted against the plan by the provincial authority. These turnout numbers confirmed the support for the anti-annexation frame and the claims making by the governmental opponents.

In December 1998, the odds turned against the provincial authority. After losing a legal battle on a procedural technicality provincial politicians feared losing too many votes during upcoming elections if they would proceed with the amalgamation process. Before the year ended, they returned their mandate to the Minister of the Interior. He had to take charge of the municipal amalgamation procedure and develop a tangible plan to reach closure in this contentious governance process.

**2000: Walking the Thin Line between Contestation and Negotiation**

The peak in contentious governance from the spring to December 1998 was followed by a quiet period, which ended when the Minister of the Interior revealed his plans for municipal amalgamation in April 2000. With the minister in charge, the governmental claimants sensed that they had to be more careful in their claims making because the minister’s plan would be finalized in a law regulating the municipal amalgamation process.

The minister’s unveiling of his plan in April 2000 shocked three of the five municipalities: they would now have to cede much more territory than under the provincial plan of 1998. Two out of the five organized open information evenings for their citizens; one was attended by 2,000 people
and from the other no numbers are available. The governmental claimants did not organize much collective action themselves in this phase of the strategic interactions; they pinned their hopes on the local citizen action groups to mobilize citizens once again. Although there were actually numerous procedural steps the minister had to follow, the AACs did not seize them as opportunities for mobilization, except for one they were already familiar with from the summer of 1998. From the end of April until mid-July 2000, the minister’s plan was disclosed for public scrutiny and citizens could send in notices of objection. The AACs managed to mobilize 28,000 citizens from four of the municipalities to do so, which was one-fifth of their population at the time.

The public pressure made the minister decide to alter his plan in such ways that significant parts of the territory of old neighborhoods required for the corridor connecting the new housing estates to The Hague’s territory were no longer at stake. From this moment onward the governmental claimants deserted their strategy of contention and completely switched to lobbying and negotiations geared toward altering details of the plan during parliamentary debate on the proposed law. In the end the whole amalgamation process took almost five years and was officially completed on 1 January 2002. The new housing estates became part of The Hague, but the rest of the territory of the five municipalities remained unaffected.

Protesting Mast Siting

The siting of mobile phone technology – base stations and antennas – is contested in many countries and locales worldwide. Protests in Europe and the United States are documented quite well (Borraz, 2011; Burgess, 2004; Drake, 2006; Stilgoe, 2005). But also outside these countries we find action against mobile phone technology, for example, in the Philippines and in Ghana. It is safe to say that global mobile phone technology has a different footprint locally, partly because of local contestation. A point of discussion is the question if these protests testify to NIMBY-ism and irrationality (Law and McNeish, 2007; Soneryd, 2007). In the Netherlands the GSM, UMTS, and LTE (fourth generation) network use about 25,000 base stations at present.

1975-1999: Stopping the Roll-out

From 1975 onward the siting of radio towers has been an object of debate and incidentally of contention in the Netherlands. Land use, interference with
household appliances or health effects were mentioned in these cases. The advent of the second-generation – GSM – cellular network beginning in the 1990s initiated protracted conflicts in about 15 percent of all municipalities. Councils and aldermen played a significant role in these conflicts.

The siting of GSM antennas in most cases fell within the jurisdiction of municipalities. As part of spatial planning policy, a building permit was required. Local governments adapted this opportunity to oppose the roll-out of GSM technology. From 1994 onward, we witness the first local protests, in about ten municipalities. One of them turned out to be crucial: Haarlemmermeer, a medium-sized municipality close to Amsterdam. There, a handful of citizens objected to the installation of a base station on the top of their rental apartment building. They mainly reported increasing health complaints and started to survey health conditions. While the aldermen initially did not want to interfere with the roll-out, the municipal council embraced citizens’ concerns and pressured the aldermen to adopt a different policy. The main argument was uncertainty about health effects. In that sense, local politicians adopted the national political and scientific discourse about health effects of mobile phone technology – no proof of adverse effects but no conclusive research in the other direction either – and turned it to their advantage. They started making antenna policy. Part of this was to look at the current sites and their legal basis. It turned out that the local planning authorities had not approved most of the base stations. The municipality adapted to this opportunity and filed a lawsuit against “illegal” base stations – which they won. Moreover, they did not hand out any permits for new stations and threatened to remove the illegal ones. Haarlemmermeer used the legal framework at its disposal, thus having a huge impact on national technology implementation: several other municipalities followed their example and the roll-out of GSM technology came under serious pressure.

At that point, the national government changed spatial planning law. Antennas were largely exempted from building permit requirements. This was approved by the national organization of municipalities, after fierce internal struggle. Effectively, municipalities lost their basis for antenna policy and therefore were excluded from the governance network. In sum, municipalities adapted legal opportunities to their local agendas and opposed mast siting in cooperation with citizens. They created new opportunities for social movement-like behavior by other municipalities and legitimated their own actions by defining scientific uncertainty as a reason to stop the roll-out.

While municipal rights were curbed, their dispersed opposition delayed the roll-out of the second- and later the third-generation technology. The
national government devised mast siting policy and coupled this to health effects, health risk research and risk communication. In that sense, the issue of the health risk of mobile phone technology was not off but firmly on the agenda. Although municipalities were no longer legally part of the governance network, citizens could enter it directly: as tenants they got a veto right if base stations were placed on an apartment building. Scientific expertise got a more pronounced role through a large funding program for mobile phone health risk research and the industry started searching for non-contentious building sites like churches or offices. In general, the industry became more dependent on other actors as well. The second phase shows how municipalities capitalized on this in a social movement-like fashion.

2000-2012: Regaining Power

Most municipalities followed the new national policy and left base station siting to national authorities, the telecom industry, and the owners or inhabitants of buildings. Other municipalities played a more activist role. Precisely because they had fewer legal opportunities to be seized, they created opportunities and adapted less obvious national discourses to their cause.

Among the municipalities that oppose mast siting we see different strategies. In rare cases, local politicians actively approach citizens to start thinking about and acting on base station siting. They organize meetings for citizens, invite critical scientists and activists from other cities and mobilize citizens explicitly. In Amsterdam for example, members of the local council invited citizens to commonly devise alternative siting plans and, even broader, to scrutinize the necessity of mobile phone technology in general. Here, local politicians were able to capitalize on two existing discourses: first the widespread claim of citizens’ participation in politics. Similar to the case of amalgamation described above, local politicians reasoned that they were “closest to the citizens.” This legitimated their involvement in mast siting decisions. Second, local politicians used common risk thinking to establish their position. As local government, they have a right to “care” about “their” citizens.

These claims are also visible where municipalities are a bit less activist. In these cases, municipal claimants hitch on to existing citizen protest and create new opportunities for them. Municipalities organize “informational meetings” or hearings. They commission survey research to chart public opinion and propose alternative sites for base stations following objections to a particular site. In one case, local politicians point citizens to the planned
erection of a mast and the procedural terms under which this might be opposed. Municipalities support lawsuits, organize media attention, or invite other stakeholders within the governance network. For example, in the city of Hengelo, following citizens’ concerns, the municipality urged the telecom provider to search for a different base station site. This was not exactly what the local action group wanted. They urged the right to think about the spot themselves. But it put the municipality back at the negotiation and policy table with telecom providers, health researchers, and national authorities.

Regarding the cases of mast siting, the onset and development of local activism happened in two steps: first, triggered by citizens concerns, social movement-like behavior of some municipalities opposing mast siting led to new restrictive national policy and legislation. Municipal rights concerning base station siting were severely reduced. Still, in the second step we see that municipalities claim a position in decision making and reclaim entry into the governance network. Here, they act social movement-like by cooperating with local action groups (for a more detailed analysis, see Bröer et al., 2012).

Local protests also made telecom providers search for non-contentious sites. Among other measures, the industry attracted liaison managers and site-acquisition specialists and made wholesale arrangements with large institutions to get around localized opposition. While most of the base stations are in place now, the remaining spots are highly contested and the upcoming fourth generation of mobile phone communication technology (LTE) might need new sites for base stations.

Finally, although mobile phone technology and base stations can be scrutinized in several ways – land use policy, real estate value, participation, necessity – discussions tend to focus on possible health effects. Although evidence of adverse health effects is rare, it cannot be convincingly excluded. The World Health Organization (WHO) reclassified mobile phones as a “possible carcinogenic” on 31 May 2011. The Council of Europe in May 2011 advised banning the use of cell phones and wireless networks in schools, and it recommended adherence to the “as low as reasonably achievable” (ALARA) principles for EMF exposure. Municipalities can seize these opportunities if it fits their strategic interactions with higher tiers of government and corporations.

Conclusion

This chapter can be read as an attempt to bring together several lines of inquiry and point to a pattern: under the condition of governance, contention
is more likely to see governmental players in many roles: as “the enemy formerly known as the state,” as institutional activist, as a partner in a coalition, or even as social movement-like actor. A governance structure favors coordination and conflicts through symbols, language, and discourse. This points to forms of mobilization more pronounced in advanced liberal democracies; it does not address upheavals like “the Arab Spring” equally well.

Indeed, in the two Dutch cases discussed here, the traditional dividing lines between state and social movements or between government and citizens no longer apply to policy conflicts. Within a governance context governmental organizations can become embroiled in processes of contention, acting as claimants who behave “social movement-like.” However, this does not imply that they become social movement organizations. Contrary to many social movements, governmental claimants are not single-issue organizations. They are always involved in many policy domains and thus have to reckon with several ongoing governance relations even with their opponents in any specific issue. Strategically, cognitively and emotionally, governance network actors depend on each other in multiple ways.

The movement-like behavior by governmental claimants is constrained by variable degrees of freedom. In the municipal amalgamation case there were stronger restrictions because the claimants always had to consider making a deal that altered the plan instead of redressing it. Protesting mast siting is less restricted by this dynamic because so many masts are required and so many sites can be considered within the municipal boundaries. The degrees of freedom for movement-like behavior also vary overtime. In the municipal amalgamation case the governmental claimants became less activist in the second episode of contention because they realized that closure had to be reached with the Minister of the Interior. In the mast protest cases we see the opposite dynamic. After they had become closed out from decision making in governance networks, various municipalities became more openly activist by adapting and creating opportunities for their citizens to protest mast siting. They reclaimed the right to make policy concerning base station siting and used contention to achieve this.

Both cases show that governmental claimants strategically react to proponents’ discourses and political actions by turning them into opportunities for direct mobilization by themselves or to provide local action groups with arguments to frame their grievances and start a process of consensus mobilization (Klandermans, 1997). Using and interpreting the rules of the game is also part and parcel of governmental claimant’s movement-like behavior, sometimes to facilitate their own protest – as was the case in the
first phase of mobile phone protests – but most often to enable bystanders to use them for their own actions. Again the degrees of freedom within ongoing governance relationships seem to be the critical factor determining whether governmental actors use opportunities themselves or mediate them to local supporters of their claims. In cases with less freedom, such as the municipal amalgamation process, governmental claimants try to avoid critique from the proponents on abusing the rules of the game for behavior that may be perceived as too “unconventional.”

Most movement-like behavior of governmental claimants remains rather conventional: organizing information evenings, organizing referenda or poster campaigns for the expression of protest. In both case studies they rely on a “division of oppositional labor” with local action groups and other bystanders. Often cued by governmental claimants, action groups organize forms of protest such as demonstrations or using legal procedures for protest that are perhaps too “unconventional” for governmental claimants to employ. In that sense governmental claimants seem to rely on a restricted political repertoire for their movement-like behavior. The concept of contentious governance allows us to the better understand these ubiquitous forms of protests.

References


