

REKINDLING MOMENTUM

How rejected major infrastructure projects regain political approval



Master Thesis – Final Version

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“An idea doesn’t start with the proximate source. It has a history. When one starts to trace the history of a proposal or concern back through time, there is no logical place to stop the process.”

John W. Kingdon, 1984

Abstract

To create a policy window, one needs to align the political perception of the problem at hand and connect this logically to the desired policy solution. In doing so, policy entrepreneurs apply methods of persuasive storytelling, which function as a series of triggering moments steering the course of the decision-making process. Although much is written about the creation of policy windows, little attention is paid to situations in which the proposed spatial intervention has a history of political rejection. This research analyses the lobbying activities and circumstances which contribute to the rekindling of momentum for infrastructure projects of national interest. An instrumental case study on the lobbying process behind the Dutch railway project the “Lelylijn”, based on a documentary data analysis of public records and media sources and interviews with key lobbying actors, is performed to unravel the intentional and accidental triggering moments which have been factors in regaining political approval.

The history of rejected proposals for the Lelylijn project has resulted in a more pragmatic and diverse storyline and increased attention to support from regional and European authorities. A combination of external developments such as the growing attention for sustainability and the Dutch housing crisis is strategically framed to fit the bundle of storylines developed to promote the rail infrastructure project. The suggestion is made that the malleability of policy deliberation processes is amplified. More recognition is needed for the unknown factors affecting the intentional, persuasive actions performed by the policy entrepreneur. Further research is necessary on the role of expert input on the formation of policy windows and the role of persuasive storytelling in retaining momentum on the long-term.

Keywords: Multiple Streams Framework; Persuasive storytelling; Policy window; Policy entrepreneur; Triggering moments; Strategic framing

Figure 1 (title page): The convergence of streams creates room for the proposed infrastructure project (adapted from iStock, 2015).

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List of abbreviations

EU	European Union
MSF	Multiple Streams Framework
TEN-T	Trans-European Transport Network
TK	Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal

1. Introduction

Despite the COVID-19 measures in force, there was a party going on in December 2021. To the joy of the lobby behind the Lelylijn, a plan for a more direct railway connection between Amsterdam and Groningen, the Lelylijn was mentioned in the Coalition Agreement of the Rutte IV administration (Rijksoverheid, 2021). Consequently, exploratory research is instigated on the realisation of the railway line and the subsequent environmental impact. The year 2038 is marked as a possible point of delivery for this infrastructural megaproject (Initiatiefgroep Lelylijn, 2021). Whether or not actual implementation will become reality, the train is brought into motion.

Unravelling how the ambassadors of a project proposal create political and societal support for their ideas through persuasive activities is an interesting, though extensively covered subject. However, from a historical perspective, it becomes clear that the current initiative for the Lelylijn is not one-of-a-kind. Already at the presentation of Cornelis Lely's famous land reclamation plan for the Zuiderzee in 1891, the first proposal for a more direct connection between Amsterdam and the northern Netherlands was put on paper. Shortly after the Second World War, the first suggestion for a railway following approximately the trajectory of the Lelylijn was made (Van Diepen, 2021). Later, revivals of the idea made their appearance in the 1980s and 2000s. In none of the cases, ideas are turned in implementation. The current lobbying efforts supporting the Lelylijn thus have deep roots.

The story of the Lelylijn exemplifies that the rejection of proposed infrastructural plans, and spatial interventions in general, at a particular moment in time is no reason for putting your ideas in the wastebasket. Although at the moment of writing (early 2022), no contracts for realisation have been signed yet, the fact that the ambassadors of the Lelylijn plan have succeeded in regaining political approval is noteworthy. The idea that momentum for infrastructural plans can be created despite earlier attempts is a valuable lesson for project ambassadors worldwide.

Academic literature provides input on the creation of momentum for spatial projects. Kingdon (1984) visualizes momentum as the point at which the general perception on a problem and the proposed policy solution of the project's lobby narrative intertwine. To bring these elements together, methods of storytelling are performed which are aimed for persuading your audience, encouraging imagination, and sparking interest for your ideas (Sandercock, 2003; Mäntysalo et al., 2020). Strategic framing is a key activity here, by giving a particular meaning and direction to planning issues and framing the past, present and future (Van Hulst, 2012).

Although academic knowledge exists on the creation of political attention for plans, literature does not cover cases in which similar proposals have been rejected in advance. To gain insight in the steps taken in this specific kind of cases, the following research question is formulated:

Which factors make that previously rejected major infrastructure projects regain political approval?

The ambassadors, or lobby, behind major infrastructure projects are the subject of the research question. In this study, they are regarded the driving force of decision-making and are the most actively involved in promoting a particular plan. The professional background of the ambassadors can be diverse, stretching from the political domain to the business sector to citizen groups.

Beside actions taken by lobbying parties (intentional triggering moments), the creation of momentum also depends on the positive or negative impact from contextual, uncontrolled developments (accidental triggering moments). To explore how these two types of input contributing to the creation of momentum in cases of infrastructure proposals with a history of rejection, three secondary research questions are formulated:

Rekindling momentum

- 1. How do intentional triggering moments contribute to renewed political approval to previously rejected major infrastructure projects?*
- 2. How do accidental triggering moments contribute to renewed political approval to previously rejected major infrastructure projects?*
- 3. Which factors make new promotion activities for previously rejected major infrastructure projects different from former promotion activities?*

These secondary research questions are aimed to jointly form an image of the actions performed by lobbying actors and the contextual developments which collectively result in renewed political attention for major infrastructure projects. For the first and second question, this study will focus on the two types of triggering moments and their impact on the course of decision-making individually, after which the third question adds a more holistic, reflexive perspective by making comparisons between current and previous lobbying trajectories.

The thesis continues as follows. First, the theoretical framework is discussed which forms the basis of the research, accompanied by a conceptual model presenting the key concepts and their relationships. The Multiple Streams Framework is introduced, accompanied by various applications of persuasive storytelling, divided among content-based and process-based activities. Secondly, the research methodology, based on an instrumental case study, is explained and legitimized, covering the data collection and analysis methods related to documentary data and interview data. In addition, these choices are critically reflected upon, amongst others regarding ethical considerations. After that, the results of the study are presented, first in the shape of a reconstruction of the decision-making and lobbying process, later through a more abstract perspective. These results then serve to answer the main research question and secondary research questions in the conclusion, where also the study's implications for planning literature and planning practice are stated. The thesis is finalized by a discussion covering a reflection on the results and the strengths and weaknesses of the overall research procedure.

2. Theoretical framework

To gain understanding of process prior to rekindling political momentum for previously rejected infrastructure projects, the Multiple Streams Framework is taken as a starting point. The framework supports the further exploration of factors contributing to the convergence of streams and the consequent creation of a policy window. These factors are considered applications of persuasive storytelling and are the result of actions performed by policy entrepreneurs. These actions can be initiated by the lobbying agent or are the result of strategically framed external events. First, the Multiple Streams Framework will be discussed in more depth, followed by various categories of persuasive storytelling. To conclude, the conceptual model demonstrates how the concepts discussed relate to one another and forms the take-off point for empirical research.

Multiple Streams Framework

This study is shaped around Kingdon's (1984) Multiple Streams Framework (MSF). This theoretical basis serves as a point of reference for connecting closely related branches of literature and conducting more in-depth research. The underlying rationale of the MSF is that agenda setting, the outcome of interest, is the result of the intersection of multiple streams which generate a policy window (Béland & Howlett, 2016). Béland & Howlett (2016) explain that in essence, the MSF consists of three streams. First, the *problem stream* refers to the public perception of problems. Public attention is usually raised by hazardous situations and highly visible programmes. The second stream is labelled the *policy stream* and represents the input from experts and analysts. They consider the problem at hand, examine possible solutions and distil the most feasible options from this. Third, there is the *political stream*, which searches for the optimal connection between the perceived problem and its policy solution.

In particular the problem stream and political stream are highly subjective in nature. A problem namely does not exist independently, it is the spoken or written product of people who feel being negatively affected by a phenomenon. For example, Hospers (2014) indicates that population decline can be regarded a phenomenon to be countered, accepted or utilized. In the latter two cases, population decline can hardly be called a problem. It is public perception which determines whether a phenomenon is considered a problem, which is why persuading the public of the existence of a problem is one of the roles of lobbyist. I will elaborate on the practices of persuasion further in this chapter. The political stream partially coevolves with the problem stream, as dominant political viewpoints generally reflect the public attitude regarding what is considered a problem.

As the objective of this study is to gain understanding of the generation of political approval, the MSF provides a visual representation of this. Following Kingdon's (1984) logic, at some point the three streams may intertwine, thereby generating a *policy window*. At this critical moment, agenda setting takes place and the problems, and its potential solution are politically connected (Béland & Howlett, 2016). Hoch (2007) frames agendas as a planning tool aimed at ordering priorities, commonly by reflecting existing 'institutional conventions' such as beliefs on the importance of specific transport modes. It is this policy window, or critical moment for agenda setting, which this study considers the outcome of interest. Figure 2 illustrates the metaphor used as the basis of the Multiple Streams Framework.

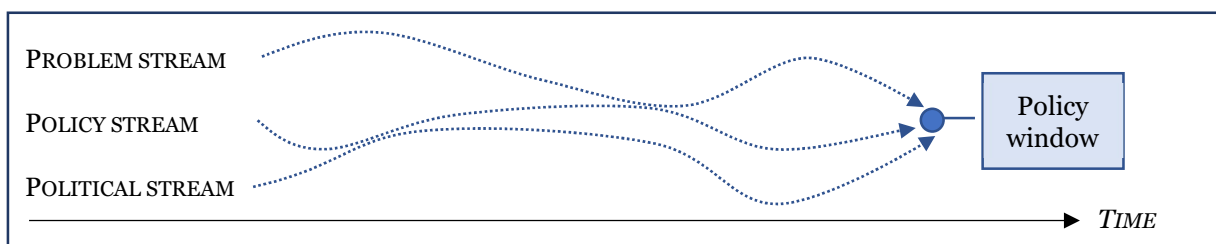


Figure 2: The three streams of Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework (author, 2022).

Triggering moments

Figure 2 could make the incorrect impression that the three streams intersect at a moment in time by incidence. On the contrary, it is the deliberate nature of raising political attention and opening the policy window which this study is built upon. Kingdon (1984) points at the influential role triggering moments and policy entrepreneurs can have on creating the desired window of opportunity. Triggering moments are the collective term for events which have an identifiable effect on the course of Kingdon's streams, either through converging or diverging them.

Triggering moments can be present in a myriad of practices, which I divide in two main categories: accidental and intentional triggering moments. The first is what Kingdon (1984) labels 'focusing events', in the remainder of the thesis discussed as 'accidental triggering moments'. Accidental triggering moments are events which are initiated beyond the grasp of lobbyists or policy entrepreneurs. A noteworthy characteristic of accidental triggering moments is that at the first glance, these are not necessarily related to the problem at hand. All sorts of external crises, calamities and less disastrous events may indirectly affect the opening of specific policy windows (Béland & Howlett, 2016). The remark is added though that the relation between such triggering factors and actual policy change is not self-evident but depends on the outcome of a framing contest between various, eventually contradicting explanations (Huitema et al., 2011). In other words, it is not the accidental triggering moment which initiates political movement, it is the policy entrepreneur who successfully moves this input in his/her way.

Secondly, intentional triggering moments represent key events which have been purposefully orchestrated by the responsible policy entrepreneur. Actions undertaken to turn such triggering moments into reality will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Persuasive storytelling as an umbrella term summarizes the toolbox of options the policy entrepreneur can choose from. This toolbox contains practices for persuading an audience through both persuasive content (metaphors, spatial imaginaries) as well as the strategic steering of the policy deliberation process (setting & staging).

The concept 'policy entrepreneur' requires further examination. Kingdon (1984) describes policy entrepreneurs as people who strive to raise attention for particular problems and their proposed solutions, with the aim to obtain political approval. Policy entrepreneurs therefore influence the flow of the problem stream and political stream. The problem stream is affected by gathering public attention to a particular issue, while the political stream is affected due to practices of coupling specific policy problems and policy solutions (Béland & Howlett, 2016). Huitema et al. (2011) underline the key role of policy entrepreneurs in carrying out policy change. They however make the distinction between strategic behaviour and spontaneous processes. Policy entrepreneurs can be involved in both types of practices, and both can lead to desired outcomes. The only differences between these types of practitioners are their level of awareness of decision-making processes and their ability to influence this process.

Triggering moments, eventually resulting from practices of policy entrepreneurs, are thus regarded the main drivers of change in the MSF. Before continuing though, nuance is needed on the contextual background of the MSF. Kingdon (1984) based his research on the American institutional system, which offers relatively much room for intervention by non-state actors through for example think tanks. Béland (2016) explains this through the decentralized and pluralist character of the United States political institutions. He argues that in more centralized bureaucracies, policy entrepreneurs will more likely be state actors. Therefore, to examine the most relevant policy entrepreneurs in a particular planning situation, it is of importance that the influential power of state and non-state actors is acknowledged.

In the following paragraphs, the activities performed by policy entrepreneurs are further concretised. First, exercises of persuasive storytelling are deliberated upon, with special attention to spatial imaginaries and metaphors. Subsequently, performances of setting and staging in the political arena are addressed.

Persuasive storytelling

A policy entrepreneur thus implicitly needs the qualities of a persuasive storyteller to gain momentum for ideas. Stories can make or break the political support for proposed ideas. However, this perspective upon stories only covers a small share of its potentiality within planning processes. Van Hulst (2012) makes a distinction between storytelling as a technique for making political processes more democratic, and storytelling as a strategic tool to influence the audience and draw away their attention from alternative policy solutions.

Besides persuasive storytelling, one can speak of what here is labelled as “inclusive storytelling”. In the latter situation, stories are constructed collectively to connect incoherent perspectives and create a narrative which makes sense of the complex reality outside. Storytelling therefore is framed as an explicitly democratic and inclusive activity, which is ought to give room for a variety of actors (Van Hulst, 2012). Innes & Booher (1999) underline that storytelling is a contributor to consensus-building through determining the setting and characters in which the planning issue is situated. Storytelling therefore provides the basis for inclusive sense-making. An important condition is that clear distinctions are made between concrete proposals and exercises of role-playing. Innes & Booher (1999) explain that position-taking should be postponed as much as possible to make way for constructive ideas. Collective scenario-building for instance can spark imagination among stakeholders.

The alternative function of storytelling though strongly deviates from these democratic values. Mäntysalo et al. (2020) claim that storytelling is a strategic, political exercise which is directed at the wider audience, rather than co-constructed by this audience (see also figure 3). In this situation, stories are meant to offer a framed representation of reality which mobilizes attention and persuades the audience of actors to set up collaborative action. Hoch (2007) extracts a comparable bias when discussing the role of plans. A similar distinction between inclusiveness and persuasiveness could be drawn. He explains how plans can be utilised as means within a process of dialogue, or in the shape of final products, representing the future. Combining the two different functions of storytelling is challenging or even impossible. Van Hulst (2012, p.313) expresses his observation as follows:

“...although storytelling can be used explicitly to make planning more democratic, it is already in use politically to persuade decision-makers and audiences and simultaneously draw the attention away from alternatives.”

Since this study aims to undercover the action performed by lobbying actors or policy entrepreneurs, the persuasive and framing nature of storytelling will be emphasized.

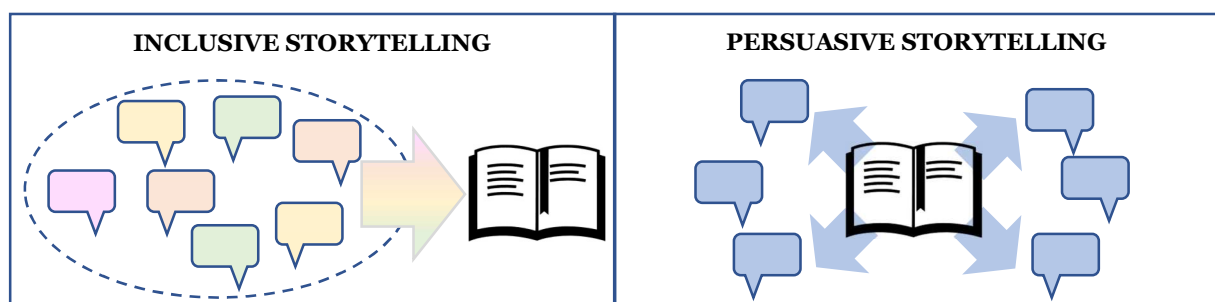


Figure 3: The two faces of storytelling (author, 2022).

As discussed, the problem and political stream in the framework are manipulated by practices which are aimed to persuade the public and decision-makers of the existence of a problem and the urge of the proposed solution. In the remainder of this thesis, these practices will be discussed as forms of persuasive storytelling. First, it should be noted that ‘manipulation’ in itself is not as negative as commonly considered. To be more specific, a distinction can be made between the manipulation of objective data and the manipulation of ideas. The first situation entails the deliberate misrepresentation of for example the projected costs and benefits of an infrastructure project, which should be avoided (Flyvbjerg, 2008). When dealing with ideas however, manipulation is no more than the replacement or addition of viewpoints in the public’s line of reasoning. According to Zohlnhöfer et al. (2016), the

strategy of manipulation is one of the key elements in the MSF logic. Persuasive storytelling is performed by presenting the problem at hand and the solution offered by policy entrepreneurs in such a way that these form the optimal couple. Manipulation in this sense rather is a form of convincement.

This study considers persuasive storytelling as the overall contributor to the convergence of thoughts and the creation of policy windows of opportunity. Stories and storytelling have the power to pave a way for change. Sandercock (2003) describes their function as the shapers of imagination and inspiration. Basically, a story is a representation of events involving particular actors in a specific setting in space and time. A story stands out from ordinary lists of events by connecting its elements into a meaningful whole. The coherence of a storyline determines its capability to explain and justify choices and policy directions (Sturup & Low, 2015). Thereby, events from the past are used to justify present situations and create a logical path towards an envisaged future (Van Hulst, 2012). This future perspective can be both a general vision and a concrete policy solution. The success of a story and storyteller, however, depends on the outcome of a battle for attention with competing, probably incommensurable stories. Van Hulst (2012) argues that this competition for dominance between stories is highly political or even inherent to the political process.

Next to the presence of competing stories, also the individual stories are not fully uniform. As indicated by Sturup & Low (2015) for example, a storyline which promotes public transportation in response to car-supporting stories experienced internal controversy between more detailed stories prioritizing either the bus or train. The general storyline therefore rather can be considered a cloud of related stories with nuanced differences internally competing for dominance. Storytelling therefore is a bifold struggle: externally between the main storylines and internally among different shadings of the main storyline. The other way around, stories can also be deliberately developed to unite different nuances of a comparable viewpoint (Van Hulst, 2012).

Throgmorton (2002) makes a comparable claim by stating that good planning can be achieved through the performance of persuasive storytelling. Persuasive stories are normative by adopting particular perspectives, in order to bend future action into a desired direction. The deliberate positioning of characters in a setting, together with rhetoric structures and persuasive figures, aims to steer the audience's attention. The stronger the story, the deeper emotions are triggered by it, thereby inspiring the receiver to act (Throgmorton, 2002). 'Powerful actors', as he labels them, are involved in the competition between stories and make use of their resources to marginalize rivalling storylines.

Sturup & Low (2015) take a step further by stating that the representatives of infrastructural megaprojects 'become' their stories as the result of the substantial level of commitment to their storyline. However, such commitment comes at the risk of misinterpretation. Throgmorton (2002) points at insights from 'reader-response theory' when arguing that it is impossible to ensure readers draw the exact same meaning from a story as intended by the planner. Context determines how messages come across and each story is contestable. According to Throgmorton (2002), this is not necessarily a barrier since most stories are only aimed at persuading a highly specific audience. The story told is tailor-made to the audience it serves.

The following section will elaborate upon two forms of persuasive content which typically are implemented as part of the storyline: metaphors and spatial imaginaries. These two products of storytelling serve to reduce complexity and give a particular meaning to a planning situation (Mäntysalo et al., 2020). Both stimulate the construction of new perspectives and guidelines for action, be it metaphors through words and spatial imaginaries through visual representations.

Metaphors

The following paragraphs demonstrate the diverse practices available in the policy entrepreneur's toolbox when it comes to persuading an audience. One of these tools is the metaphor. According to Hoch (2007), planning is derived from a combination of rational and rhetoric input. Plans designed for persuasion use selectivity to adjust to particular audiences, be it individuals, communities, or larger parts of society. Although not fully controllable, the meaning attributed to a plan by its audience is influenced by its representation. Planning practice is concerned with managing the expectations of its

audience (Hoch, 2007). Metaphors serve this goal of giving meaning to plans. Hajer (2006) demonstrates the difficulty of presenting a sound definition of a metaphor. He describes the use of metaphors as the practice of framing one kind of thing by using terms of another. In the constructivist tradition, the metaphor defines the way in which we see the world. As an example, Hajer (2006) refers to the metaphor 'acid rain', which has contributed considerably to the recognition of a structural environmental problem. Dembski & Salet (2010) speak of 'symbolic markers', which are aimed to organise the social perceptions attached to real-life situations.

It is noteworthy that a powerful metaphor alone is no key to success. Dembski & Salet (2010) point at urban metaphors such as the Pearl River Delta and the Flemish Diamond, which despite their promising symbolic value fail to become a steering factor in the planning process. They indicate that to change societal perceptions, alignment with the institutional dimension is required. The authors refer to institutions as deeply internalized social norms, which become visible through rituals, such as voting as part of the democratic system. Attaching symbols with institutionalised practices gives the planning metaphor a more solid basis. According to Dembski & Salet (2010), this is achieved through deliberate institutional change. Repetitive exposure of the symbol to the audience thereby is of importance. Urban planning concepts which can be regarded as successfully meeting this requirement (such as the London Green Belt and the Dutch Green Heart) are generally developed for preservation purposes rather than for spatial development (Dembski & Salet, 2010).

Spatial imaginaries

Spatial imaginaries serve a comparable purpose in planning as metaphors, attaching a sense of logic to a plan. The approaches performed to do so however contains some nuanced differences. Davoudi (2018) defines spatial imaginaries as strongly embedded collective worldviews and perceptions of the relation between the social world and space and place. As a form of background understanding, spatial imaginaries give logic and legitimacy to spatial practices. They are representations of reality which serve to give a sense of naturalness to what practice is a deeply political process. Such representations can be expressed through images, but also through stories, data, and other media (Davoudi, 2018). Imaginaries can also be framed as a collective form of imagination, for which individuals share their personal creativity and shape a common social imaginary. As stated by Davoudi (2018), social imaginary serves to generate a (temporal) sense of community and identity.

Haughton & Allmendinger (2015) take a more neoliberal approach onto imaginaries. In their research, they explore the causes of success and failure of various attempts to create regional spatial imaginaries across England. The demand for such imaginaries derives from the wish for stronger regional identities regarding global competition. Coexisting imaginaries compete for the label 'natural', thereby becoming a strategic backbone for policy actors. In doing so, a variety of rhetorical and material practices is used to persuade specific stakeholders and audiences. Haughton & Allmendinger (2015) conclude that the successful creation of a regional sense of place generally turns out troublesome because of the many current identities present within the larger region. Also, they point out that in the context of England, more recent attempts of regional branding are increasingly focused on commercial actors rather than the public. This 'democratic distancing' undermines more long-term strategies.

The twofold nature of storytelling is also observable in the production of spatial imaginaries. The collective construction of social imaginaries aligns with the inclusive character of storytelling. On the other hand, Davoudi (2018) indicates that power relations perform a considerable role in the creation of intersubjective views on space and place. She notes that the input of theorists, planners, and other influential individuals can catalyse the construction of commonly agreed spatial imaginaries. For instance, the *Randstad*-concept was introduced by Albert Plesman, founder, and former director of the Royal Dutch Airways. Ideas which commence through deliberate claims of individuals can develop to become tacit, de-politicized imaginaries of space and place. Nonetheless, Davoudi (2018) claims that the source or instigator of a particular common mental map oftentimes cannot be pointed out, especially when imaginaries did not originate from a single idea.

Spatial imaginaries do not solely require an effort to be constructed, also their maintenance is a deliberate activity. The recurring representation of these mental maps in planning documents is

necessary for sustaining a particular imaginary. Together with its collective nature, performativity is a key characteristic of spatial imaginaries (Davoudi, 2018). Besides describing and explaining existing situations, spatial imaginaries also play a significant role in directing towards a future path, thereby mutually competing for dominance. Powerful actors in political processes can ultimately make adaptations to spatial imaginaries or stimulate alternative ones when a change of tacit assumptions is necessary.

Mäntysalo et al. (2020) argue that the strength of spatial imaginaries and metaphors to coordinate strategic actions is in their connection to boundary objects. According to them, boundary objects combine the flexibility of stakeholders' interpretation and the robustness of real-life artefacts. Haughton & Allmendinger (2015) speak of 'symbolic markers' as physical or cultural items with high eminence which can internalize a particular imaginary, such as Olympic parks or songs. Davoudi (2018) highlights the political nature of developing spatial imaginaries. Political actors deliberately trigger the imagination of their audience to make transformations.

Persuasive content in practice

This discussion of persuasive storytelling practices may draw the image of an unidirectional relationship between these practices as the input for change and the moving problem and political streams as their receivers. However, the content of stories performed also adapts to its environment, meaning that stories and streams are co-constitutive entities. Davoudi (2018) highlights the dynamic nature of spatial imaginaries, stating that resistance from society can be the cause for reflecting on the message brought about by the imaginary and, ultimately, its revision. Haughton & Allmendinger (2015) underline what they call the 'fluid' character of spatial imaginaries which serve to simplify and pinpoint certain aspects of a highly complex reality. Fluidity is for example expressed in the fuzziness used to demarcate the boundaries of a spatial imaginary such as 'The Atlantic Gateway', roughly containing Liverpool and Manchester. They explain that such fuzziness has the benefit that pragmatic choices could be made on which actors to involve and which projects to support.

Throgmorton (2002) frames the storyteller as being positioned in an intricate web of relationships. Gaining understanding of this web supports the storyteller in adapting stories in such a way that its message comes across to the audience as effective as possible. Changes to the problem stream and political stream are demonstrations of the dynamic web in which the storyteller operates. Accidental triggering moments cause existing stories to match the situation to a better or lesser extent. It is therefore of importance that these stories manage to respond to their changing environment, by incorporating in their favour.

Setting and staging

Now that we covered the content of storytelling, it is time to shift towards the more process-related side of the practice. Van Hulst (2012) points out the quality of persuasive storytelling is determined by more than a sound story alone. Equally vital is the strategic incorporation of physical settings, social networks, and institutional processes. Performances of influencing decision-making through these practical changes is known as 'setting and staging'.

As stated by Hajer (2005) deliberations which form the basis of policy making could be regarded as acts, including various players, scripts, and a staging. The quality of such deliberations is dependent upon the setting in which the discussions occur. This setting is built up by both material and immaterial factors, like the 'stage' on which the act is performed and the norms guiding the deliberation. Innes & Booher (1999) also draw parallels between planning and acts of role-playing, thereby speaking of 'games' rather than 'acts'. However, they emphasize the transformative nature of role-playing processes. Therefore, modifications to the political game also change the personal attributes of the actors involved. Renewed attitudes and knowledge regarding a particular planning issue in its turn results in considerably different decision-making outcomes.

Hajer (2005) refers to the 'contexture' as the key contributor to policy deliberation moving into a particular direction. A factor of major importance within the act's contexture is the sequential ordering of stages in the political decision-making process. The strategic organization of stages, or staging, has the power to shape political discussions through steering the contributions of individual actors and their interactions (Hajer, 2005). Innes & Booher (1999) extend this viewpoint by including informal stages of decision-making, such as receptions. They argue that politicians and lobbyists use these comfortable, unstructured moments of interplay to find support for their ideas.

In formal, publicly visible discussions, participants are morally constrained to their formal role, resulting in a lesser tendency towards consensus-building (Innes & Booher, 1999). Hajer (2005) argues that generally, the actors involved in political discussions follow familiar scripts and position their role in the act accordingly. In his case study, this 'discursive code' however was successfully broken because of new input entering the debate and activating the audience. Visualisations among which maps, and photos turned a rather technical discussion into a participatory deliberation. Furthermore, Hajer (2005) states that staging, or the sequential ordering of events, has resulted in what he named a 'climax', the momentum which this study aims to unravel. Innes & Booher (1999) speak of a 'breakthrough' and mark the need for drama to enhance the players' emotional commitment to the consensus-building process. Hajer (2005) concludes that modifications in setting and staging can result in significantly different policy deliberation practices, even with the act being performed by the same 'cast'.

Innes & Booher (1999) note that the role-playing game of planning can be somewhat untransparent. Deliberation outcomes may contain ideas none of the participants explicitly stated, or ideas some of them even explicitly argued against. This black box in consensus-building is what the authors call a performance of 'bricolage'. Within that process, the interaction of problems, solutions and the actors carrying them leads to unpredictable transformations. Creativity is prioritized above rational, logical reasoning. Innes & Booher (1999) stress that the bricolage approach should not be confused with the 'garbage can' metaphor, whereby policy ideas are picked from a stack of unimplemented ideas. Because of the interactivity of the bricolage process, the bricoleur (the collector and blender of ideas) is confronted with uncertainty on the type of output that can be generated from the dialogues. Criteria on the quality of such output therefore are intuitive (Innes & Booher, 1999).

Conceptual model

Below, the concepts discussed, and their relations are visualized in the conceptual model (figure 4). The model demonstrated here builds upon Kingdon's (1984) Multiple Streams Framework by similarly projecting the policy window as the desired outcome of converging three streams. Within the policy window, a distinction is made between 'political approval', the intermediate lobbying objective central to this study, and 'project delivery', the ultimate lobbying objective. Additional features of the conceptual model are the factors contributing to the convergence of the problem, policy and political stream. These factors jointly form the 'fyke' of the policy entrepreneur, becoming narrower over time up until the moment a policy window emerges. Persuasive storytelling here is regarded as the overall converging force working on the streams, therefore represented as the fyke.

The factors forming the 'policy fyke' can be put into two categories of triggering moments. On the one hand, what is labelled here as *intentional triggering moments* refers to the input initiated by the policy entrepreneur(s) involved. These contain various activities related to persuasive processes, represented by the practices of setting and staging as discussed by Hajer (2005) and Innes & Booher (1999), and persuasive content such as metaphors (Hoch, 2007; Dembski & Salet, 2010) and spatial imaginaries (Davoudi, 2018; Haughton & Allmendinger, 2015). On the other hand, there are *accidental triggering moments*, of which the input originates from beyond the control of the policy entrepreneur. This however does not take away that the policy entrepreneur will attempt to put a positive spin on such developments through strategic framing of the external focusing event. Nevertheless, instances may occur in which the policy entrepreneur cannot prevent the external input from negatively impacting the convergence process. Such negative effects are visualized in the conceptual model as holes in the fyke.

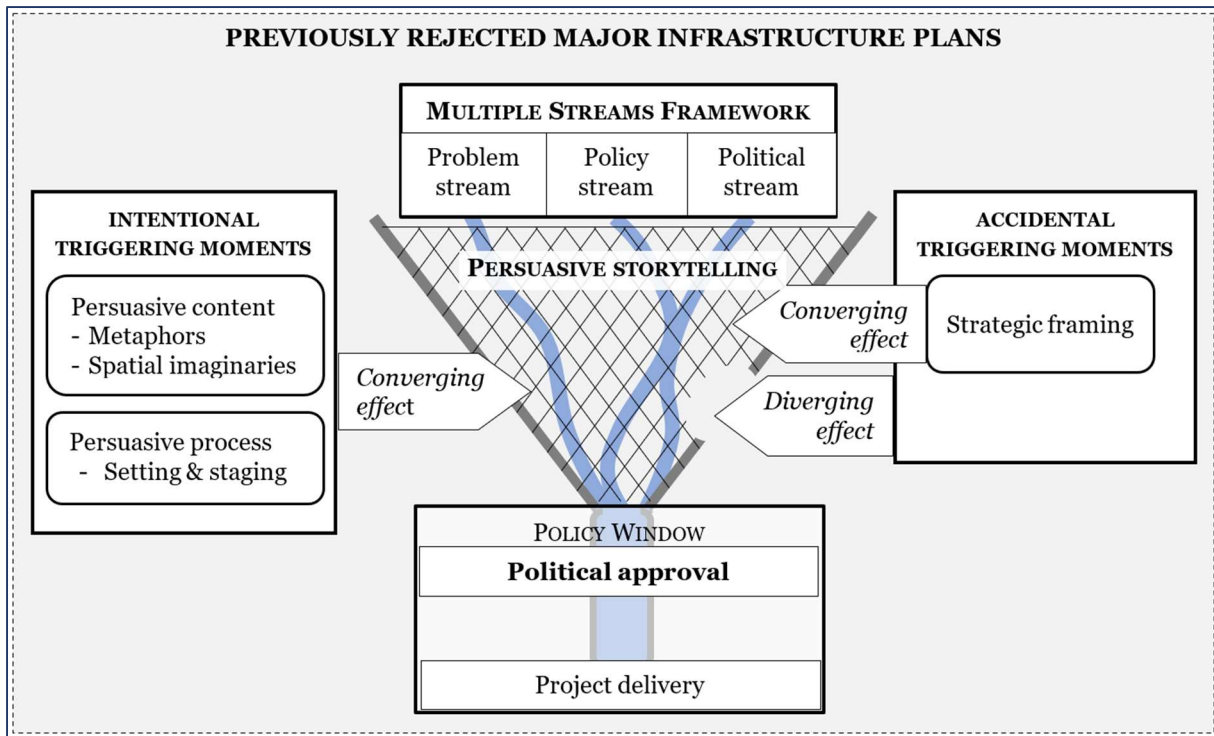


Figure 4: The conceptual model ('the Policy Fyke') (author, 2022).

Expectations

The conceptual model above demonstrates the expectation that policy windows, including renewed political attention to previously rejected infrastructure plans, derives from a mixture of the factors forming persuasive storytelling. Another expectation is that all practices of persuasive storytelling visualized in the conceptual model may cause the success or failure of generating a policy window. Practices of setting and staging and the creation of metaphors and spatial imaginaries may prove sufficient or insufficient to move public and political perceptions into the desired direction. Moreover, accidental triggering moments may have a constructive or destructive impact on the existing storyline, depending on the policy entrepreneur's ability to strategically frame these developments in favour of the proposed plans.

3. Methodology

As we have seen in the conceptual model, the process of persuasive storytelling is dominated by the input generated from triggering moments. These moments, which can emerge both within and beyond the reach of the storyteller, have the potential to be critical points, or even tipping points in the convergence process towards the desired policy window. This study aims to reconstruct the sequence of tipping points which guides the raise of political approval for previously rejected major infrastructure projects. In line with Innes & Booher (1999), such a reconstruction has the purpose to frame the policy deliberation process as a political game.

However, it should be noted that the scope of this type of research will never be fully comprehensive. With reference to the quote by Kingdon (1984) on the second page of this document, triggering moments which have somehow indirectly contributed to the conversion and diversion of the three streams may be spread further in space and time than any study can cover. In the words of Tobler (1970), “*everything is related to everything else, but nearer things are more related than distant things*”, which I consider valuable for distance in time as well. Analysing factors which have contributed to the political revival of previously rejected infrastructure plans requires setting boundaries to distil the most relevant factors from an infinite range of indirect contributors. Within these limitations, a research strategy is developed which optimally responds to the research question.

Research strategy

As discussed in the introduction, this study aims to answer the following research question:

Which factors make that previously rejected major infrastructure projects regain political approval?

Subsequently, two secondary research questions emphasize the two main sources of input of persuasive storytelling, namely intentional and accidental triggering moments. The third secondary research question reflects on the nature of previously rejected major infrastructure projects as compared to proposed major infrastructure projects without this political history.

- 1. How do intentional triggering moments contribute to renewed political approval to previously rejected major infrastructure projects?*
- 2. How do accidental triggering moments contribute to renewed political approval to previously rejected major infrastructure projects?*
- 3. Which factors make new promotion activities for previously rejected major infrastructure projects different from former promotion activities?*

The main research question as well as the first two secondary research questions underline the focus on the practical implementation of theoretical, more general arguments. The literature discussed in the previous chapter serves as a focus lens to evaluate the practical performances under study, which makes the research deductive in nature (Punch, 2014). The third secondary research question is also practice-oriented, though to a lesser extent has a theoretical foundation.

To come to an appropriate research strategy, criteria are listed which legitimize the methodological choices made. The sequence of decisions taken here follows an increasing level of detail, which is summarised in figure 5. The first decision involves the type of research method matching the research question and secondary research questions of interest.

In the first place, the study's orientation towards practical performance calls for empirical research, other than a theoretical discussion. The next step considers the type of empirical data suitable to answer the research question. As stated by Punch (2014), a well-performing research question has the capacity to dictate the type of data needed to answer it. Since the aim of this study is stated qualitatively as to *understand* how major infrastructure project ambassadors regain political attention for their ideas after rejection, a qualitative approach is the logical direction for retrieving knowledge. Being an umbrella term though, a multitude of alternative qualitative approaches can be identified, from which a more specific strategy can be picked (Punch, 2014).

Understanding how triggering moments perform as tipping points in the promotion of infrastructure projects requires a detailed process of identifying and examining the role of such input within a particular planning situation. Moreover, the interaction with real-life contextual factors is a vital element in understanding how accidental triggering moments make way for further convergence and the creation of a policy window. Because of the required level of detail and the importance of context, providing a comprehensive image of the triggering moments affecting the policy deliberation process calls for the examination of an individual case. Case study research is considered the most appropriate research strategy to respond to these criteria. Limited resources and the research's desired level of detail make that a single case study is preferred over a multiple or comparative case. More specifically, this case is aimed to be instrumental to demonstrate how theoretical deliberations are applied within a real-life context (Punch, 2014).

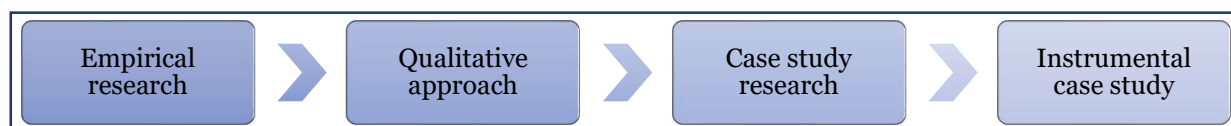


Figure 5: Steps of determining the research strategy (based on Punch, 2014).

Case selection

Subsequently, a suitable real-life case which allows for reflecting on theoretical arguments through practical findings must be decided upon. A couple of basic criteria for such a case can be extracted from the research question: the case (1) is a (proposed) major infrastructure plan, here defined as 'a road or rail-related plan of national interest'; (2) has a history of one or multiple comparable proposed plans which have been rejected by decision-makers; and (3) has recently (within five years) regained political approval. It is noteworthy to highlight that the plan does not necessarily have to be realised yet. Political approval as the result of a policy window is the desired outcome this study is focused on. Furthermore, practical criteria such as accessible data on the decision-making process and the possibility to contact actors who are (have been) involved in this process has resulted in the prioritization of cases from the Netherlands.

For this study, I considered the proposed plans for the so-called *Lelylijn* suitable to comply with the criteria set above. The *Lelylijn* is promoted as a new, more direct railway connection between the Dutch cities Amsterdam and Groningen, passing the provinces Flevoland and Friesland. In 2021, the political attention for the plan was materialized in the Coalition Agreement of the Rutte IV administration (Rijksoverheid, 2021). Lobbying efforts to introduce the plan to national decision-making took off in 2019 (Stentor, 2019a). However, the first proposal of a more direct railway connection between Amsterdam and the Northern Netherlands dates from 1891, as part of the *Afsluitdijk* plan from the founding father of the Flevoland polders, Cornelis Lely (Friesch Dagblad, 2020). As a result of delays in the plan approval procedure and the 1930s economic depression, the interest for the railway gradually evaporated. Since then, ideas for connecting the Dutch capital and the northern provinces by rail via the former *Zuiderzee* (therefore also called *Zuiderzeelijn*) have revived in the late 1960s, late 1980s and in the 2000s (Van Diepen, 2021; Friesch Dagblad, 2020). Nevertheless, realisation always was a bridge too far. A more extensive discussion of the *Lelylijn* case can be found in chapter 4. The most recent process of lobbying for the *Lelylijn* thus is the case the empirical research is centred around. In the following segment of this chapter, I will discuss the methods which are applied to conduct the instrumental case study on the *Lelylijn*-lobby.

Data & methods

The first step to determining these methods is to elaborate on the type of data needed to answer the research question and the secondary research questions by means of this case study. In this study, the two main purposes of collecting and analysing data are (1) to reconstruct the sequence of triggering moments throughout the lobbying process and (2) to reflect on the factors which have resulted in new momentum for the old infrastructure plan. These functions are performed by both documentary data and interview data. Documentary data can be found in a range of categories. Following MacDonald (2001), documents represent all readable productions of the social world. To operationalize this type of data, he makes use of a five-way categorisation: public records, media sources, biographies, private papers, and visual documents. In the latter case, “reading” should be considered rather metaphorically, for example in the way someone can read a map or painting.

With the aim of unravelling the triggering moments which have contributed to political approval for the Lelylijn plan, biographies, and private papers as a source of data are of lesser meaning. Also, for this case the role of visual documents throughout the decision-making process is regarded of minor influence. Public records and media sources have the potential to deliver elements which help reconstructing the puzzle. Beforehand though, a careful process of evaluation should occur, to ensure the selected documents are authentic, credible, and representative (Punch, 2014). Furthermore, MacDonald (2001) recommends the critical determination of deeper meanings attached to the document by its producer, given that any document is a social product of decisions and assumptions. A more extensive elaboration on these considerations is given at the end of this chapter.

Beside documentary data, also interview data serves the purpose of reconstructing the lobbying process and its triggering moments. Triangulation is a relevant argument for the choice of the two types of data. Other than written documentation, interview data for this purpose derives from the respondent’s memory. Designing interviews comes with a set of practical decisions, among which whom to interview (Punch, 2014). For reconstructing the steps towards the policy window for the major infrastructure plan, the potential interview respondents can be divided in two classes: active and passive case actors. In the first place, it is desirable to contact actors who are/have been actively involved in the lobbying procedure. Apart from that, further triangulation is achieved through including respondents who have been passively following the process, such as journalists. Figure 6 summarizes the types of data of which the data collection and data processing methods will be discussed more specifically in the following paragraphs.

Documentary data	Interview data
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Public records•Media sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Active actors•Passive actors

Figure 6: The categorisation of consulted data sources (author, 2022).

Data collection

The data collection process follows a sequential logic, with the findings from documentary data serving as input for the interviews. Documentary data is collected with the aim of creating the basis of understanding how intentional and accidental triggering moments contribute to the regaining of political attention for previously rejected major infrastructure projects, thereby focusing on the first two secondary research questions. The reflexive nature of the third secondary research question is considered less suitable to be answered through documentary data. The two main categories of documentary data on which the instrumental case study relies are retrieved from a combination of online accessible databases. Here, for both categories, the corresponding data collection methods and sources are discussed. After that, I will further deliberate on the data collection process linked to interviews.

Public records

Public records contain a variation of governmental publications, ranging from economic records to census data to verbatim reports (MacDonald, 2001). It is the latter type of public record which is considered most appropriate to gain understanding of the development of political attention. Given that this study defines political attention as attention on the national government level, the same level is used for retrieving public records. In the case of the Lelylijn, this is translated in inquiring the main online Dutch national parliamentary databases on public records: *Eerstekamer.nl* and *Tweedekamer.nl*. Within these databases, the search engine is applied with the keyword ‘Lelylijn’. The resulting official documents are researched for the description of potentially triggering moments, which can be present in three ways: (1) as the cause of the Lelylijn being discussed in the specific document; (2) as the consequence of what is stated in the document; or (3) as the political event of which the document is the record. Written descriptions of these triggering moments are selected, copied, and collected as a chronological list of events.

Media sources

More than public records, media sources can draw broader stories. MacDonald (2001) raises attention to the selectivity in which media sources display their content. For instance, one should be aware of the audience the author had in mind. This notion is especially relevant when dealing with regional or local media sources such as local newspapers, who will present events in accordance with the local perspective. Nevertheless, media sources are of added value by highlighting concrete events and by making linkages between prior and later events. MacDonald (2001) explicitly refers to newspapers as the dominant representation of media as documentary data. Currently however, news websites have acquired a comparable or even dominant position above traditional newspaper. Given the convenience of putting articles on the internet, awareness of errors, bias and selectivity arguably is even more relevant yet. For this empirical research, media sources are divided among national media sources and regional media sources. National media sources consist of reputable Dutch news(paper) websites (*Trouw*, *NOS*, *NU.nl* etc.). Regional media sources are represented by regional news(paper) websites spatially covering the potential Lelylijn route (*De Stentor*, *RTV Noord* etc.). Within these websites, the keyword ‘Lelylijn’ again serves to extract triggering moments which either (1) are reported in the particular article, or (2) are announced in this article.

This second source of input complements the timeline established in the collection of data from public records. Where public records contribute to reconstructing the decision-making process, media sources add to this the lobbyist’ perspective. Figure 7 summarizes the consulted types of documentary data.

Public records	Media sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Eerstekamer.nl•Tweedekamer.nl	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•National news(paper) websites•Regional news(paper) websites

Figure 7: Documentary data sources operationalized (author, 2022).

Interviews

Punch (2014) labels interviewing the most prominent form of data collection when performing qualitative research. Within the methodology of this study, interviews have a more supplementary function, complementary to the data collected through different types of documents. The added value of interviews is that where documents are written to reflect particular moments in time, interviews have the power to reconstruct the order of events and reflect on a longer span of developments. Therefore, the aim of the interviews conducted for this instrumental case study can be stated as: ‘to reflect on the process of lobbying for the Lelylijn, regarding both intentional and accidental triggering moments which occurred in this period’. As stated earlier, two types of interview respondents are considered, namely

those who have been actively involved in the lobbying campaign and those who have passively followed the process throughout the years.

Although the position of the respondent determines the content which can be discussed, the structure of all interviews is comparable. A semi-structured, one-on-one set-up is considered the most appropriate interview category to serve the study's purpose. For this research, a one-on-one setting is preferred over focus group interviews, since this allows for making comparisons between the answers given by the interview respondents without them being influenced by one another. Moreover, the interview is aimed to reflect on the Lelylijn lobbying campaign in general as well as the contributions made by individual lobbying actors.

Semi-structured interviews are an amalgamation of the characteristics Punch (2014) attaches to structured and unstructured interviews respectively. A limited series of pre-established questions, both closed and open-ended, is developed to ensure the different general themes are covered. These questions serve as a starting point for a more unstructured discussion, in which follow-up questions are posed which logically derive from the respondent's answer. For those interview respondents labelled 'active actors', these are the pre-established questions:

1. Do you consider the Coalition Agreement 2021 the most important milestone reached so far?
2. How would you describe your contribution to promoting the Lelylijn?
3. Which circumstances during the campaign have played the lobby into its hands?
4. Which circumstances during the campaign have hindered the lobby?

Regarding the 'passive actors' participating the interview, especially the second question requires alteration. An alternative phrasing leads to the question: 'Which trends do you recognize in the lobbying activities performed throughout the campaign?'. For all interviews, eventual follow-up questions could zoom into for example the collaboration between different lobbying actors and authorities, or the storylines which derived from intentional and accidental triggering moments. It should be noted that during the interview, the terms 'intentional' and 'accidental triggering moments' are replaced by more concrete phrasings such as 'lobbying contributions' and 'external events' respectively.

As explained by Longhurst (2016), interviews as a method within a qualitative research approach are not aimed to pursue representativity. Instead, they contribute to gaining understanding of the experiences and viewpoints of individuals. Fusch & Ness (2015) point out that the level of data saturation delivered by interviews is a more appropriate determinant for evaluating interviews. They characterize data saturation as a rather fuzzy concept which describes the point in research on which the research method does not deliver new data, themes, or codes. Consequently, the level of data saturation affects the number of interview participants needed to draw conclusions from the collected data. For this study, it appeared that the point of repetition of themes became evident after the fourth interview. Additional interviews were considered of limited added value, as the point of data saturation was recognized.

Interviews were conducted with three participants representing the three most active organizations in the lobbying campaign, based on the findings from media sources: Initiative Group Lelylijn, employer association VNO-NCW Noord and the Province of Fryslân. These participants were therefore labelled the 'active actors'. A journalist from a regional broadcasting organisation, who has followed and reported on the lobbying campaign for years, participated the interview as a 'passive actor'. The interviews are conducted via an online connection in the period 20th of June – 1st of July 2022. Participants have been asked for permission to record the interview through a consent form applied by the University of Groningen (see appendix III). The recordings are stored locally and are deleted with the final publication of this study. Furthermore, notes are taken during the interview.

Data analysis

For describing the analysis of collected data, again a distinction is made between documentary data and interview data.

Documentary data

The first aim of the documentary data collection is the reconstruction of a timeline representing the various triggering moments, intentional or accidental, of major or minor influence and with a converting or diverting impact, which have influenced the course of Kingdon's (1984) streams in the Lelylijn's decision-making process. Passages in public records and media sources discussing triggering moments in the Lelylijn are selected and copied into an Excel dataset, which spreads the different types of documentary data across the columns and adds the variable of time to the rows. Given the frequency of publications around the Lelylijn, it has been decided to group the input from documentary data sources per month. From the selected passages, the key sentences are collected into a column combining the input from public records and media sources. Visual documents are selected through a similar, by selecting images and positioning them on the timeline.

The following step involved four rounds of descriptive coding. As stated by Punch (2014), descriptive coding serves to summarise segments of data and offering a basis for further inference in subsequent phases of the analysis. The first round of descriptive coding involved dividing the events described in public records and media sources among two categories: triggering moments themselves and events which are potential reactions to these triggering moments, such as decisions made in parliament. Secondly, the set of events labelled triggering moments was split according to the source of the trigger: intentional triggering moments represent those triggers initiated by lobbying actors and accidental triggering moments represent the triggers from beyond the reach of these actors.

Where these two rounds of descriptive coding were prespecified codes, the third round was not. Punch (2014) argues that one should be alert for signs from the data, indicating the presence of further codes. In this case, it appeared that the set of accidental triggering moments could be divided following the spatial scale of their occurrence: regional, national, and European scale. Fourthly, these forms of accidental triggering moments are labelled through the direction of their impact: either converting or diverting, as explained in the theory chapter. As demonstrated in the conceptual model, intentional triggering moments are not considered to have eventual diverting impact, since these events are purposefully designed with the aim of making a particular proposed policy solution look more feasible.

As discussed in the theoretical framework, accidental triggering moments receive their converting effect because of strategic framing practices. Therefore, storylines can be extracted from the accidental triggering moments which have been successfully converted into arguments supporting the lobbying campaign. This step in the coding process involves more inferential coding, in which data is integrated and higher-order concepts are pursued (Punch, 2014). Figure 8 summarises the steps indicated above.

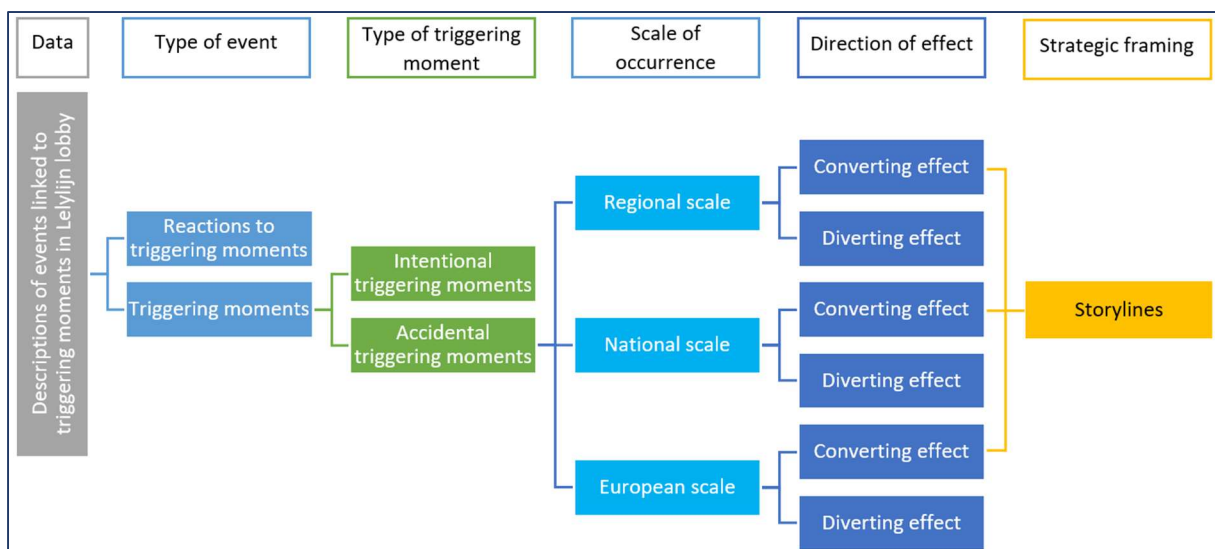


Figure 8: Four rounds of descriptive coding and one round of inferential coding, based on documentary data (author, 2022).

This coding process resulted in six separate timelines, each covering a particular section of the coding tree. These timelines consist of:

1. *The decision-making line*: reactions to triggering moments are translated into movements in the decision-making process.
2. *The lobbying activity line*: intentional triggering moments which are visible as purposeful lobbying activities.
3. *The regional line*: accidental triggering moments which occurred in the regional context of the Lelylijn lobbyist, the northern Netherlands.
4. *The national line*: accidental triggering moments which occurred in the national context of the Lelylijn lobbyists, the Netherlands.
5. *The European line*: accidental triggering moments which occurred in the European context of the Lelylijn lobbyists.
6. *The storyline*: a share of the accidental triggering moments is strategically framed to complement the storyline used in the lobbying campaign.

The timelines discussing the accidental triggering moments occurring at regional, national and European scale thus display both 'positive' and 'negative' impacts on the Lelylijn campaign, from a lobbyist' viewpoint. This emphasizes the notion that the process of rekindling momentum is not linear in nature. Reconstructing the multitude of events surrounding the Lelylijn lobbying efforts via these six trajectories contributes to the understanding of the complex, multilevel environment in which the lobbying actor operates.

Interview data

With the aid of the interview recording, a summary is made of the discussed content. Even though the literal transcription of the interview is a more common processing technique (Punch, 2014), summarising the discussed content in alternative phrasing was considered a more valuable first step of interview data analysis, a function which taking notes during an interview can have as well (Longhurst, 2016). Literally transcribing interviews goes at the risk Punch (2014) attributes to the use of language. Rather than an objective medium of information transmission, he labels language as a representation of social meaning. Summarising the interview support the avoidance of misinterpretation of language. Furthermore, producing the summary already involved a round of descriptive coding, as content was categorised under the main interview questions listed earlier in this chapter. The summary is sent to the interview participants for approval and eventual suggestions.

After that approval was given, the interview summaries served as a basis for a second round of descriptive coding. Given the open character of the main questions, these codes were not prespecified, but developed on the way instead. To make comparisons between the interview participants, reoccurring themes in the interview responses were collected for every main question. As can be seen in figure 9, the first question covers the contradiction between whether the Coalition Agreement can be considered an achievement within the wide lobbying campaign. In the second question, the discussed content can be divided among the contribution made by a single organisation and the collaboration outcomes of the joined lobbying partners. The responses to the question on 'positive circumstances', those circumstances which play the lobby into its hand, cover the three spatial scales which were also extracted from the documentary data. The fourth question on 'negative circumstances', those circumstances hindering the lobby, focused on the regional and national level.

On a more inferential level, comparisons were made between the current and former lobbying campaign in favour of a faster railway connection from the western to the northern Netherlands. Given that this comparison was aimed to explain the rekindling of momentum, focus was put on the factors with converting impact: the lobbying efforts (intentional triggering moments) and the positive circumstances (converting accidental triggering moments).

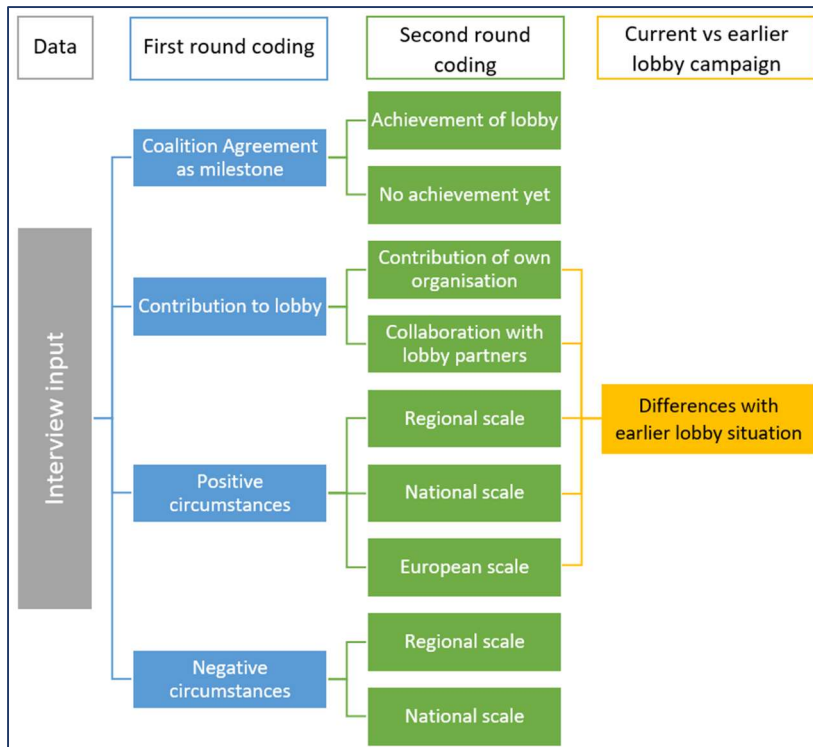


Figure 9: Two rounds of descriptive coding and one round of inferential coding, based on interview data (author, 2022).

Critical notes

Before moving on to the research’s results, it is of importance to deliberate on the fundamental limitations of the methodology illustrated above. This research is conducted based on the ontological and epistemological viewpoint of poststructuralism. Couper (2015) explains that this philosophical stream is characterized by the idea that our view upon the world and the knowledge which can be generated from it is inevitably bounded by the theories and concepts which are around. Therefore, the meaning attached to reality is subject to constant transition. Each form of written and spoken text thereby reflects the author’s personal deeper meaning, which afterwards can be interpreted by the reader in a myriad of directions. Summarising and rephrasing the content of interviews therefore functions as a check to align the thoughts of the interviewer and interviewee.

Consequently though, the findings from documents and interviews which is displayed in the next chapter should be regarded the tip of the iceberg. Behind explicit statements produced in spoken or written texts, which can be extracted on the surface, hides an ambiguous web of personal interpretations and thoughts. Beside these more general notes, the two main research methods also have their specific considerations to reflect upon.

Documentary data: authenticity, credibility, and representativeness

MacDonald (2001) describes a list of problems encountered when evaluating documentary data. The first of those is authenticity, which refers to the question if the document at hand is original, or that it has been intentionally falsified or unintentionally wrongly copied. Another point of attention is the document’s credibility, which can be confined when a document describing an event has been written a long time after the event, or when the author was dependent on the observations of others when making an account of the event. The final problem involves representativeness and focuses on whether the selected document is a vital representation of the wider set of existing documents covering comparable content. If not, valuable information could eventually be left out.

The main response to problems regarding documentary data in this study is methodological triangulation. MacDonald (2001) defines triangulation as the need for multiple data sources to support the claims made in documents, whereby methodological triangulation delivers this variety through the research methods applied. He makes the distinction between within-method and between-method triangulation, which are both incorporated in this study. Within-method triangulation is translated in incorporating multiple media sources separately taking account of the same event. This strategy is unfeasible when dealing with public records though, given that these sources are unique in reporting transcribed parliamentary debates. However, public records which are retrieved directly from governmental databases are considered less vulnerable to problems of authenticity, credibility, and representativeness than media sources, which can be written a longer period after the event and possibly highlight elements of interest only. Between-method triangulation is applied by reconstructing the momentum-building process by means of documentary data and interview data. The complementarity of the two main data collection methods lies in the function of between-method triangulation.

Interview data: confidentiality, anonymity, and positionality

The personal nature of interviews makes that ethical issues are prominently present when conducting this research method. It is vital that the researcher performs as a reliable actor towards the interview participants. Above all, Longhurst (2016) states that confidentiality and anonymity go together as the two key themes when conducting interviews. In this study, confidentiality is safeguarded in the first place by offering participants the chance to keep the interview unrecorded if wished so, see also the interview consent form in Appendix III. The consent form informed the participant of the purpose of the research as a whole and the particular interview. With the interviewee's consent, the interview is recorded with the use of the offline program 'OBS Studio' and is stored on the computer's internal storage. To ensure no information considered sensitive by the participants will be published, the interview summary is delivered to the participant for approval and suggestions, after which the interview data could be further analysed. Regarding anonymity, the consent informed participants about their right to remain anonymous and eventually withdraw from the interview. To further support transparency, the research's outcome is shared with the participants digitally.

A final point which applies to conducting interviews in particular and research in general is positionality. Longhurst (2016) notes that researchers ought to be reflexive about the impact their personal identity may have on the course of the interview. In addition, Smith (2016) argues that any personal characteristic or experience is a source of positionality. Regarding myself, it should therefore be acknowledged that attributes such as (1) being a student with interest in infrastructure development and (public) transport solutions, and (2) living in an area which could benefit from improved public transport accessibility as a result of the Lelylijn, do affect my perspective upon the process under study. Positionality in this sense is limited to increased curiosity about the case at hand and does not involve any financial or political stakes. However, when being transparent about it, this form of slight positionality is not necessarily undesirable. Smith (2016) addresses positionality in the context of cross-cultural research, in which being aware of the personal differences between researcher and participant may be even more crucial. For this study though, mild expressions of positionality have potentially brought the researcher and the participants, the lobbying actors of the Lelylijn, closer together. By taking the perspective of a lobbyist, for instance when labelling the Coalition Agreement 2021-2025 a milestone, the interview participants were not forced into the position of defender. This opened the further discussion, also when the less successful phases of the lobbying process were addressed.

4. Results

Rekindling momentum reconstructed

As indicated earlier, two reconstructions of the momentum-building process are presented here. First, public records offer insights in the perspective from decision-makers in The Hague. After that, media sources form the basis for a reconstruction focusing more on the lobbyists' perspective.

The decision-making perspective

Documentary data from public records discussing the Lelylijn offers a detailed overview of the course the political stream has taken from the start of 2019 to the end of 2021. A total of 52 public records, predominantly consisting of meeting reports, parliamentary documents, and motions, was consulted for reconstructing the course of decision-making on the Lelylijn in the Dutch national parliament (see also Appendix II). Most public records discussing the Lelylijn derived from the parliament's Infrastructure and Water Committee, which addresses amongst others transport infrastructure projects and public transport delivery. Besides that, the topic is discussed in the parliament's plenary meetings. Figure 11 summarizes the general proceeding of Dutch national decision-making around the Lelylijn in the period 2019-2021, whereas table 1 gives an overview of the quotes from national politicians which will be demonstrated in the following paragraphs. For the original quotes in Dutch, please see Appendix I.

The first time the Lelylijn is addressed in public records is in May 2019, in response to the conceptual version of the '2040 Vision on Public Transport'¹. Three committee members state the observation that the Lelylijn, and improved connections in the three northern provinces in general, are absent in this vision. In answer to this critique, the State Secretary of Infrastructure and Water highlights that this infrastructure projects was rejected in the past already, under the header 'Zuiderzeelijn'. A reassessment of this past decision therefore is considered redundant: *"In the past, extensive research has been done on the Lelylijn, from which the conclusion derived that it's added value would be limited. By then, two billion was made available for specific measures in the northern Netherlands. An extensive examination was done then, therefore primarily looking into how to optimise via high-quality public transit connections is more logical."* This indicates that at this point in spring 2019, the Lelylijn is not considered a feasible option by the State Secretary, who prefers making improvements to the existing public transport system. Nevertheless, several committee members from different parties thus already raise attention for the initiative.

Later in 2019, the public records show a degree of consensus on the notion that there is a need for "a" form of improved public transport connection between the northern Netherlands and the Randstad. The urgency of the issue is raised by events of transport hindrance due to maintenance work at railway 'bottleneck' Zwolle (see also figure 10). Operationalizing this need for improved connectivity is food for further discussion. While call for researching the potential costs and benefits of a new rail line is repeated during seven more meetings in 2019 alone, the Minister and State Secretary of Infrastructure and Water hold on to their preference for an improved bus connection between the Randstad and the northern Netherlands, following roughly the proposed trajectory of the Lelylijn: *"When we are talking about public transit, we are not only talking railroad ties."*

By the start of 2020, the Minister announces research which will update the past findings on the feasibility of the Zuiderzeelijn and which is aimed to compare different transport solutions: improving the existing rail infrastructure, introducing new rail infrastructure in the form of the Lelylijn and introducing a new 'high quality bus connection'. The Minister thereby stresses her openness towards all alternatives and criticizes parliamentarians who only pursue the Lelylijn alternative: *"With the region, I want to research extensively and keep up the dialogue on the way we can further improve the connection between the Randstad and the northern Netherlands, without prejudging on the direction of the solution. Some of you I heard say: it should be rail. For us, a high-quality bus connection is an*

¹ Dutch: Toekomstbeeld OV 2040

option as well, emphasizing «option»”. Within one year, the Lelylijn thus moved from an unthinkable option to an equivalent alternative.



Figure 10: The proposed trajectory of the Lelylijn, connecting Amsterdam and Groningen and mitigating the bottleneck function of the Zwolle-Meppel trajectory (Sikkom, 2020).

In July 2020, the findings of this so-called ‘potentiality research’ were publicized. Although the report states that the projected direct economic benefits of the Lelylijn alternative have not significantly increased as compared to earlier research on the Zuiderzeelijn proposal, committee members promoting the plan are pleased to see that this alternative appears more effective than a bus connection and more efficient than improving the existing rail connection. *“The Lelylijn is the project showing that it’s possible to connect the entire Netherlands and which proves to be a good investment, for infrastructure as well as the Dutch economy.”* Although proponents consider these results sufficient for realisation, the Minister and State Secretary are more hesitant to invest the necessary billions. They point at the earlier announced Growth Fund as a potential solution to this budgeting issue and request patience until the autumn, when more research will be done, and more details of the Growth Fund are elaborated upon.

After a period of relative silence around the project, November and December 2020 are characterized by the upcoming national elections in March 2021, which brings the Lelylijn higher on the agenda again. One by one, political parties announce the inclusion of the Lelylijn project in their electoral program, among which all four coalition parties. In December 2020, a parliamentarian raises public attention by calling for a so-called ‘Deltaplan for the north’, which is supposed to deliver a concrete plan combining the development of the Lelylijn with the construction of over one hundred thousand houses in the three northern provinces and Flevoland. The State Secretary remains hesitant towards budgeting for the major infrastructure project: *“We are exploring various long-term possibilities, under which, and certainly not only, the Lelylijn. At the moment, budget for these types of investments is out of sight – you know so too – unless suddenly extensive budget would become available from a big pot of money”*. A committee member urges the cabinet to investigate the possibilities of European funding for the project. In sum, the discussion on the Lelylijn at this point is limited to an impasse regarding the availability of national funding.

With the elections approaching, the Lelylijn is brought up increasingly often and in a larger variety of debates during the winter ‘20-‘21. Nitrogen reduction, issues concerning the housing market and the development of the National Environmental Vision are examples of topics in which parliamentarians raise attention for the Lelylijn. Furthermore, the publication of the ‘2040 Vision on Public Transport’ in March is welcomed with mixed feelings by proponents of the Lelylijn. On the one hand, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water puts the Lelylijn on top of a list with major long-term investments, while on the other hand, the project is not labelled a ‘robust basis’ project, which is awarded to the projects considered most urgent. Again, the State Secretary points at the unavailability of funding as the elephant

in the room: “The fund managers have concluded that the information offered did not allow for proper judgement. If desired, the proposal once further elaborated, can be handed in for examination in a next round of the Growth Fund”. The impasse therefore is still in place.

Election promises made by prominent persons from various political parties have their impact far after the voting. After the installation of the new Committee on Infrastructure and Water, the new committee members see the consensus on the need for the Lelylijn which derived from electoral programs and electoral debates as a solid basis for starting the legal trajectory to realise the rail line: “Why can’t we press ahead, while nearly all parties included the Lelylijn in their electoral program? Why can’t we take action now already?”. The State Secretary however considers that decision a responsibility for the upcoming cabinet, thereby increasing the pressure on the parties involved in the government formation.

The last weeks before the announcement of the coalition agreement in December 2021, proponents of the Lelylijn increasingly focus on the upcoming government. Parliamentarians point out the high expectations caused by election promises and the Deltaplan for the north: “It’s time for cash on delivery”. Ultimately, the new cabinet fulfilled this request with a coalition agreement including the passage: “We will reserve funding for the eventual construction of the Lely rail link from Lelystad to Groningen with regional and EU co-financing. Over the coming period we will work out how this rail link can help strengthen the economy of the northern Netherlands, provide access to new residential developments and improve international rail connections with northern Germany, as part of the ‘Delta Plan for the North’”. Another intermediary step towards realisation is taken.

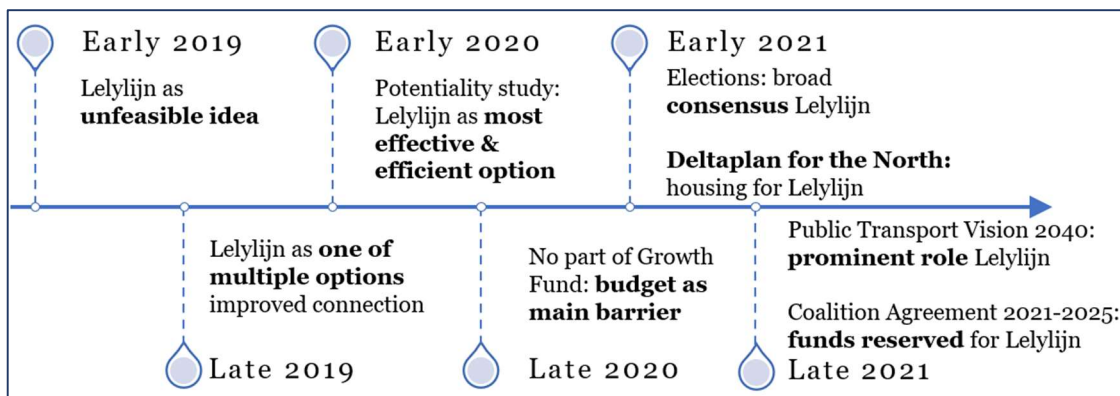


Figure 11. The proceeding of decision-making around the Lelylijn in Dutch national politics in the period 2019-2021 (author, 2022).

Table 1: Quotes from public records, translated from Dutch.

May 2019	<i>In the past, extensive research has been done on the Lelylijn, from which the conclusion derived that it's added value would be limited. By then, two billion was made available for specific measures in the northern Netherlands. An extensive examination was done then, therefore primarily looking into how to optimise via high-quality public transit connections is more logical. (TK, 2019a)</i>
July 2019	<i>When we are talking about public transit, we are not only talking railroad ties. (TK, 2019b)</i>
January 2020	<i>With the region, I want to research extensively and keep up the dialogue on the way we can further improve the connection between the Randstad and the northern Netherlands, without prejudging on the direction of the solution. Some of you I heard say: it should be rail. For us, a high-quality bus connection is an option as well, emphasizing «option». (TK, 2020a)</i>
July 2020	<i>The Lelylijn is <u>the</u> project showing that it's possible to connect the entire Netherlands and which proves to be a good investment, for infrastructure as well as the Dutch economy. (TK, 2020b)</i>
December 2020	<i>We are exploring various long-term possibilities, under which, and certainly not only, the Lelylijn. At the moment, budget for these types of investments is out of sight – you know so too – unless suddenly extensive budget would become available from a big pot of money. (TK, 2020d)</i>
March 2021	<i>The fund managers have concluded that the information offered did not allow for proper judgement. If desired, the proposal once further elaborated, can be handed in for examination in a next round of the Growth Fund. (TK, 2021a)</i>
June 2021	<i>Why can't we press ahead, while nearly all parties included the Lelylijn in their electoral program? Why can't we take action now already? (TK, 2021b)</i>
November 2021	<i>It's time for cash on delivery. (TK, 2021c)</i>
December 2021	<i>We will reserve funding for the eventual construction of the Lely rail link from Lelystad to Groningen with regional and EU co-financing. Over the coming period we will work out how this rail link can help strengthen the economy of the northern Netherlands, provide access to new residential developments and improve international rail connections with northern Germany, as part of the 'Delta Plan for the North'. (TK, 2021d)</i>

The lobbying perspective

Media sources serve multiple purposes for this analysis. Not only they report on the decisions made in the ‘political stream’, which have crossed in the discussion on public records. Media sources also provide insights of the world outside the politics of The Hague. The upcoming section focuses on intentional and accidental events reported by media sources which have served as input for political decision-making. Furthermore, they offer reactions to the decisions made in parliament. Thus, the events discussed here are the input as well as the output of the developments described in public records. Appendix II offers an overview of the media sources requested for this study.

In the first half of 2019, media attention is centred around the initiation of a new lobbying campaign promoting a more direct rail connection between Amsterdam and Groningen, from now on labelled as the ‘Lelylijn’. At this point, the town of Emmeloord in north-eastern Flevoland serves as the headquarters of the campaign, with local municipal council members and businesses aiming to “*revitalize the discussion on the rail connection*” (Omroep Flevoland, 2019b). The symposium ‘Goed gespoord van west naar noord’, hosted in Emmeloord in March 2019, is presented as the formal start of the wider pro-Lelylijn campaign. The symposium not only has the purpose to raise national political attention for the topic, but also to gather regional allies for the initiative. The three northern provinces namely are claimed to be hesitant towards the initiative, seeing the improvement of the existing rail infrastructure as a more feasible solution (RTV Noord, 2019a). An early milestone for the campaign is the show of support by national lobbying organisation and employer’s association VNO-NCW during a conference of its northern branch (Leeuwarder Courant, 2019a).

Halfway 2019, the three northern provinces and Flevoland express their support for the Lelylijn through the provincial coalition agreements which derived from the provincial elections of that year (Stentor, 2019b). With the State Secretary still showing preference for the bus alternative, this statement from the provinces is seen as important for leaving the door open for the Lelylijn during the negotiations between the provinces and the ministry. Thanks to these signs of support, the fact that the lobbying campaign faces reluctance from the national government is no reason to let the campaign come to a halt. Instead, the growing attention for the Lelylijn in The Hague among opposition parties encourages the lobbying actors to ‘continue the battle’ (RTV Noord, 2019b)

Meanwhile, the national employer’s association has taken over the lead of the lobbying campaign from the local initiators and organises meetings with the northern provinces, the municipalities along the proposed trajectory and other ‘sympathisers’ (RTV Noord, 2019b). The need for these meetings appears from the friction between the northern authorities. For example, one point of discussion is the desire of the Frisian city of Leeuwarden to become the second starting / ending point of the Lelylijn, equivalent to the city of Groningen. Furthermore, the province Drenthe prioritizes two other rail infrastructure projects: realising the Nedersaksenlijn, connecting the northern and eastern parts of the Netherlands, and improving the existing rail trajectory to Groningen, which crosses Drenthe, above the proposed new connection (Leeuwarder Courant, 2019b). Figure 12 illustrates the spatial distribution of these three proposed rail infrastructure projects.

The attitude of lobbying actors towards the decision-making process in parliament during the second half of 2019 is characterized by a combination of hope and suspicion. On the one hand, hope derives from the announcement of a 50 billion euros Growth Fund for major national investments (Dagblad van het Noorden, 2019) and the ministry’s promise to further research the potentiality of the Lelylijn (Omrop Fryslân, 2019). However, the latter also is a reason for suspicion. The call for research is seen as a common political trick to buy time and procrastinate further progress, which is recognized by actors involved in the lobbying process for the Zuiderzeelijn, roughly ten years earlier (Friesch Dagblad, 2019b).

In early 2020, the Lelylijn enters media sources increasingly as a matter of principle, representing broader issues encountered in the north. Farmers’ protests against nitrogen measures and the decision to choose Zandvoort above TT Assen to host Formula 1 are examples of events which add up to the sentiment that the mostly rural, northern Netherlands are structurally disadvantaged (Nieuwe Oogst, 2019). Nevertheless, VNO-NCW prefers to distance from this ‘Calimero story’ and present the Lelylijn from a more entrepreneurial perspective: a sound business case (VNO-NCW, 2020).

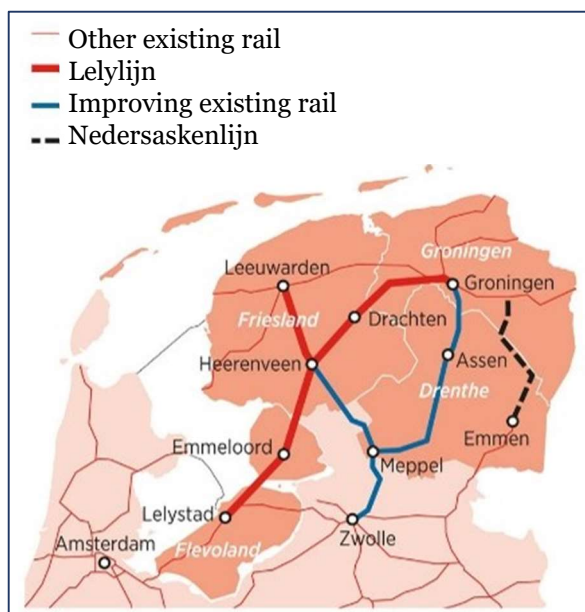


Figure 12: Regional friction on the map: Leeuwarden as a second start/endpoint of the Lelylijn and two other competing regional rail infrastructure projects (adapted from Trouw, 2021).

Publications around the Lelylijn in spring and summer 2020 are dominated by two themes: the COVID-19 pandemic hitting the Netherlands and the preparations for the national elections of March 2021. Regarding the first, the Lelylijn is presented following two arguments: (1) due to the pandemic lockdown, working from home is becoming the ‘new reality’, which allows people to live further away from work and occasionally take a high-speed rail connection to work; and (2) the economic crisis which likely will be the result of the COVID-19 measures needs to be countered through anticyclical investments, under which the Lelylijn (RTV Drenthe, 2020).

The second theme, the national elections, demonstrates the moderate expectations lobbying actors have on the progression the current government is going to make regarding the Lelylijn in the months until then. Municipal and provincial politicians from the north are requested to address the new rail connection during national party conferences, with the aim of including the project in the party’s electoral program (Dagblad van het Noorden, 2020a). With the same objective in mind, the lobbying actors encourage the rapid publication of the report on the Lelylijn’s potentiality (Leeuwarder Courant, 2020a). These outcomes, discussed in the political stream, positively highlighted the Lelylijn as a public transport alternative to the bus or existing rail infrastructure. Lobbying actors therefore regard the report final evidence that there is no getting around the Lelylijn (Leeuwarder Courant, 2020b).

With the 2020 Budget Memorandum approaching, all eyes turn towards the official presentation of the national Growth Fund, which was already announced the prior year. This investment fund, which contains 30 billion euros less than the 50 billion announced in 2019, is regarded a key chance for concretizing the Lelylijn plans before the upcoming national elections (Algemeen Dagblad, 2020). During a conference of the northern department of VNO-NCW, the minister shares she is working on getting the Lelylijn on the fund’s longlist, which is an unprecedented expression of support from the side of the ministry (RTV Noord, 2020).

At the same time, delays in infrastructural projects within and outside the Netherlands are forming a potential threat for realizing the Lelylijn. In the first place, the renewal of the Groningen southern ring road is a source of significant overruns in time and costs, thereby reducing the budget available for others infrastructure projects (Dagblad van het Noorden, 2020b). Furthermore, the argument of creating a public transport corridor towards north-eastern Europe is threatened by cost and time overruns for the reconstruction of the demolished Friesenbrücke, an essential German rail bridge to connect Groningen and Bremen (Omrop Fryslân, 2020). On the positive side, the construction of the Fehmarn Belt Fixed Link between Denmark and Germany is pointed out as another important chain in the international corridor to which the Lelylijn could belong (OOGtv, 2020).

Another narrative introduced by Lelylijn-promoters in the second half of 2020 is the role of the railway line in countering the shortage of housing, a nation-wide issue. The lobbying authorities increasingly take the position of *quid pro quo*: in return for the rail connection, urban areas along the trajectory can contribute a major share of the need for housing (De Noordoostpolder, 2020). However, an unsolved question these months remains whether this offer mainly serves national or regional interests. In the same period namely, the earlier described ‘Deltaplan for the North’ is announced with the aim of creating a coherent plan to stimulate the economy of the northern Netherlands. The proposed additional housing here serves a bifold purpose: avoid the brain drain of youth to economically stronger regions and attract people who escape the crowded the Randstad (Leeuwarder Courant, 2020c).

The lobbying actors feel supported by an increasing number of national political parties addressing the Lelylijn in their electoral program, as well as Dutch Railways (Dagblad van het Noorden, 2020c). Nevertheless, the campaign must handle a disappointment in the start of 2021, when the Lelylijn is not awarded Growth Fund investment. This results in criticism among sympathizers of the campaign of the performance of the lobby thus far. Criticizers refer to a lack of fighting spirit and consensus among the lobbying actors, who insufficiently present themselves as a uniform entity due to diverting interests throughout the north (Dagblad van het Noorden, 2021b).

Though, this disappointment is rapidly replaced by growing confidence. The position of the Lelylijn in the 2040 vision on public transport, combined with the promises made during the ‘Northern party leaders’ debate’² make room for stating that the lobby is in favourable circumstances (OV-Magazine, 2021). Furthermore, the elections result in a wide majority of the parliament’s seats being designated to parties endorsing the Lelylijn (Stentor, 2021a). However, whether the persuading activities of the campaigning actors can offer opposition against the state’s financial limitations remains doubtful. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, national emergency funds are extended to prevent the economy from collapsing. These expenditures are regarded a serious risk for the affordability of a major rail investments (NOS, 2021a).

Feeling encouraged by the election results, getting the railway line into the upcoming coalition agreement has become the main goal of the lobbying campaign. The ‘Deltaplan for the North’ is aimed to play a considerable role in this. While politics and media increasingly often speak of the Netherlands experiencing a housing crisis, the three Northern provinces and Flevoland state the ambitious aim to make room for 220.000 extra houses in their proposal for this Deltaplan, titled the ‘Building blocks for the Deltaplan for the North’ (Berenschot, 2021). The urgent need for housing is the ultimate steppingstone to make the Lelylijn reality, as stated by one of the provinces’ representatives: *“I have learned that in politics, a good idea only becomes a good idea once it is there at the right moment. Nowadays, there is a massive demand for housing, and we can serve this demand to a major extent”*³ (Trouw, 2021). The Deltaplan is received by sympathizers of the plan as an expression of ‘good salesmanship’ (RTV Noord, 2021a), while criticizers speak of ‘cheap barter trade’ (Leeuwarder Courant, 2021b). Lobbying actors also respond to the financial limitations raised by the national government, by stimulating both provincial authorities and the European Union to set guarantees on co-financing the major infrastructure project (Stadszaken, 2021).

The last months prior to the publication of ‘Coalition Agreement 2021-2025’, are characterized by a series of appeals towards the negotiating political parties. Invitations to formal and informal meetings in the north (Omrop Fryslân, 2021a), a manifesto signed by a collaboration of northern political authorities, transport agencies and knowledge institutes, (NOS, 2021b) and lobbying actors raising attention for the topic during national party conferences (Omrop Fryslân, 2021b) are examples of the strategies performed to put the Lelylijn on the negotiation table. It is therefore no surprise that the announcement of the coalition agreement was perceived as *“the recognition of the need for a proper connection to the north, which should not always have to pass Zwolle any longer.”*⁴ (Stentor, 2021b).

² Dutch: ‘Noordelijk Lijsttrekkersdebat’

³ Dutch: *“Ik heb geleerd dat in de politiek een goed idee pas echt een goed idee is als het op het goede moment komt. Er is een enorme behoefte aan woningen en wij kunnen voor een belangrijk deel in die behoefte voorzien.”* (Trouw, 2021)

⁴ Dutch: *“Het is erkenning voor een goede ontsluiting van het noorden, dat niet meer altijd via Zwolle hoeft.”* (Stentor, 2021b)

Rekindling momentum evaluated

Answering the research question requires a more abstract look into the reconstruction created above. From the reconstruction of the three-year process which brought the Lelylijn from an unattainable fantasy to a written objective of the newly formed coalition, triggering moments can be extracted which have had an identifiable effect on the alignment of Kingdon's (1984) streams, either through converging or diverging them. As indicated in the theoretical discussion of this study, triggering moments are divided under two main categories: *intentional* triggering moments, which are deliberately triggered by actors with the aim of moving the problem and political stream into a certain direction; and *accidental* triggering moments, which originate from forces beyond the reach of these actors, but which nevertheless can be *framed* to the actors' benefits. In the following paragraphs, these forms of triggering moments will be discussed separately. First, a fundamental assumption which defined the scope of this study is offered nuance by the interview participants, representatives of the three most prominent lobbying partners (Initiative Group Lelylijn, employer association VNO-NCW Noord and the Province of Fryslân) and a critical journalist. These findings add fresh insights into the reconstruction of the rekindling momentum process.

The evaluation of success

The boundaries of the period analysed for this study are based on the notion that by the time of writing (early 2022), the publication of the Dutch national Coalition Agreement 2021-2025 could be regarded the main milestone in the lobbying campaign for the Lelylijn so far. This claim is received by the lobbying actors with slight hesitation. The most widespread remark is that the lobbying work is still uncompleted, as long as a major share of the necessary funds are not collected yet. Therefore, lobbying activities have shifted from the national to the European scale, with the aim of getting the Lelylijn on the European Union's Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) and receive the remaining funds via this institutional trajectory. The commitment expressed by the national government is considered an important step for the further success of the lobbying campaign, but overall is not regarded a major lobbying success in itself. As demonstrated in the conceptual model, 'political approval' is only a means to an end, which is the project delivery.

An extra reason for scepticism is the history of earlier comparable project proposals, under the heading 'Zuiderzeelijn'. As pointed out by one of the participants, caution is essential, since governmental commitment was given to the most recent Zuiderzeelijn attempt as well. To the astonishment of many, financial arguments back then caused the project to be deleted before a shovel hit the ground. Another participant looks back onto the current Lelylijn campaign as a series of milestones, of which the coalition agreement is a significant one. Earlier milestones are in line with those found in public records: the positive outcome of the potentiality study, in incorporation of the railway line in the Ministry's 2040 Vision on Public Transport and the inclusion of the Lelylijn in a majority of the electoral programs.

Furthermore, the lobbyist from foundation Initiative Group Lelylijn pointed out that the lobbying campaign has its roots a year before the first media sources started to report about the activities in 2019. A motion which was filed during a national political party conference in 2018 is seen as the moment the ball started rolling. Since then, visits from national politicians and the formation of the foundation resulted in the first symposium in 2019, the first intentional triggering moment receiving national media attention.

Intentional triggering moments

Intentional triggering moments can thus be labelled all activities deliberately launched by actors behind the pro-Lelylijn lobby. The discussion of public records and media sources leads to the observation that these activities come in three main forms: public gatherings, media publications and direct contact with national decision-makers, which here are discussed more detailed.

Public gatherings, such as symposia and conferences play the most prominent role in the first year of the lobbying process. It is not without reason that several media sources mark the symposium of March 2019, initiated by local Lelylijn-sympathizers from north-eastern Flevoland, as the starting point of the lobbying campaign which followed. The gathering, hosting approximately 300 hearers (Omroep Flevoland, 2019a), received attention at the regional and national level, thereby serving as a starter engine for later activities. The most important function of the symposium was a symbolic one: pointing out to the world that despite the earlier rejection of comparable ideas, the initiators of the symposium feel the confidence that “*revitalizing the discussion*” (Omroep Flevoland, 2019b) has the potential to be successful this time. However, it should be noted that in this early phase of the campaign, the lobbying efforts did not reach the discussion tables of The Hague, where the initiative was discussed in May 2019 the first.

As stated earlier, national employers’ association VNO-NCW adopted a major role in the lobbying campaign later in 2019, which gave room for larger-scale gatherings and the joining of more authorities throughout the northern Netherlands. The symposium of December 2019 thus differed from its predecessor in structure, but also in function. Where in March of that year, public attention-raising was the main aim of the event, this symposium was oriented towards aligning the interests of northern authorities (Friesch Dagblad, 2019b). This shows that the idea of ‘joined forces’ (Leeuwarden Courant, 2019c) is not considered self-evident. The efforts made to present the sympathizers of the lobbying campaign as a single entity are noticed in The Hague, where parliamentarians increasingly speak in terms of ‘the growing support for the Lelylijn in the northern provinces’. It therefore can be concluded that events designed to internally enforce the campaign have their effects in the external decision-making environment. After the 2021 elections, the ‘Railforum debate’ was organised with a comparable range of participants, calling for attention from the future government (SporPro, 2021).

Media publications by lobbying actors are posted on a regular basis, in the form of written contributions or interviews. To a lesser degree than public gatherings, they have to ability to raise national attention individually. Nevertheless, they contribute to narrowing down of what is labelled the ‘policy fyke’ in the conceptual model, as regular reminders of the urgency of the issue at hand and the logic response the Lelylijn is to this issue. In other words, they prevent Kingdon’s (1984) streams from diverting rather than causing further conversion, something for which stronger, more persuasive triggering moments are needed. New year’s speeches from mayors and provincial key persons (Dagblad van het Noorden, 2021a) are considered an example of such ‘reminders’.

Exceptions to this claim are media publications which either display broad support for the plan, or which are explicitly designed to gather wider support. Examples of these are the call towards businesses and citizens to subscribe as “Friend of the Lelylijn” in late 2019 (Friesch Dagblad, 2019a) and the manifesto of late 2021 addressed to the negotiating coalition parties, which more than before demonstrated a broad northern cross-sectoral collaboration of authorities speaking with one voice (NOS, 2021b). In these cases, media publications deliberately contribute to bringing the proposed infrastructure project closer to decision-making.

Where public gatherings and media publications are aimed to exert influence on national decision-making more indirectly, also direct contact between lobbying parties and representatives from The Hague has occurred. These triggering moments often arrive as the result of invitations by the lobbying actors. For instance, the Minister of Infrastructure & Water was invited to a conference by the national employers’ association in September 2020, where she for the first time expressed herself explicitly positive towards the potential of obtaining budget for the Lelylijn through the Growth Fund (RTV Noord, 2020). With increasing pressure on the coalition negotiations in autumn 2021, members of the future coalition were invited to Fryslân for an informal sailing trip (Omrop Fryslân, 2021) and were confronted with the issues experienced by citizens of Groningen during a formal visit to the provincial government (RTV Noord, 2021b).

Interestingly, the lobbying activities which interview participants see as being the most important contribution to the campaign are those which are scarcely addressed in documentary data: regular visits by the lobbying partners to parliamentarians in The Hague, initially with the aim of raising attention for the project, later with the aim of ‘keeping them sharp’. Moreover, parliamentarians receive input from the lobbyists prior to debates covering the Lelylijn. It appears from multiple interviews that before

interference in national politics became fruitful, the lobbying partners were sent away with the assignment to enhance internal support for the initiative among the authorities of the Northern Netherlands. After a long process of bargaining, the three northern provinces and Flevoland presented themselves via the Deltaplan for the North as a single alliance. Their contribution can be regarded a package deal, including the proposal of building one hundred thousand houses, the Lelylijn and the Nedersaksenlijn, a new rail connection towards the eastern Netherlands which would mostly benefit the Province of Drenthe. Nevertheless, one of the interview participants argues that this alliance is little more than window-dressing, hiding internal disputes about varying priorities from the outer world. On the other hand, two other participants stress the strengthened collaboration between northern authorities in Collaboration Northern Netherlands⁵, an institution which according to the journalist has contributed considerably to the total lobbying capacity in the months prior to the publication of the coalition agreement. Figure 13 summarizes the categorisation of intentional triggering moments as described above.

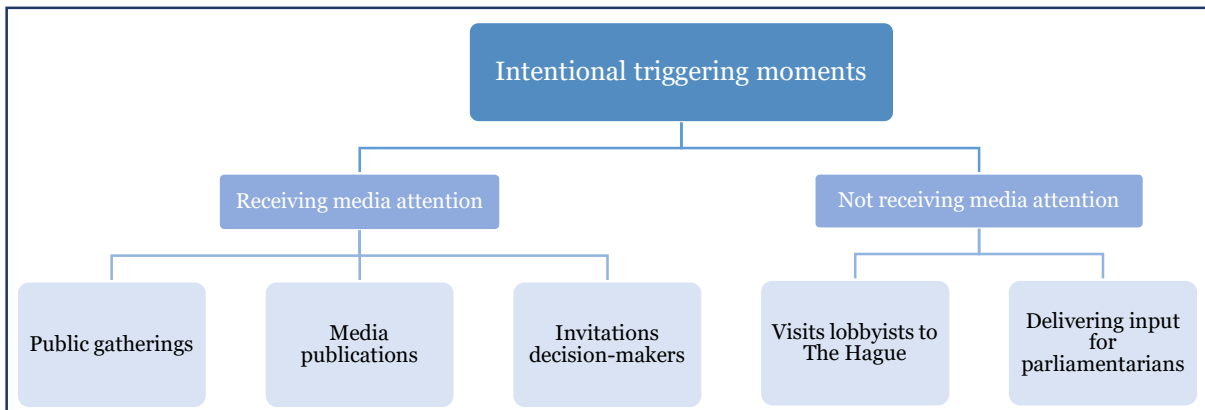


Figure 13: Internal triggering moments categorised (author, 2022).

Overall, it can be argued that those lobbying activities which raise the most media attention are not necessarily the activities considered the most important by the lobbyists. Following the interview participants, long-lasting contacts in The Hague form the basis for the milestones achieved. Figure 14 offers a timeline with some of the most publicly prominent intentional triggering moments of the lobbying campaign.



Figure 14: Internal triggering moments surrounding the Lelylijn lobby in the period 2019-2021 (author, 2022).

⁵ Dutch: Samenwerkingsverband Noord-Nederland

Accidental triggering moments

Accidental triggering moments are more ambiguous in nature than intentional triggering moments, for the link between external events and the convergence or divergence of problem and political streams is of a more indirect nature. As discussed by the start of the methodology chapter, tracing back the past will lead to the conclusion that any event somehow affects the course of events following. Therefore, the demarcation of accidental triggering moments has resulted in a selection of those events to which explicit reference is made in public records or media sources. These events are categorised following the spatial scale of their occurrence: regional, national, and European scale, which will be discussed here in more depth.

Regional

In the process of rekindling momentum for the Lelylijn, regional triggering moments have performed a convergent as well as a divergent role. Examples of 'convergent triggering moments' at the regional level, or external events which have been strategically framed by lobbying actors, are the delays caused by rail maintenance works around Zwolle in 2019, which support the 'bottleneck to the north narrative'. Other regional events contribute to the 'justice narrative', the idea that the north has the right to receive compensation for unfair treatment. Gas extraction-induced earthquakes in the province of Groningen and TT Assen being passed as host of the Dutch Grand Prix are examples of events which collectively add up to a sentiment of injustice.

Regional events however also are a cause for hindering the building of momentum. The major delays and cost overruns of a redevelopment project on the Groningen ring road undermine funds designated for other infrastructure projects (Dagblad van het Noorden, 2020b). Furthermore, local resistance to the Lelylijn proposal the image of a like-minded northern alliance. This resistance is especially driven by nature protection interests (NPO Radio 1, 2020), but also by a fear of villages and towns getting overcrowded with new train commuters (Leeuwarder Courant, 2021a). Thus, regional opposition to the plans is characterized by a sentiment of preservation. However, also biases between authorities supporting the Lelylijn can be considered a form of regional hindrance to the campaign.

The interview participants discuss regional events mostly when thinking of circumstances which hindered the lobby. Especially in the province of Fryslân, the lobby encounters increasing opposition against the plan. As indicated by one of the respondents, opposition exists in the form of two contradicting narratives. On the one hand, a Frysian political party foresees a major population influx from the western Netherlands, leading to an intrusion of the existing landscape and communities. On the other hand, a share of the regional academics regards the Lelylijn a connection which will pull more economic activities from the north to the west instead of vice versa, resulting in decline. About regional circumstances with positive impact on the lobbying campaign, another participant refers to the improved collaboration between authorities in the northern Netherlands, which however was partly achieved because of efforts by the lobbying partners.

National

The notion that the Lelylijn lobby is particularly active at the national political level corresponds with the way the story developed around the Lelylijn reacts to national accidental triggering moments. The period 2019-2021 displays a series of events which was strategically framed to contribute to the wider argument in favour of the Lelylijn. As confirmed by the three lobby representatives, the increased relevance of sustainability in the national and European debate is one of the pillars on which the Lelylijn could develop new political attention and approval. Rail infrastructure in general, and the Lelylijn in particular, is presented as the best transport solutions to cope with climate goals (Algemeen Dagblad, 2019) and nitrogen emissions (Omrop Fryslân, 2019).

A theme which has become more prominent throughout the lobbying campaign is the heated Dutch housing market, which raised the need for an extensive housing construction operation. Consensus

exists among the interview participants on the important role of the housing element in the promotion of the Lelylijn. With liveability being under pressure in the western Netherlands, the lobbying partners created a *quid pro quo* storyline which presented the four collaborating provinces as a key answer to the housing issue. This new chapter in the lobbying campaign caused a widening of the debate about the Lelylijn in The Hague, which extended from the Infrastructure and Water Committee to the Ministry of Interior (TK, 2020c). This storyline is crystallized in the document 'Building blocks for the Deltaplan for the North' (Berenschot, 2021), in which the four provinces and four major municipalities collectively state proposals for the national government about the construction of 220.000 houses and the strengthening of the northern railway system via three projects presented in figure 12: the Lelylijn, the Nedersaksenlijn and the improvement of the existing rail line. As argued by one of the lobbyists, the housing crisis has turned the Lelylijn into a project of national importance.

National events which trigger the sentiment that the North deserves the Lelylijn as a form of symbolic compensation are not considered helpful for the lobbying campaign by the interview participants. Examples of those are framing the farmers' protests against nitrogen regulations as the expression of general dissatisfaction in rural regions (Nieuwe Oogst, 2019), or the decision to favour Zandvoort in the western Netherlands above Assen in the North as the host of the Formula One Dutch Grand Prix (VNO-NCW, 2020). Stories supporting this call for symbolic compensation are labelled part of the 'Calimero attitude', referring to the tv animation character who blames the world for being treated unfairly.

Examples of other developments during the three years of lobbying which supported the promotion of the idea are (1) the ever-low interest rates, displaying the Lelylijn as a smart investment for the short-term (VNO-NCW, 2020); (2) the growing importance on hydrogen in the national energy system, with the Lelylijn as the gateway to hydrogen frontrunner the Eemshaven (Dagblad van het Noorden, 2021c) and (3) the COVID-19 crisis, which created a reality in which working from home allows employees to live further from work (Leeuwarder Courant, 2020d).

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the Lelylijn lobby is twofold though. One of the interview participants refers to the COVID-19 compensation funds by the national government as one of the reasons for the limited availability of infrastructure funds. Meanwhile, there is considerable concurrency from other major infrastructure projects such as the extension of Amsterdam's Noord/Zuidlijn, which is frequently mentioned in the same breath as the Lelylijn (TK, 2019c). Another respondent perceives the government's tendency to only invest in 'profitable infrastructure' as a barrier to realize the Lelylijn, given that projections on the economic impact of the railway connection are highly uncertain. Only evaluating a project proposal by its profitability unnecessarily flattens the debate, so this respondent argues.

European

As suggested by one of the participants, European policies from the last years have created a favourable environment for gaining political approval for rail initiatives such as the Lelylijn. The EU Green Deal has announced a transition towards climate-neutrality which has sustainable mobility as an important pillar. As part of the program, short-distance international airway connections are replaced by rail, thereby increasing the relevance of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). In line with this program, representatives from five European cities have taken action to gain EU support for a north-eastern trans-European corridor from Amsterdam to Helsinki (Groene Amsterdammer, 2021). In parliament, the opportunities of the Lelylijn as part of a wider international network were highlighted the first in early 2020 (TK, 2020e).

The potential of such international rail connection is further enhanced through infrastructural projects along the trajectory. The most prominent example of this is the 'Fehmarn Belt Fixed Link' tunnel between Germany and Denmark, which is under construction by the time of writing (OOGtv, 2021). Other segments of the corridor prove more troublesome, such as the delays in rebuilding the Friesenbrücke connecting Bremen and Groningen (Omrop Fryslân, 2020).

Overall, however, all interview participants conclude that the circumstances in which the Lelylijn lobby is operating are predominantly supportive. One participant speaks of “a favourable cocktail of circumstances”. In other words, the converting triggering moments dominate over the diverting counterparts. This is also demonstrated in figure 15, which summarizes the most prominent accidental triggering moments at all scale levels in the 2019-2021 period, as indicated by documentary data and interview participants.

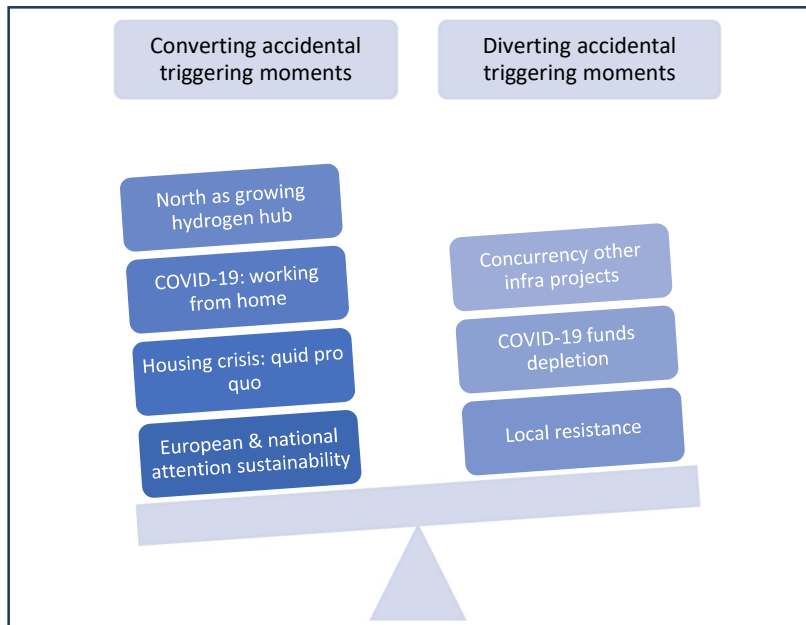


Figure 15: The most prominent accidental triggering moments surrounding the Lelylijn lobby in the period 2019-2021 (author, 2022).

The expanding storyline

As indicated in the conceptual model, the accidental triggering moments described above could contribute to the opening of a policy window for the Lelylijn through strategic framing. Themes which gained political and/or societal attention were translated in arguments supporting the lobby. Strategic framing was performed via multiple, complementary storylines which gradually entered the discussion table. From those, six main storylines, visualized in figure 17, were extracted from documentary data and interviews. These are discussed in more detail in this paragraph.

Economic arguments

The first three storylines are grouped under the header ‘economic arguments’ and emphasize the economic relevance of the proposed undertaking. A dominant storyline since the publication of the ‘Building blocks for the Deltaplan’ document is what can be labelled as the ‘*quid pro quo* narrative’, suggesting that the Lelylijn is the necessary reward for the North’s contribution to cooling down the heated housing market. This framing strategy positions the Lelylijn in the context of the socio-economic challenge which affects most of the Netherlands, and especially the highly urbanized western region.

The second economic argument draws attention to the specific economic opportunities which are offered by the northern Netherlands. Similar to the first storyline, emphasis is put on the role the North can play in national affairs, phrased by one of the interview participants as “play on the wings of the field”. However, this storyline is different in referring to existing economic developments instead of future potentials such as housing construction. Examples of innovative sectors performing as regional flagships are water technology, agriculture, and energy (Berenschot, 2021).

The third storyline focusing on the economic dimension sheds a quite reverse light on the North, by accentuating the socio-economic risks of *not* investing in the North's infrastructure. Based on the notion that standstill equals decline, Where the second storyline frames the Lelylijn to exploit the potential of the region, this storyline makes the railway line a counterforce against a loss of population and economic activity in the region, or *"the negative socio-economic spiral"*⁶ (Berenschot, 2021). From the interviews, it appeared that storylines emphasizing the opportunities are prioritized when 'selling' the project. Consequently, the second storyline is more widespread across documentary data than the third.

Broader arguments

The three other storylines are labelled 'broader arguments', for looking beyond economy-driven interests. In the first place, the lobby has responded to the increasing attention to issues related to the emission of greenhouse gasses and nitrogen at the national and European scale. Therefore, rail transport is promoted as the more environmentally friendly mobility solution. At the national scale, this resulted in comparing rail to car transport, whereas on the European scale rail transport was put against short-distance flights. This indicates how the same main storyline is adapted to the scale and audience to which lobbying efforts are designated.

The second storyline builds upon the first by envisioning the Lelylijn specifically as the missing link in a north-eastern, trans-European corridor connecting Amsterdam to Stockholm or Helsinki (figure 16). The function of concretizing the position of the Lelylijn within the European network differs depending on the level of decision-making. As argued by the interview participants, if the EU would award the Lelylijn the TEN-T status, this would have crucial consequences for the availability of budget. In the national parliament, the prospect of potential EU funding is used to convince the government of the Lelylijn being a safe and inevitable investment: *"If we could gain momentum and receive subsidy or financial means from Europe to extrapolate the connection to Helsinki, we would be mad not to take this opportunity"*⁷ (TK, 2020e). The storyline framing the Lelylijn as parts of a European corridor therefore exerts persuasive power directly in Brussels and indirectly in The Hague.



Figure 16: The Lelylijn as missing link in the TEN-T network, creating international (north-)eastern corridors (adapted from Berenschot, 2021).

Finally, one storyline is represented in figure 17 by a dotted line since the contribution of this storyline in the lobbying campaign is more ambiguous. This storyline implies that the northern Netherlands 'deserve' the Lelylijn as an expression of symbolic compensation, linked to the 'Calimero attitude' discussed in the national accidental triggering moment section. Even though the interviewed lobbyists stated their disapproval of arguments based on this storyline, expressions of dissatisfaction with the

⁶ Dutch: *"de negatieve sociaaleconomische spiraal"* (Berenschot, 2021).

⁷ Dutch: *"Als we dat doen en dat in een breder kader tot aan Helsinki kunnen doortrekken, als we daaruit momentum kunnen krijgen en als we wellicht zelfs subsidie of financiële middelen uit Europa kunnen krijgen, zouden we wel gek zijn als we die kans niet zouden pakken"* (TK, 2020e)

perceived unequal treatment of Dutch regions occasionally appear in parliament: “while improvements to the rail connection towards Zandvoort to host the Formula One party were arranged in second, the Lelylijn is only procrastinated so far. Please make the cabinet prove that it’s there for the northern Netherlands as well.”⁸ (TK, 2019c).

These six storylines thus each represent strategically framed accidental triggering moments. In the following paragraph, these outcomes will contribute to a reflection on the factors explaining the renewed success of the current Lelylijn lobbying campaign as compared to its predecessors, especially the most recent Zuiderzeelijn campaign in the 2000s.

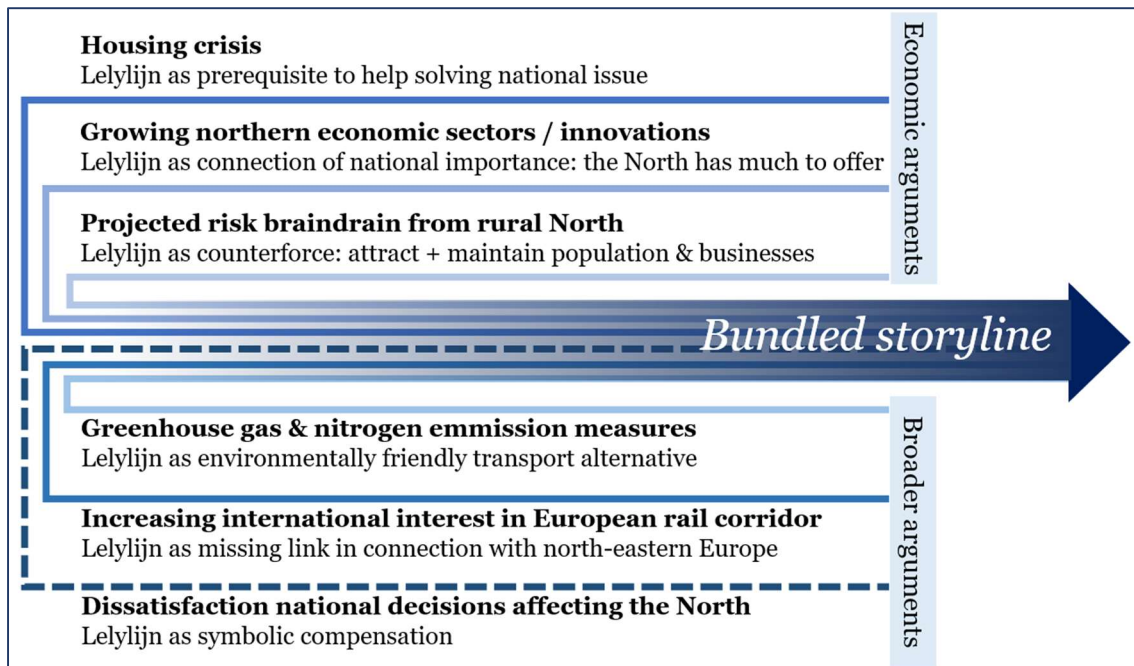


Figure 17: The bundle of storylines applied in rekindling momentum for the Lelylijn.

Regaining momentum

As commented by the interviewed passive follower of the lobbying activities, there have been so many attempts to realize the second rail connection to the North in the last one hundred years that in case the current campaign proves unsuccessful, realisation will always remain unattainable. Rising costs and complexity related to such major infrastructure projects are an increasing limitation to bringing these into being. The idea that the option of rekindling momentum is not inexhaustible adds pressure on the current lobbying process, but also raises the question: which mixture of factors gave way for triggering renewed political attention and approval for the lobby ideals? The interview participants showed consensus on the differences between the current and former lobbying campaigns, which also can be divided across the two categories of triggering moments.

⁸ Dutch: “waar verbeteringen van een spoorverbinding naar Zandvoort voor het Formule 1-feestje van pandjesprins Bernhard zo gepiept zijn, wordt de Lelylijn tot nu toe weggeschoven. Laat dit kabinet bewijzen dat het er niet voor een handjevol mensen is, maar zich ook wil inzetten voor Noord-Nederland.” (TK, 2019c).

The role of intentional triggering moments

From the interviews, three activities by the lobbying partners emerge as the main improvements of the current campaign as compared to former ones: (1) presenting the rail line in a more pragmatic fashion, (2) presenting the northern authorities as a harmonious entity and (3) placing the Lelylijn within a European context.

Starting with the first improvement, the passive actor explains that the proposal for the Zuiderzeelijn was surrounded by a sense of futurism. The lobbyists of that time played at high stake by calling for a magnetic railway, a novelty for the Netherlands. Despite the benefits of such new technology, especially regarding speed, the interview participant argues that the idea was considered a ‘flight of fancy’⁹ across large parts of society and national politics. In contrast, the current Lelylijn campaign goes back to basic by setting a more pragmatic ambition: to realize a faster rail connection between the North and West, while also opening former disconnected areas. This more abstract approach, which moreover leaves room for connecting the rail line to the wider Dutch rail network, mitigates the resistance triggered by moving towards fixed designs before the support base for the idea has set.

Secondly, the unity and assertiveness demonstrated by the northern authorities is considered an important reason for the achievements of the Lelylijn lobby. One participant explains that initially, when the lobbying group attempted to raise attention for the proposal in The Hague, they were dismissed with the assignment of getting the northern authorities on the same page first. According to this participant, once aligning the northern authorities was accomplished, the lobbying actors were welcomed in The Hague far more positively. This practical example supports the argument Hajer (2005) that the sequential order of stages within the political decision-making process influences the outcome of the deliberation, even when the cast is unchanged. Another active actor mentions that reaching agreement among the coalition parties of the province Fryslân on the willingness to pursue the Lelylijn was the first milestone obtained in the lobbying trajectory, which indicates that regional unity on the theme is not self-evident. On the contrary, the passive actor argues that although the lobbying actors have created the image of northern unity, this is rather a form of window-dressing, covering disputes among the provinces about the actions and aims of the lobbying campaign.

Thirdly, one of the interviewed lobbyists sees a difference in the spatial scale in which the Lelylijn is presented as compared to its predecessors. While proposals for the Zuiderzeelijn focused exclusively on connecting people and places within the Dutch national borders, the current lobbying campaign looks beyond this and emphatically addresses the function the rail line may have as part of trans-European connections. This shift can be considered a renewed spatial imaginary of the Lelylijn, which according to Davoudi (2018) legitimizes spatial practices. Given that Europe only represents one of the six storylines displayed in figure 17, the spatial context in which the Lelylijn is positioned shows resemblance with what Haughton & Allmendinger (2015) label the ‘fluid character of spatial imaginaries’. The pragmatic focal switch between the Lelylijn as a national or European connection has the advantage of leaving room for further specification later in the process.

The role of accidental triggering moments

When reflecting on the differences between the current and earlier lobbying campaign for a second rail connection to the North, all interview participants pay most attention to the altered circumstances in which the lobbying activities occur. In other words, accidental triggering moments are experienced as gamechangers for the promotion of the Lelylijn. The three developments most prominently referred to are: (1) the increased attention to sustainability at the Dutch and European level, (2) the Dutch housing crisis and (3) the behavioural changes caused by the COVID-19 crisis.

In the first place, all three lobby representatives value the gradually increased importance of sustainability at all decision-making levels and throughout all policy sectors as a key factor in regaining momentum for the Lelylijn. The storyline built around the Lelylijn being a more environmentally

⁹ Dutch: ‘luchtfietsenrij’

friendly mobility alternative to driving and flying could not have been constructed without the renewed discourse on the need for sustainability-driven behavioural change.

A less gradual development is the increasing pressure on the Dutch housing market, which put the four provinces promoting the Lelylijn in a more solid bargaining position. A participant argues that connecting the housing issue to the Lelylijn has strengthened the story behind the rail line. Although this accidental triggering moment is only considered one of the storylines forming the bundle of storylines, it is certainly the storyline receiving the most media attention for having the most direct and impactful consequences for the physical environment. Figure 18 gives an indication of the size of the proposed operation following this storyline.

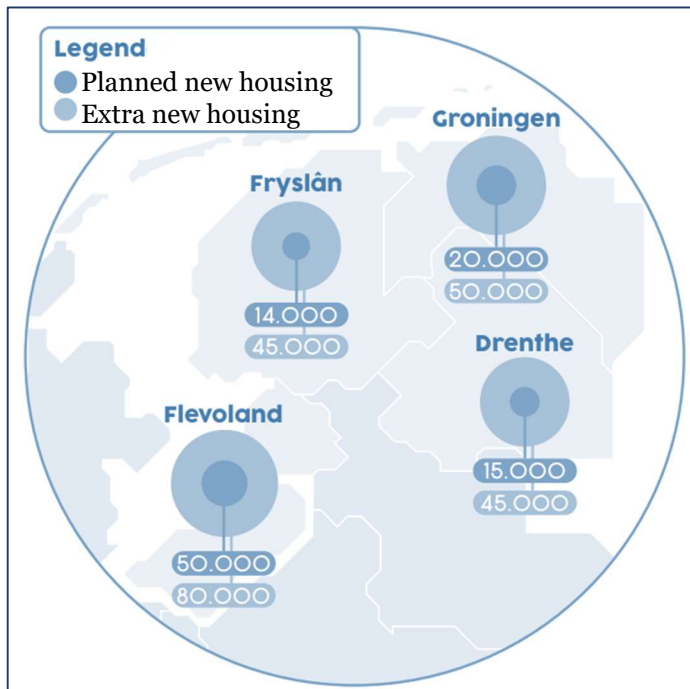


Figure 18: The proposed quantities of additional housing in return to the Lelylijn (adapted from Berenschot, 2021).

The third and most abrupt development affecting the course of the lobbying campaign is the COVID-19 crisis. Working from home in lockdown periods has demonstrated the potentiality of behavioural change among commuters and led to the Lelylijn being presented as the mobility option for the infrequent cases working at the office in necessary. The lessons from the COVID-19 crisis are supplementary to the three economic arguments addressed in figure 17 by confirming the role the North can play in the Dutch national economy, although the long-term impact of the crisis on behavioural travel patterns remains ambiguous.

5. Conclusion

This study has dived into the phenomenon that unrealized proposals of major infrastructure projects can rekindle momentum at another moment in time. While academic literature offers various insights on the formation of policy windows and processes of persuasive storytelling performed by policy entrepreneurs, limited attention is paid to the cases in which the proposed ideas are no novel initiatives but have a long history instead. Such cases show that political rejection is no end point per se, they can be the starting point of a new cycle of lobbying efforts. These ideas resulted in the following main research question:

Which factors make that previously rejected major infrastructure projects regain political approval?

The lobbying campaign behind the Dutch Lelylijn project, a previously rejected proposal for a second and faster railway connection between the northern and western regions of the Netherlands, served as an instrumental case to answer this research question. The secondary research questions which were developed for this study are discussed here in more depth.

1. How do intentional triggering moments contribute to renewed political approval to previously rejected major infrastructure projects?

Intentional triggering moments contain all activities deliberately arranged by the responsible policy entrepreneur, to bring a publicly perceived problem and the proposed policy solution closer to one another. In other words, these lobby activities are designed to trigger the problem stream and political stream to convert. As indicated in the conceptual model (figure 4), intentional triggering moments are divided among two categories linked to persuasive storytelling, namely persuasive content, and persuasive processes. Persuasive content refers to *what* is told in stories, whereas persuasive processes are about *how* the storytelling is performed.

The lobbying activities around the Lelylijn demonstrated a variety of persuasive content and processes. In terms of content, the lobbying partners have pursued mostly practice-oriented, economic arguments in the bundle of storylines which has grown over time. Attaching metaphorical or symbolic meaning to this project proposal is argued to be unnecessary or even undesirable. Arguably, this strategy fits particularly well the Dutch social context, in which sobriety regularly is considered a characteristic profiling the country to the outer world. A set of spatial imaginaries was implemented to increase the number of themes which corresponded to the Lelylijn. Positioning the rail line simultaneously as (1) the access route of areas currently inaccessible by rail, (2) the connector of economic and demographic hubs in the western and northern Netherlands and (3) the connector of the largest cities of northern Europe increased the resilience of the bundled storyline against counter arguments.

Regarding processes, the case under study indicated how setting and staging influenced the course of policy deliberations. ‘Drama’ was created through large-scale manifestations which fostered people’s emotional attachment to the initiative, especially the multiple symposia proved effective settings for this purpose. Also ‘playing around’ with the order of stages of policy deliberation had considerable implications on the decision-making trajectory. The lobbyists experienced that raising and showing the support from regional as well as international authorities was needed before the most significant milestone of the lobbying campaign thus far could be reached: seeing the Lelylijn being included in the national government’s Coalition Agreement 2021-2025.

2. How do accidental triggering moments contribute to renewed political approval to previously rejected major infrastructure projects?

Accidental triggering moments exist of all forces influencing the course of decision-making without direct control by policy entrepreneurs. Therefore, changing circumstances in which lobbying actors operate can either improve or hinder the match between the perceived problem and the proposed policy solution. However, the policy entrepreneur can influence the converting or diverting impact of accidental triggering moments on the policy deliberation process by strategically framing the situation at hand. Considering that indirectly, any external situation somehow may be related to the subsequent course of events, a selection is made of the most direct and influential triggers.

A reconstruction of strategically framed external event revealed that virtually any situation could be transformed into an argument supporting the Lelylijn storylines. Especially accidental triggering moments occurring on the Dutch national level proved suitable for enriching the arsenal of arguments, of which the housing crisis was integrated the strongest in the storylines supporting the Lelylijn. While most of the exploited external events fitted existing storylines without much alternation, such as the publication of the European Green Deal or the declaration of stricter regulation on nitrogen emission. However, the incorporation of the housing crisis resulted in a new, complementary storyline, framing the Lelylijn as a bargaining chip.

Few external triggering moments are considered to have had negative impact on the lobbying efforts, illustrated by a lobbyist speaking of ‘a favourable cocktail of circumstances’. Most resistance against the project derives from regional actors, driven by concerns about the indirect impacts of the rail line on local communities and landscapes. The hindrance to the lobby considered most relevant though is the limited availability of infrastructure funds, due to a combination of major governmental expenditures.

3. Which factors make new promotion activities for previously rejected major infrastructure projects different from former promotion activities?

Lessons have been learned from the decisions made during the Zuiderzeelijn lobby, the predecessor of the Lelylijn initiative. These lessons are translated into adaptations to the activities performed when creating intentional triggering moments. More than previously, effort is put in the ‘groundwork’, collecting a broad regional support base by raising consensus among the northern provinces and municipalities. This process of negotiation resulted in a wider lobbying scope, also including other rail-related objectives. Next to that, the more flexible spatial imaginary of the Lelylijn discussed earlier is an improvement of the more statically presented Zuiderzeelijn. Lastly, the current lobbying actors deliberately lowered their stakes by deviating from the wish for more expensive, technologically advanced solutions.

Apart from the different lobbying strategy, also the altered socio-institutional context has impacted the potential of rekindling momentum for the Lelylijn considerably. The gradual move of the national and European discourse towards sustainability principles has paved the way for new promotional activities to take off. It is fair to say that without this discursive shift, new efforts to realize the Lelylijn would not have been legitimized. Rekindling momentum takes more than repeating obsolete actions, it requires a revision of the storylines told, the sequence and setting of persuasive events and a supportive socio-institutional environment. The first two points can be controlled by the policy entrepreneur, the latter one requires a degree of luck.

Implications

This study has contributed to literature by shedding light on a relatively uncovered theme within the field of storytelling, that is the role of persuasive storytelling when dealing with a history of rejection. The argument is made here that starting off a process of exercising influence on decision-making as the successor of previous initiators requires is significantly different from working on a 'political blank canvas'. On the one hand, one can benefit from the notoriety gathered by predecessors, especially when it comes to raising media attention. On the other hand, though, the history of rejection stuck to the lobby can result in the new proposal being received with an attitude of suspiciousness.

From this case study, it has derived that existing theory tends to amplify the influence the policy entrepreneur has on the course of decision-making. The production of powerful intentional triggering moments is emphasized over the strategic exploitation of accidental triggering moments. In other words, the malleability of the policy deliberation process is considered high. Nevertheless, the results displayed above indicate a noteworthy position of uncontrolled events in the enrichment of the storylines supporting the major infrastructure project under study. Both *known unknowns* as the future direction of the sustainable mobility discourse and *unknown unknowns* as the COVID-19 crisis require more recognition in the theoretical field of persuasive storytelling. The most influential storytellers are those who can cope with such unknown factors and put their own spin on them. In an increasingly complex and fragmented political domain, both in the Netherlands as well as democracies worldwide, the importance of a phenomenon I would label 'persuasive resilience' needs more theoretical awareness.

Regarding planning practice, the contribution of this study is a story of hope. The political rejection of a proposed spatial intervention is not synonymous to failure, it simply may not have been the right moment yet. To a certain extent, the policy entrepreneur can steer the path towards momentum-building through the creation of intentional triggers. However, the presence of a supportive socio-institutional environment is crucial to cash the efforts made to bring the perceived problem and the solution offered closer together. Therefore, the adequate monitoring of discursive movements and the preparation of adaptive storytelling scenarios is a prerequisite to deal with the various *unknowns* entering the decision-making arena. Only then one can respond to the opportunities coming on the way.

6. Reflection

The main strength of this study lies in the adopted multi-perspective approach. The Lelylijn lobbying process was explored through the lens of the lobbyists themselves, the parliamentarians to whom the lobbying efforts were primarily addressed and the media which continuously reported on the process. This form of triangulation contributed to the research's quality not only by controlling for the credibility of sources, but also by selecting the most influential triggering moments from the cloud of events hanging above the lobbying campaign. This strategy thereby aimed to respond to one of the potential weaknesses of the study, which is the difficulty of assessing the relative impact of particular intentional and accidental triggering moments in the fuzzy process of policy deliberation. In line with the qualitative approach which forms the basis of the research methodology, the solution was found in addressing the *perceived* impact of the various lobbying activities and external events. Moreover, the multitude of sources mitigated the inevitably biased image derived from interviews with active actors who have a distinct position in the lobbying process under study.

Another limitation to the results of this study is the bias between the achievement of *political approval* and *project delivery*. Although in theory, these two phases are connected linearly, practice demonstrates that the first does not necessarily imply the second. The case under study was found in a situation in which political approval was achieved without the corresponding financial means being made available. As discussed earlier, this leads to the question whether it is fair to speak of success under the current circumstances. The Dutch national Coalition Agreement 2021-2025 is indeed regarded an important milestone, although the lobbyists considered some reservations appropriate.

Further work is necessary to gain a more holistic view onto the process of persuasion in policymaking. Apart from rekindling momentum, retaining momentum is a different ballgame, but equally relevant regarding the long-term nature of planning and realizing major infrastructure projects. In the meantime, the world outside the decision-making arena keeps turning and fresh insights can either support or counter the convergence of streams. This places the policy entrepreneur increasingly in the position of defendant, which requires corresponding techniques of persuasion.

A second knowledge gap deriving from this study is the role of the 'policy stream' in the process of policy window formation. Kingdon (1984) frames this stream as the most objective, expert-driven source of input, which is less exposed to the influence of policy entrepreneurs than the problem and political streams. This study addressed how expert input such as the 'potentiality study' has fostered the decision-making process. Nonetheless, the subjective nature of the policy stream, for example the decision which mobility alternatives to include in the comparison, remained untreated. Broadening the focus to include all three streams also brings opportunities to evaluate the performance of the Multiple Streams Framework in explaining the creation of policy windows.

As a final point, for me as a researcher, the process which has led to the end-product you are reading now has been an enlightening journey. The months I worked on this project have trained my skills as a solitary researcher, including the development of a sound research design, gathering, and analysing data and putting those steps into words. I have improved my techniques for managing the input from literature and empirics and practiced my social skills when contacting and talking to interviewees. Specifically, regarding the interviews, I consider myself successful in holding on to the motto: 'hard on content, soft on the person', since I got the participants to reflect on the less beneficial aspects of the lobbying campaign while remaining on good terms. And finally, I feel privileged by the support from my supervisor Terry van Dijk, who offered me a combination of valuable insights and the confidence that I could responsibly and independently manage my research progression.

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I. Original quotes public records

Table 2: Original Dutch quotes from public records.

May 2019	<i>Specifiek naar de Lelylijn is in het verleden natuurlijk uitvoerig onderzoek gedaan. Er is uiteindelijk geconcludeerd dat de meerwaarde toen relatief beperkt was. Toen is 2 miljard beschikbaar gesteld voor Noord-Nederland, voor specifieke maatregelen. Daar is dus al wel een keer goed naar gekeken. Dat maakt het misschien ook logischer om nu in eerste instantie via HOV-verbindingen te kijken wat daar nog te optimaliseren is. (TK, 2019a)</i>
July 2019	<i>Wanneer we het hebben over openbaar vervoer, hebben we het niet alleen over spoorbellen. (TK, 2019b)</i>
January 2020	<i>Ik wil met de regio breed onderzoeken en in gesprek blijven over de vraag op welke wijze we de verbinding tussen de Randstad en Noord-Nederland verder kunnen verbeteren, zonder daarbij vooruit te lopen op de oplossingsrichtingen. Ik heb van een aantal van u gehoord: het móét per se spoor zijn. Voor ons is een hov-verbinding ook een optie, met de nadruk op «optie». (TK, 2020a)</i>
July 2020	<i>Als één project kan laten zien dat je letterlijk heel Nederland met elkaar verbindt en dat het een goede investering is voor zowel de infrastructuur als de economie van Nederland, dan is dat de Lelylijn toch wel. (TK, 2020b)</i>
December 2020	<i>We kijken naar verschillende langetermijnmogelijkheden, waaronder, maar zeker niet alleen, een Lelylijn. Op dit moment is er echter nog geen zicht op budget voor dit soort investeringen – dat weet u ook – tenzij er ergens uit een grote pot met geld in een keer een heel budget beschikbaar zou komen. (TK, 2020d)</i>
March 2021	<i>De fondsbeheerders hebben geconstateerd dat er nog informatie ontbrak om tot een goede beoordeling te komen. Desgewenst kan dit voorstel na verdere uitwerking en aanvulling in een volgende ronde van het Groeifonds opnieuw voor toetsing worden ingediend. (TK, 2021a)</i>
June 2021	<i>Waarom kan er dan nu niet doorgepakt worden, terwijl bijna alle partijen die Lelylijn in het verkiezingsprogramma hebben staan? Waarom kunnen we nu niet al actie ondernemen en verdere stappen zetten? (TK, 2021b)</i>
November 2021	<i>Het is tijd om nu dan ook boter bij de vis te doen. (TK, 2021c)</i>
December 2021	<i>We reserveren middelen om op termijn met medefinanciering vanuit de regio en uit Europese fondsen de Lelylijn te kunnen aanleggen. De komende periode werken we uit hoe de Lelylijn, in het kader van het Deltaplan voor het Noorden, kan bijdragen aan versterking van de economie van het Noorden, de ontsluiting van nieuw te ontwikkelen woningbouwgebieden en betere internationale treinverbindingen met het noorden van Duitsland. (TK, 2021d)</i>

II. Documentary data sources

Table 3: Number of public records consulted per source.


<i>Public record source</i>	<i>Number of publications selected</i>
<i>Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal</i>	51
<i>Eerste Kamer der Staten Generaal</i>	1

Table 4: Number of media source consulted per source.

<i>Media source</i>	<i>Number of publications selected</i>
<i>Leeuwarder Courant</i>	23
<i>RTV Noord</i>	23
<i>Dagblad van het Noorden</i>	17
<i>Omrop Fryslân</i>	14
<i>Omroep Flevoland</i>	13
<i>Stentor</i>	10
<i>NOS</i>	4
<i>OOGtv</i>	4
<i>RTV Drenthe</i>	4
<i>SpoorPro</i>	4
<i>De Noordoostpolder</i>	3
<i>Friesch Dagblad</i>	3
<i>Trouw</i>	3
<i>AD</i>	2
<i>Flevopost</i>	2
<i>NPO Radio 1</i>	2
<i>VNO-NCW</i>	2
<i>BNR</i>	1
<i>Enigma Research</i>	1
<i>Groene Amsterdammer</i>	1
<i>Nieuwe Oogst</i>	1
<i>NS</i>	1
<i>OV Magazine</i>	1
<i>Stadszaken</i>	1
<i>Telegraaf</i>	1
<i>Treinreiziger.nl</i>	1
<i>Volkskrant</i>	1
<i>Waldnet</i>	1

III. Interview consent form

Figure 19: Interview consent form (Research Ethics Committee University of Groningen, n.d.)

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Agreement to participate - Research Ethics Committee (REC)
in research project: *Rekindling Momentum - How rejected major infrastructure projects regain political attention*

The purpose of this research is to gain understanding of the process which brought the proposed plans for the Lelylijn to the decision-making table and into the Coalition Agreement 2021-2025, given that comparable ideas for a new rail connection between the west and north of the Netherlands have been rejected several times in the past. The research focuses on the development of opinions regarding the Lelylijn in the national parliament for 2019 to 2021 and aims to reconstruct the key moments during the lobbying campaign which have contributed to persuading national decision-makers of the need for this railway line.

- I have read and I understand the information sheet of the research project.
- I understand that taking part in this research is voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from it up to three weeks after the interview, as well as to decline to answer a question I do not wish to answer.
- I understand that my participation in this research is confidential. Without my prior consent, no material, which could identify me, will be used in any reports generated from this study.
- I understand that the interview data may be used in academic articles, book chapters, published and unpublished work and presentations.
- I understand that all information I provide will be kept confidentially either in a locked facility or as a password protected encrypted file on a password protected computer.

Please highlight with **bold marking** YES or NO to each of the following:

I consent to my interview being audio-recorded	YES / NO
I wish to remain anonymous for this research	YES / NO
If YES My first name can be used for this research	YES / NO
OR A pseudonym of my own choosing can be used in this research	YES / NO

If you wish to choose own pseudonym, please mark it here:

“I agree to participate in this individual interview and acknowledge receipt of a copy of this consent form and the research project information sheet.”

Signature of participant: _____ Date: _____

“I agree to abide by the conditions set out in the information sheet and I ensure no harm will be done to any participant during this research.”

Signature of researcher: _____ Date: _____