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Abstract

Nowadays, the cockpit model for public policy planning has been largely replaced by a model of distributed decision making. Taking a dramaturgical perspective on politics, this article follows issues when they are displaced between different settings for decision making. A typology of five different displacements is proposed and linked to staging effects of settings. This typology could form the basis of a theory with which complex, interactive, and distributed decision-making processes can be understood in more general terms. The approach is applied to a case of decision making about an innovative flexible public transport system in the Netherlands.

Keywords

decision making, transport policy, innovation, public transport, displaced politics

Introduction

Nowadays, the cockpit model for public policy planning has been largely replaced by a model of distributed decision making. As an example, I will present a case in which the decision-making process was distributed over

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16 settings, each with different agendas and participation criteria. Examples of settings are provincial states, stakeholder meetings, negotiation structures, and user panels. This article aims to characterize these settings and the displacement of issues between them by drawing on some old notions that have recently been taken up in a fruitful crossover of political science and science and technology studies.

The idea that politics is displaced from its traditional locus in institutions of democratic politics is most notoriously put forward by the German sociologist Beck (1991, 1996). His analysis shows that many forms of politics exist outside and beyond the representative political institutions of nation-states. The displacement of politics (or: proliferation of “subpolitics”) indicates a weakening of bureaucratic, state-oriented politics and challenges conventional notions of politics. Drawing on this thesis, Bovens, Derksen, Witteveen, Kalma, and Becker (1995) mention the possible displacement of politics in six different directions in an interesting publication of the research institute of the Dutch Labor Party. Politics moves from national parliaments toward local administrative bodies, networks of civil servants, societal organizations, the private sphere, the legal system, and the European level. They show that the power to shape the world is distributed among a wide variety of settings. To this variety, studies of science and technology have added laboratories and design departments. Although science and technology have helped to improve the standards of living and seem to make the world more transparent, they also challenge the common meaning of politics (Salomon, 2000). Technological innovation has been conceived of as the continuation of politics with other means (Latour, 1987), but this politics seems most successful when it bypasses political institutions (Winner, 1980).

Most often, the displacement of politics is taken to be a normative diagnosis of western societies and is followed by an analysis of democratic implications. Displacements are either seen as an explanation for a presumed democratic deficit (Beck, 1991; Bovens et al., 1995; Van der Meer & Ham, 2001; Winner, 1986) or as an explanation for the emergence of new forms of (distributed) democratic control (Gomart & Hajer, 2003; Marres, 2005; Nahuis & Van Lente, 2008). The focus of these studies is henceforth to discuss the concept of democracy. In this article, I focus on the concept of displacements as such; they are the object of study in this research. What kinds of effects do they bring about? How do they affect the mobilization of resources, audiences, and legitimacy? And how does this enable and constrain actors involved in decision making? A general framework for understanding the dynamics of displacements is still lacking. This article contributes to the literature by addressing the question whether different types of displacements exist. If that

would be the case, then this could enhance our understanding of, for example, why some types of displacements are more actively pursued than others in a particular context. Such an understanding marks the beginning of a theory of displacements with which complex, interactive, and distributed decision-making processes can be understood in more general terms.

I will argue that displacements are patterned according to five different types of displacements. The next sections first elaborate on the notion of displacements and then introduce and characterize these five types of displacements. The framework is subsequently applied to the case of decision making about an innovative flexible public transport system in and around Hoogeveen, the Netherlands: a case in which the decision-making process was distributed over various settings partly because of a national policy shift toward liberalization and decentralization. The study shows how displacements between these settings led to a specific staging of issues and to the final outcome of the innovation process. In the concluding section, it is discussed to what extent the results of the case study can be generalized in terms of the typology of displacements. The article ends with the suggestion that the typology can also be a very helpful aid for evaluating the (democratic) quality of the process.

Displacements as an Organizing Principle in Distributed Decision Making

In this study, issues are followed within and across settings. Issues are the central elements of decision-making processes, especially in controversial cases that justify a conflict-model. Issues consist of opposed opinions, interests, or visions; they are not settled until one of the contesting parties succeeds to recruit sufficient support from allies and bystanders and forces opponents to capitulate for whatever reason (Lukes, 1974; Schattschneider, 1960). In the context of innovation, this political nature of issues can be illustrated by the notion of “interpretive flexibility.” Technology can mean different things for different social groups (Bijker, 1995; Kline & Pinch, 1996; Pinch & Bijker, 1987). A nuclear energy reactor can simultaneously be interpreted as a way of climate-neutral energy production, as an employment project, as a nuclear waste producer, or as a danger for the environment. Social groups, such as policy makers, scientists, engineers, producers, users, and social movements attach different meanings to artifacts under development and one cannot predict beforehand which interpretation comes to dominate others. Closure of the debate only occurs in a political process of heterogeneous action and coalition formation, in which goals and meanings get shaped through interactions and

learning processes (Bijker, 1999). Drawing on this terminology, I define an issue as a public conflict between an interpretation and one or more counter-interpretations of the same technology or service. I use these notions in a heuristic way to be able to empirically identify and describe issues.

Issues are not free-floating entities, but are articulated, discussed, and settled in “settings.” Settings are the direct contexts of contestation. Examples of settings are negotiation structures, sites for demonstration of innovative technology, forums for debate, political institutions, and protest actions.

This article takes a view on settings from the perspective of dramaturgical sociology. In this perspective, “staging” or “setting the scene” is seen as the starting point of any human action (Burke, 1945; Hajer, 2005). As Burke states, “Using ‘scene’ in the sense of setting, or background, and ‘act’ in the sense of action, one could say that ‘the scene contains the act.’ And using ‘agents’ in the sense of actors, or acters, one could say that ‘the scene contains the agents’” (p. 3). Also Goffman (1959) highlights the dependence of human action on time, place, and audience in his theory of staged performances. Edelman (1964), who applies the metaphor of drama more explicitly to governmental acts, builds on this work when he puts the notion of settings in the center of his analyses: “Settings are planned by the arrangers and actors in the event and by what is expected by the audience” (p. 95). According to Edelman, the audience is made to believe that it is being represented on the stage. In his analysis, settings are arranged to obscure the role of bias in political action, with bias referring to the set of predominant values, beliefs, and institutional procedures that, by admitting only safe issues to political debates, operates to the benefit of certain actors and at the expense of others (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Lukes, 1974; Schattschneider, 1960). The arrangement of a setting is, therefore, itself a political event.

More recently, dramaturgical metaphors have been fruitfully used in the study of social movements (Benford & Hunt, 1992) and technological change (Akrich, 1992; Pfaffenberger, 1992). As Pfaffenberger phrases it, “The metaphor of drama . . . is to emphasize the performative nature of technological ‘statements’ and ‘counterstatements’, which involve the creation of scenes (contexts) in which actors (designers, artifacts, and users) play out their fabricated roles with regard to a set of envisioned purposes (and before an audience)” (p. 285). Also Mol’s (2002) work on participation in medical decision making takes the setting as a starting point. She notes that inside the hospital, what-to-do questions are pressing much more on issues than questions about who should have a say in them.

Drawing on both political theory and technology studies, Gomart and Hajer (2003) argue that the bias of a setting is a key concept for understanding

Table 1. Different Kinds of Settings and Staging Characteristics

Settings	Staging characteristics
Demonstrations, open letters	Arranged by concerned actors to engage new audiences, oriented at claim making
City councils, parliaments, public debates	Institutionalized debates about the public interest, agents accountable to audience, often ideologically inspired argumentation
Working groups, negotiation structures, stakeholder meetings	Arranged by interdependent stakeholders to negotiate interests or elaborate policy plans, practical/consensus orientation
Hierarchical organizations, principal-agent meetings	Arranged by dominant actors, weak role for audiences, command structure
Court, juries	Institutionalized decision making based on transparent reasoning by accountable authority

the displacement of politics. But in contrast to the theoretical tradition, they claim that bias can also be positively used in order to achieve surprising results and unexpected turns in policy making. The displacement of an issue to a differently biased setting may upset common frames of problem definition and decision making. Democratic political processes may accordingly benefit from the “mobilization of bias” (Schattschneider, 1960), from the displacement of issues through a variety of settings, because each displacement potentially offers surprising positive effects. Although Gomart and Hajer have been criticized for drawing their normative conclusions too quickly,¹ their claim that one can only evaluate political performances in the context of displacements still stands. The bias of a setting is not good or bad in itself but in its effects on the overall decision-making process.

Although bias is a key concept in political theory, I prefer the somewhat broader concept of staging to avoid the negative connotation of bias. The dramaturgical metaphor of a stage draws attention to the positions of actors, their use of attributes and symbols, and their relation to the audience. Staging can either refer to the activity of arranging settings or to the effects of this arrangement on the performance. In this article, I focus on this second aspect of staging. As a first attempt, Table 1 presents some examples of different kinds of settings and their staging effects.

Because of the different staging effects, displacements of issues between settings highly matter in the politics of innovation. A *displacement* is defined as the movement of an issue to another setting. Actors search for new shapes of political action. Those who feel excluded, marginalized, or otherwise do not succeed to find support for their interpretation in a particular setting may attempt to negotiate new practices or displace the issue to more favorable settings. In this framework, Schattschneider's (1960) famous phrase that "organisation is the mobilisation of bias" means that displacements are crucial aspects of organization. Displacements are the main organizing principle when decision making is distributed over a variety of different settings.

A Typology of Displacements

Staging is an inherent effect of displacements of issues to settings. As a consequence, some actors are better equipped to bring their interpretations across than others. Is it possible to be more general about such consequences? A typology of a limited number of displacements would make the conceptual framework much more useful for understanding the distribution of decision making.

Schattschneider distinguishes two basic types of displacements: proliferation and containment. Proliferation is a diverging, democratizing movement and involves the widening of a conflict and the engagement of a broader public to an issue; containment is the converging, antidemocratizing movement opposite to proliferation (Marres, 2005; Schattschneider, 1960). The first leads to an increase of interpretive flexibility and the latter to a decrease. In this article, I suggest to extend these two types of displacements by distinguishing two diverging movements (articulation and politicization) and three converging movements (delegation, depoliticization, and authorization). These five displacements are typified on the basis of their results in terms of the articulation, (de)contextualization, and degree of convergence of interpretations and counterinterpretations. In the case study, I will show how settings and their staging shape these types of displacements in conjunction with the activities and interpretations of the actors participating in the setting.

Articulation is the public demonstration against a dominant interpretation. Public protest, for example, often targets at the organization of opposition and expression of counterinterpretations by means of media coverage; the result is a change of perspective on a certain issue. Articulation is a displacement by which actors devise or make use of a staging that enables them to bring forward underemphasized interpretations. Articulation thus adds a new

perspective on issues and opens them up for deliberative decision making. The focus is on the persuasion of influential audiences.

Politicization is the discussion of an issue in a wider context. This may involve questioning the fairness or justice of different interpretations or of how these interpretations are staged in previous settings. Although articulation is based on partial interests and specific interpretations, politicization is based on principles that transcend the interpretations of and interests in an issue. For example, when issues are displaced to a body of elected representatives, staging involves the mobilization of the broader principle of representative legitimacy acquired by promoting ideologies. As a consequence, the interests of some stakeholders become more important or some staging effects appear as more legitimate, because they better conform to the public interest and prevailing ideas about fairness and justice.

Delegation is the attempt to reduce interpretive flexibility (and achieve closure) on the basis of negotiations between interdependent actors. The implementation of a council decision is an example of delegation. Another example is negotiations in practically oriented settings, in which representatives from different constituencies are involved. Delegation sometimes requires important political skills and the capacity to link one's interpretation to other more or less complementary interpretations. Characteristic is the crucial importance of a mandate provided by the constituency in the delegating setting. This implies that participants in the delegating setting should become a critical audience and look on the execution of the mandate.

Depoliticization is the bracketing of counterinterpretations and, as a likely consequence, the disappearance of issues. Instead of looking for compromises with or reasons to legitimately reject counterinterpretations, depoliticization is based on the a priori exclusion of those advancing a certain interpretation or on efforts of dominant participants to shift the attention away from the most radical counterinterpretations. Depoliticization is likely to happen after displacement to settings where access is limited to one or two participants and without a critical audience. But depoliticization can also happen when participants do not base a decision on the content of an issue but on the basis of a majority position alone. In that case, coalitions bargain a solution without need for a public debate.

Authorization is the solution for a conflict on the basis of acknowledged authority. An example of authorization is a displacement to court, in which authority is derived from the legal system. Such a setting strictly specifies the kinds of argumentation that count: the laws that apply to the situation. Typical

for authorization is a legitimate and binding judgement of a third and independent party.

In the remainder of the article I provide examples of these different types of displacements and show how they may trigger each other. The main objective of this study is to show that the typology aids to a better understanding of complex and distributed decision-making processes. To illustrate this potential, I present a case study in which the decision-making process was distributed over a wide variety of settings.

The Case of a Flexible Public Transport System

The case comprises the introduction between 1999 and 2004 of a flexible and user-driven public transport concept in and between Hoozeveen and Meppel, two small towns in the province of Drenthe in the northern part of the Netherlands. The case starts in 1999, when a former civil servant and his American companion negotiated with the provincial authorities to provide a transport service with small buses for the elderly and people with disabilities in Hoozeveen. Multinational transport company Arriva provided regular public bus transport within the town, as it did in and between nearly all regions in the north. In addition, a railway operated by the Dutch Railways connects the town to the cities of Groningen and Zwolle. The transport system that these two entrepreneurs had in mind was supposed to serve the “bottom of the market,” thus complementing regular public transport.² They proposed a quite innovative service concept for a number of reasons (Schlingmann, 2002). In proportion with the town size and target group, the buses were just large enough to transport eight passengers. Instead of at designated bus stops, the buses stopped for anyone on the route who raised his hand. It was even possible to pick up (disabled) people from their homes if that would not disrupt the time schedule. Panels of users determined the principal routes, time schedules, and tariffs. These features amounted to a highly flexible and demand-driven system and a very attractive concept for small towns. With a permit and loan from the province of Drenthe and subsidies from the Ministry of Traffic and Transport the two entrepreneurs set up an experiment to develop the system. For the exploitation of the system, they founded a company called Millennium Transport International (MTI), a company that initially employed merely drivers besides its two directors.

The directors themselves interpreted the project as a viable transport concept for “ten regions or areas in the Netherlands.”³ This interpretation is taken as the starting point for the case study. The next step has been the identification of statements expressing interpretations and counterinterpretations that enabled

or hampered MTI's interpretation to become more dominant. Alignments of and conflicts between these interpretations always happen in a particular setting, the conditions of which have subsequently been investigated. An interrogation of settings in terms of their staging is done to understand why these interpretations and counterinterpretations were expressed as they were.⁴

The data used for this case study have been derived from archival records, policy documents, evaluation reports, and, most importantly, minutes of meetings. Archives of newspaper articles were effective starting points, because popular media spend a lot of attention to innovative activity in public transport. By means of a snowball method (Bijker, 1995) references to meetings, policy documents, project proposals, and other sources of information have been found. For the investigation of the staging of settings, this study has made additional use of thought experiments by consequently asking questions about access (i.e., who participated and how did they get access), argumentation (i.e., what kind of arguments were used and why were these relevant), and audience (i.e., who were in the audience and what did they expect?).

Maneuvering Through the Institutional Landscape

The realization of the service concept intended by MTI depended on the company's maneuvering through the institutional landscape composed of a variety of settings. The company encountered interpretations of other actors participating in these settings, like authorities, other transport companies, drivers, and consumer organizations. In the course of the project, MTI's interpretation of how their transport concept would offer good transport for the elderly and people with disabilities was challenged and transformed in 16 settings. I will present these settings in a chronological order to highlight that most issues were displaced in response to conflicts and deadlocks in previous settings.

Setting 1. Structures for Negotiation (About Arriva's Tender)

While MTI started up the experiment for elderly in Hoozevee in 1999, provincial authorities put the regular public bus transport network out to tender for the first time. The forthcoming Passenger Transport Act 2000 would oblige provincial authorities to invite tenders for its public transport and Drenthe was one of the first to anticipate this obligation. But because of historical circumstances, this first invitation was only open for one provider: Arriva. The province wanted to invite together with the neighboring province of Groningen and the

city of Groningen in order to establish an optimally connected transport network, but because Groningen City had a continuing contract with Arriva, the three authorities exclusively negotiated with this “monopolist.”⁵ The staging of the negotiations thus strongly favored Arriva and this tended to depoliticize the decision-making process, because alternatives were a priori excluded.

But the company may have been too confident about its position when it disagreed with one of the requirements. Arriva did not want to promise a substantial decrease of costs by means of innovations in the next 4 years. It only wanted to innovate if the province would provide extra funding.⁶ This statement involved a counterinterpretation of the program of requirements; the staging of the negotiations was put at stake. This caused the first displacement.

Setting 2. Provincial States (Part 1)

Facing Arriva’s standpoint, the deputy of Drenthe returned to Provincial States. This displacement is a typical example of politicization, because the staging effects of the previous setting became the central issue in this setting. The issue was discussed in a broader context and associated with principles of liberalization and good public transport, whereas in the negotiations the debate was predominantly about costs. Within Provincial States, several members suggested a more prominent role for MTI in regular public transport, because of its new user-driven transport service concept in Hoozeveer.⁷ These state members thought that liberalization is a farce with Arriva’s exclusive candidacy. MTI was one of those rare transport companies willing to exploit the thin lines of transport networks: the lines that are far from profitable to operate with standard buses. State members showed growing appreciation for this willingness.⁸ They had raised the issue whether the focus on costs would not go at the expense of the less profitable thin lines in rural areas and the interests of the elderly and people with disabilities. They considered a social system of transport more important than increased efficiency. Ideological kinds of arguments, written down in party programs, characterize the staging of this setting—a staging that appeared to support state members’ interpretation of the MTI project as a way to organize regular public transport just like it already organized private transport for the elderly and people with disabilities in Hoozeveer.

Setting 3. Structures for Negotiation (About MTI’s Inclusion)

The provincial deputy returned to negotiate the tender with Arriva, this time inviting MTI too. This displacement can be characterized as delegation,

because the new interpretation of how public transport in Drenthe should be organized got impact. The deputy carried out a new mandate of Provincial States. The tender period was now limited to 2 years and, more important, proposed a distinction between a “connecting network” and a “disclosing network” in order to negotiate with more parties about parts of the whole.⁹ Thanks to this staging, MTI could be invited to the negotiations and, as a result, the province could grant regular public transport in the towns of Hoogeveen and Meppel and in the so-called InterHoMe region (in between the towns) to MTI. What started as an experiment at the “bottom of the market,” quite remote from the provincial responsibility for regular public transport, suddenly became a support for the province in its negotiations with Arriva. When MTI agreed to operate the three services as Arriva’s subcontractor, its own interpretation of the concept as a feasible transport service in more than one town started to take off.

Setting 4. Development Group (Part 1)

However, other actors also had to be convinced of this interpretation when the issue displaced to the fourth setting in the case: the supervising Development Group Southwest Drenthe. This displacement was another delegation, because interpretations of different stakeholders were aligned and thereby became more concrete. The Development Group was founded and chaired by the province to look after the setup of the MTI project among other things. Participants were representatives of the province and the municipalities in the region, as well as someone from traveler organization ROVER, who represented a platform of consumer organizations. Furthermore, the participation of both Arriva (board and drivers) and MTI reflected constructive intentions: The group could directly allocate tasks to those actually serving the region. The most important issue the Development Group had to decide about was the concrete transport service plan as proposed by MTI.¹⁰ Municipalities expressed interpretations of what the plan could comprise with regard to routes and municipal policies (like 30 km/h zones).¹¹ The group insisted on good connections with trains and with the Arriva lines to other parts of the province.¹² It drew attention to the peak loads at opening and closing hours of schools and factories, and pressed MTI to make arrangements with Arriva about back-up equipment and drivers. In addition, the two companies also had to agree on the transition of personnel and the division of earnings from the National Tariff System.¹³ All this can be summarized as a pragmatic and client-oriented staging of the issue, which contributed to the reduction of interpretive flexibility that initially surrounded MTI’s concept, at least a reduction in terms of service

characteristics. MTI presented a draft plan, which described routes, time schedules, required equipment and personnel, and season-ticket tariffs.¹⁴

Setting 5. Arriva's Council of Employees

The forthcoming Passenger Transport Act 2000 would arrange the transition of personnel if a new company wins a tender in order to protect drivers against unemployment. Because the law had not been enforced yet, the involved companies voluntarily arranged the transition. MTI hired personnel from Arriva, provided that the former would apply all labor conditions as formalized in the Collective Labor Agreement (CLA), a document negotiated between employees and labor unions.¹⁵ As part of the procedure Arriva's council of employees (which consults the board of Arriva about decisions that possibly affect employees) had to approve the arrangement (Diepens & Okkema, 2003). This displacement of the issue to the council of employees is an example of articulation, because a hitherto underemphasized counterinterpretation was put center stage: the MTI concept as a violation of labor rights. A representative of the drivers had already warned the Development Group for possible resistance among drivers, but the provincial chair said that persuasion of employees was a task for Arriva's board, not for the group. The representative did not further contest this staging in the Development Group, because the issue would be displaced to the council of employees anyway.¹⁶ Whereas the Development Group staged the transport plan from a client perspective, the council of employees took a driver's perspective. The council disapproved the proposed contract because MTI's intentions did not match formal requirements.¹⁷ MTI appeared to give a different interpretation of some aspects of the public transport CLA: drivers did not get two breaks of 21 min every 4½ hr, but four times 13 min in accordance with MTI's time schedule and similar to its own employees (Zwama, 2002). To its own employees, the company applied the taxi CLA, because they drove the small eight-passenger buses and did not have to possess a driving license for buses. However, Arriva's council of employees rejected this interpretation as far as the hired drivers were concerned. This standpoint resulted in a deadlock between diverging interpretations, especially when MTI stuck with its own interpretation for financial reasons and Arriva's board took sides with its employees, because it thought MTI competed unjustly on labor conditions.¹⁸ What is more, labor unions consulted by the council stated that compliance with the public transport CLA should not only apply to the hired drivers but also to MTI's own employees. After all, MTI now provided regular public transport.¹⁹ Labor union CNV would start a legal suit against MTI for this reason (see further below).

Setting 6. Private Meetings (Province, Arriva, and MTI)

The start of the tender had meanwhile been postponed at least half a year.²⁰ Initially, the province had taken a background position and conceived of the deadlock as a conflict between two private parties. However, when the parties failed to agree, provincial officials intervened and invited Arriva and MTI for a private meeting. This displacement can be labeled as a partial depoliticization of the issue. Instead of discussing the full content of the issue with various stakeholders, the private meeting aimed at a solution between two conflicting interpretations, while the most radical counterinterpretation of the MTI concept as a violation of labor rights was bracketed. Neither Arriva's employees nor labor unions were involved in the meeting. Because of this staging, principal interpretations were removed from the center of the stage. In the meeting, provincial officials convinced MTI that further delay would really harm the company's financial situation. MTI included 21-min break times but only in the schedules of those lines operated by Arriva employees.²¹ The province decided to tolerate this situation.²² Perhaps officials or the Deputy should have acted more decisive: either force MTI to comply or stop the project. That decision, however, would have required a displacement to Provincial States and, more striking, a shame for the initiators and for the very idea of liberalization. In the current setting, the province tried to settle the conflict silently by excluding as many actors and aspects as necessary. The boards of the two companies indeed reached agreement.

Setting 7. MTI's Office (Strikes)

In cooperation with Arriva's schedule makers, MTI adjusted the time schedules to the 21-min break time requirement. This gave rise to a displacement to the actual work floor, where the hired employees had to be fit into the schedules in hectic circumstances (Diepens & Okkema, 2003).²³ The postponed start date neared and MTI's schedule makers had neither experience nor proper sight on the contents of the public transport CLA. MTI cancelled a planned information gathering for the selected drivers because of time constraints. Drivers faced the outcomes of schedule making work from which they had been excluded, although the feasibility of these outcomes depended on their agreement. In this phase, they raised their voice after a displacement that can be characterized as the articulation of concerns. First, with a strike they expressed dissatisfaction with ever-changing driving schedules by incompetent schedule makers. Second, with another strike they objected to a simplistic revision of the schedules (lines would depart *and* arrive 9 min

later, causing passengers to complain about missed train connections). Third, over time more and more drivers noticed stress and sickness. Out of 12 initially hired drivers, only 2 were still on the bus in the second year (Diepens & Okkema, 2003). In this setting, the CLA conflict was again put at the center of the stage. In addition, the audience played an interesting role in this staging. Because the drivers were employed by Arriva, but hired by MTI, the boards of both companies were simultaneously targeted by the protest actions. This staging offered a powerful way to articulate a new interpretation of the CLA conflict, namely, as a sickness generator.

Setting 8. Correspondence MTI/Arriva

Instead of giving in, MTI tried to displace the issue. The private meeting with MTI, Arriva, and provincial officials was continued with a series of letters, which can be considered as settings themselves. But these displacements had much more the character of articulation this time. Copies were sent to the province to gain support for two different interpretations of the issue. In a first letter to Arriva, MTI accused “sick” drivers of work refusal, and therefore it did not want to pay the bills to Arriva. Arriva, however, ascribed the high illness rate to bad management by MTI and reported so to the province and the Development Group (Diepens & Okkema, 2003).²⁴ The result was a further divergence of interpretations. The province’s official asked MTI and Arriva to solve the issue bilaterally, but Arriva understood this as permission to initiate a legal procedure that should attribute responsibility on this issue.²⁵ This step made further cooperation between Arriva and MTI impossible and the province concluded that the only remaining solution was to discontinue the project in the current form. The tender ended by the end of the year anyway.²⁶

Setting 9. User Panel

The user panel is an exceptional setting in this case, because it remained isolated in the institutional landscape. Issues neither moved to nor moved from the user panel. But because its existence featured so prominently in any presentation of the company (in media, to authorities, in subsidy requests), it seems worthwhile to have a look at the discussions that took place within the panel. This will clarify why issues on the agenda were depoliticized a priori.

User involvement was claimed to be a main feature of the MTI concept, and the concept’s appeal to authorities originated in part from this feature. The company announced to organize user panels to decide by majority about operational issues like routes, frequencies, and tariffs.²⁷ As soon as the Hoogeveen

experiment had been approved, the company recruited a large number of participants for the user panel in canteens of old people's homes.²⁸ The panel held regular meetings every month. This user panel would remain the only one in the case, although MTI had promised user panels for each of the three service areas. The small MTI board prioritized solving CLA troubles over organizing other panels (Diepens & Okkema, 2003).

In its early phase, the Hoogeveen user panel hardly disputed announcements made by the MTI management.²⁹ It even achieved important modifications of MTI's service plan. On proposal of the panel, MTI lengthened, shortened, diverted, and combined routes; it instructed drivers to stop as near to the sidewalk as possible; it installed grips in the buses for better accessibility and a light bulb at the front window for better visibility in dark; and it provided relevant public buildings with time schedules.³⁰

Right when the panel discovered the opportunities of participation, the director of MTI did not show up on a number of meetings and the panel started fearing not being taken seriously enough.³¹ Ever more, the panel meetings showed a confrontation between the company's interpretation and panel's interpretation of a good transport service. A number of recurring issues were not settled but by overruling the panel. First, MTI transported a lot of employees of social workplace Alescon. This caused capacity shortage around 4 p.m., even after MTI used a larger bus. An extra bus would have been required, but the company stated that it could not afford hiring an extra driver for this bus.³² Second, MTI rejected a request from users to divert one route to the Carstenstraat and the cemetery. Unlike the panel, MTI believed that there was not enough demand at these locations.³³ Third, elderly people, the original target group, complained about a lack of service by drivers and the company. The panel repeatedly issued the possibility to take walking aids on the bus. MTI simply advised the elderly to avoid peak hours.³⁴ Fourth, at the moment MTI started operating in Meppel and the InterHoMe region, it announced to level all tariffs. This implied a price increase of about 30% for a Hoogeveen season ticket, which evoked a lot of resistance in the panel. But MTI closed the discussion: "It cannot be changed anymore. Passengers who often make use of public transport in Hoogeveen will still profit from a season-ticket."³⁵ To sum up, the panel indeed achieved some victories, but it lacked power to alter the specific staging of issues in which the MTI board clearly took all responsibility for operational decisions. The panel was overruled on the controversial issues, and merely "innocent" issues were open for discussion. The reason to speak of a priori depoliticization is that the panel was not empowered to question the staging of the panel. There was neither a critical audience that could summon MTI to be more responsive, nor were there possibilities

Table 2. Examples of Tasks Not Taken Up by MTI

The national Internet service for travel information should get the MTI data.
 There should be more information along the routes.
 Drivers should be able to communicate in case a back-up bus meets with peak demand.
 It should be clear how buses deviate from the routes in case of road works.
 Drivers should be able to communicate with the office otherwise than by mobile phones.
 MTI should make clear how it deals with complaints.
 MTI should organize a user panel for the InterHoMe region.
 MTI should develop a communication plan.
 MTI should sell tickets in the bus and not let people without a prepaid ticket travel for free.

for displacement of issues to settings where more impact could be achieved. The Development Group was not really interested in the decision making of the user panel; it saw the panel as part of the MTI organization.

Setting 10. Development Group (Part 2)

Meanwhile, another issue was articulated in the Development Group, which would much more seriously threaten MTI's chances in the next tender. This issue was not displaced to the group, but emerged within the group to be displaced to other settings later on.

MTI did not conform to the rules of the Development Group. The agenda showed a number of small issues that would add up to a fast-growing action list. MTI postponed or did not execute its tasks and over time the list turned into an issue itself. Most of the actions had to do with travel information and communication.³⁶ Table 2 gives some examples of these not fulfilled tasks.

The province presented an overview to the Development Group, which summarized 38 not (sufficiently) executed tasks from five meetings, most of them allocated to MTI. Follow-ups of these tasks remained unclear as the director of MTI mostly happened to be excused. He was late once, replaced by subordinates twice, and just absent on the last meeting.³⁷ The conclusion of the overview clearly reflected the group's annoyance:

Unfortunately, MTI time and again shows its unprofessional side in spite of guidance by the province. There are a number of reasons, like a lack of experience in public transport, the small board of MTI, the many miscommunications within the company, and the non-attendance

of meetings. There is a strong hierarchy at MTI, where the top decides what happens. The other parties in the Development Group unanimously find MTI unprofessional and there is explicit doubt whether MTI is capable of operating public transport services at all.³⁸

Because of the composition of the Development Group (and the expectations of the constituencies of the representatives in the group), issues were staged from a client perspective. Interpretive flexibility about what the transport concept should entail was reduced earlier and the prevailing transport plan offered a consensual interpretation of the concept (see Development Group, part 1). But this interpretation also implied a decisive managerial role for MTI. This aspect of the interpretation was now articulated and put at stake. The group members still interpreted the MTI project as innovative in principle, but they also saw it threatened by bad management despite provincial steering. MTI's troubles in other settings were not considered as valid excuses for the failing performance in this setting.

Setting 11. Private Meeting (Province, MTI)

Whereas MTI already argued with Arriva about driver sickness, it now also faced an annoyed Development Group. If MTI were to survive in the next tender, then it needed renewed support from at least the province. After two displacements, both of the depoliticization type, MTI's chances would grow again. A first depoliticizing displacement toward rehabilitation was that the issue was taken up in a "clarifying conversation," in which the deputy of the province reassured the board of MTI that the company should work on the action list (Diepens & Okkema, 2003).³⁹ The province commissioned public transport, on which MTI's existence depended. If MTI wanted to be involved in the next tender, then it now had to obey the province. The province in turn wanted the project to become a success. The action list, an initiative of provincial officials, already reduced the variety of issues to one single issue: MTI's capability to operate a public transport system. The setting of this private meeting was staged in such a way as to achieve a shared interpretation that the MTI project is innovative and feasible if management improves. For the moment, possible improvements were discussed in absence of other members of the Development Group to bracket counterinterpretations, which fed annoyance and distrust. In the conversation, the two actors made arrangements about the action list without interferences of the others. As a result, the list would return on the agenda of subsequent meetings and MTI reported task by task about the state of

affairs. In this refreshed atmosphere, the Development Group did not raise new issues and the most controversial ones gradually disappeared from the agenda.⁴⁰

Setting 12. Evaluation

A second depoliticizing displacement toward rehabilitations of MTI and renewed support from the province was an evaluation of the project. Peculiarly, the evaluation did not hold MTI primarily accountable for the current conflicts and tensions. The province had commissioned the evaluation, but rather than evaluating MTI's performance it aimed at lessons for the province regarding forthcoming tenders.⁴¹ This staging problematized the role of the province and hence neutralized the role of MTI. As a result, the evaluators interpreted the MTI project as innovative though badly managed due to bad steering. The evaluators mentioned a lot of problems, miscommunications, and ignorance, but they only drew conclusions about how the province should have prevented or solved these problems. For example, they ascribed the growing action list to a lack of steering by the province: "In the implementation phase the province insufficiently controls the execution of arrangements between Arriva and MTI . . . and MTI gets too much freedom in (not) living up with appointments" (p. 28). It concluded that the project was indeed innovative and feasible and would have been better managed if the province had played a better part. This focus on policy lessons offered valuable input for the new tender invitation, but it also neutralized the annoyance and "excused" MTI for its incapacity. It depoliticized the issue of bad management.

Setting 13. Provincial States (Part 2)

The issue was displaced to Provincial States when the service was put to tender again. The provincial Board of Deputies prepared the new tender invitation and Provincial States controlled the Board. Because the Board of Deputies wanted to continue with MTI it needed to avoid discussion about the capability of MTI to operate a public transport system. The Board of Deputies indeed believed that public transport in rural areas could benefit from experiments like these.⁴² The fact that the company was suited by labor union CNV for not complying with the CLA was countered with the argument that politicians should not occupy the position of judges. Waiting for a verdict, the Board considered MTI innocent.⁴³

Whereas the legal suit worried some state members, bad management by the company was no issue at all. The "good conversation" and the "excusing"

project evaluation had had their depoliticizing effects. The MTI project was still interpreted as a feasible project with many advantages (see Provincial States, part 1). What is more, without much discussion the Board of Deputies had prepared a tender invitation that clearly favored MTI. The Board had invited three transport companies to compete for the contract, but the program of requirements reflected the existing situation (except user panel): the winner should drive the same lines with the same time schedules and the same kind of equipment as MTI had been doing for the past 2 years. The program even required the absence of regular bus stops (except for unsafe locations), which was another specific feature of the MTI concept.⁴⁴ Moreover, the contract would last for just 1½ year, because Drenthe and its southern neighbor Overijssel had already agreed to invite tenders for an extension of the region around July 2005.⁴⁵ This short period was of little attraction to newcomers. Although the “bad management” and the CLA issue had been removed from the stage in Provincial States, a biased program of requirement was put in the spotlights. This staging led to a very favorable interpretation of MTI’s tender, which at the end of the selection procedure indeed appeared to be selected as the most economic one.⁴⁶ The issue of bad management was fully depoliticized by then.

Setting 14. Court

For the new invitation MTI again prepared a tender, though without need to hire drivers this time. Simultaneously, it developed a CLA of its own, adjusted to the flexibility of its transport concept.⁴⁷ But while the company indeed succeeded to win the tender, labor union CNV won the legal suit about the right of MTI to develop a distinct CLA (see Setting 5). This displacement to court was an example of authorization, because the judge gave a legitimate and binding judgement on which interpretation is right. This staging in court involved a reduction of the MTI project in terms of just one aspect: labor conditions. In this staging, economic arguments supporting MTI’s interpretation—for example, the fear that a changeover from a taxi CLA (or MTI’s own CLA) to a public transport CLA would cause MTI’s bankruptcy⁴⁸—did not count; neither did MTI’s opinion that the “entirely obsolete regulation and a very rigid CLA” frustrate necessary innovation in public transport.⁴⁹ The judge concluded that the CLA should even be applied to MTI’s “exceptional” situation and obliged the company to comply with all conditions of the public transport CLA. The verdict included obligatory 21-min breaks each 4½ hr, an extra payment for weekend work, and days off instead of shorter workweeks.⁵⁰

Setting 15. Media Coverage

Although MTI won the tender competition, it lost the legal suit. Time schedules had to be revised in order to integrate the 21-min breaks. With regard to weekend work: MTI either had to increase rewards or skip weekend services. Because weekend services had always been the least profitable ones, it chose to do the latter. But because of that decision, state subsidies also decreased.⁵¹ For these reasons, MTI had cut down expenses, fired 13 of 70 employees, and explicitly blamed the labor unions for that in an interview with a regional newspaper.⁵² By displacing the issue to the media the director of MTI tried to trigger a public debate about the inadequacy of the current regulatory regime. With this articulating displacement, the director effectively put forward his interpretation of the CLA as an innovation barrier instead of a labor protection agreement.

Setting 16. CLA Negotiation Structures

Media are often used for lobbies toward decision-making structures. Via articulation in the media, MTI succeeded to put its case on the agenda of yet another setting: the meeting between the employers' association and labor unions, where new CLAs are negotiated.⁵³ Here, the CLA issue was politicized because it was debated in terms of broader political, organizational, and cultural changes. MTI did not participate itself, but because other transport companies faced similar problems in consequence of the Passenger Transport Act 2000 and the subsequent changes in the economic structure of the sector, employers and unions discussed the possibility to modernize the CLA: "Particularly issues like flexibility, customer-orientation, and cost-control should be translated to organization structure, working processes, and desired culture. This raises the question whether the current CLA still suits external developments."⁵⁴ By the end of 2003 the parties commissioned a working group to advice about this issue. The MTI project became an exemplary case in this rethinking. Meanwhile, however, the company itself went bankrupt because of circumstances in another project to which it had extended its activities: the province of Brabant cut down subsidies because the company did not meet its objectives in the town of Oss and MTI could not pay the rent of buses anymore.⁵⁵

A Typology of Displacements

An issue can be defined in terms of conflicting interpretations of an artifact or a service. Such issues are dealt with in settings, where actor positions are

arranged, perspectives exchanged, and audiences engaged. I have referred to this arrangement in terms of staging. Because staging is specific for the type of setting, displacements of issues to other settings highly matter in policy and innovation processes. Although displacements can be studied as a challenge to common understandings of democratic control, this article focuses on the question whether it is possible to discern patterns of displacements. When the decision-making process is distributed over various settings, where different aspects of the issue are put in the center of the stage each time, displacements are an important organizing principle.

Based on different dynamics of interpretations and counterinterpretations, I have distinguished five types of displacement: delegation, politicization, depoliticization, articulation, and authorization. The typology was applied in a case study about the introduction of an innovative flexible public transport service in the northern part of the Netherlands.

Delegation is the attempt to reduce interpretive flexibility (and achieve closure) on the basis of negotiations between interdependent actors. It occurred in settings like negotiation structures and the Development Group. In the latter, for example, actors used the ambiguities of the transport plan to suggest specifications based on their interpretation of what the transport service should entail. *Politicization* is the discussion of an issue in a wider context to link interpretations, counterinterpretations, and their staging to more general ideas of fairness and justice. It occurred in Provincial States, but also in the CLA negotiations between the unions of employers and employees. Typical for the staging in these settings is that there is more opportunity to associate issues with the meaning of wider societal changes, such as liberalization. This opportunity is related to the much more general interests of audiences that transcend the specific conflicting interpretations that constitute the issue. *Depoliticization* is defined as the bracketing of counterinterpretations and, as a likely consequence, the disappearance of issues. It happened in settings like principal-agent meetings, the user panel and Provincial States (Part 2), where there was no audience involved or where the audiences a priori shared one particular interpretation of the issue. This staging implied a reduction of the variety of actors and aspects. *Articulation* is the public demonstration against a dominant interpretation to draw attention to unacknowledged actors and aspects. It happened in the council of employees, driver protests, letters to the province, and media coverage. The staging in these settings offered the opportunity to persuade audiences, which might become influential in the near future, with arguments supporting counterinterpretations. *Authorization*, finally, is the solution for a conflict on the basis of authority. This happened in court, where the staging was characterized by institutionalized authority

and legal argumentation. Only interpretations highlighting the justness of issues were relevant.

The case study shows that decision making about the project occurred in many different settings in a complex institutional landscape. Issues were not settled until they were displaced between various settings. Nevertheless, all displacements found in the case study could be reduced to these five types. The typology thus seems to offer a framework that can accommodate the interactive, opportunistic, and distributed nature of decision making about public transport issues in this particular case. This conclusion is in accordance with other studies showing that the typology is sufficiently comprehensive to capture displacements in other cases, too (Nahuis, 2007).

A research question hardly addressed in this study concerns the strategic efforts behind staging and displacements. In this article, staging is mainly conceived as an inherent effect of issues appearing in a certain setting. Staging can also be understood as the activity to anticipate this effect. In other words, it is a strategy to mobilize and shape the bias of a setting; to determine the position of actors, their attributes, and their relation with the audience. Counterstaging, then, means that other actors engage in strategies to shape the bias of a setting differently. It seems plausible that staging and counterstaging are more prevalent activities in newly devised settings than in settings with more formal, institutionalized procedures where actors rather attempt to make use of an already existing staging. If insights in such staging efforts can be linked to the typology of displacements, then the beginning of a new theory of decision making about innovation and innovation policy might be offered. For example, articulation and depoliticization seem to be characterized by staging activities of those who initiate the displacements, while in politicization and authorization actors conform more to an existing staging. Delegation would probably involve a dynamic interplay of staging and counterstaging, because of the mutual dependency of actors involved in delegation.

The typology can also be used for evaluative purposes. Elsewhere I have compared three case studies and derived a set of hypotheses that explain why different types of displacements provoke each other and how the interaction between types of displacements affects democratic quality (Nahuis, 2007). But if such an evaluation will have a genuine impact on democratization policy, then it should be based on an adequate conceptualization and theory. By distinguishing different types of displacements, a first attempt toward a more general theory of displacements is made.

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Notes

1. Gomart & Hajer (2003) can be criticized for selecting a case where creativity in political solutions happened to coincide with remedying injustice. By celebrating the first, they avoid spelling out what is involved in the second. For example, would they also appreciate “sudden reversals” and “unexpected turns” if these instead led to power centralization? (Nahuis & Van Lente, 2008; Pestre, 2004)
2. *Provinciale regeling openbaar vervoer 2000*, [Provincial regulation public transport 2000], Provincie Drenthe, Assen.
3. Project proposal on <http://www.move-mobiliteit.nl/html/projecten/ketenpr-12.htm>.
4. See Nahuis (2007) for the specific merits of this heuristic.
5. Statenuitvoering 732. *Programma van eisen stads- en streekvervoer Groningen en Drenthe*, [Program of requirements urban and regional transport Groningen and Drenthe], Provincie Drenthe, December 20, 1999.
6. Statencommissie Ruimte, Infrastructuur en Mobiliteit (RIM), [States Committee on Space, Infrastructure and Mobility], Provincie Drenthe, December 21, 2000.
7. Statencommissie RIM, October 16, 2000. Provinciale Staten, November 7, 2000. Statencommissie RIM, December 19, 2000. Statencommissie RIM, December 21, 2000. Statencommissie RIM, January 15, 2001.
8. Statencommissie RIM, January 17, 2000. Provinciale Staten, February 9, 2000.
9. *Concessiebeschikking openbaar vervoer Arriva*, [Licence decision public transport Arriva] Provincie Drenthe, Assen, January 24, 2001.
10. Minutes of Development Group Southwest Drenthe (below referred to as DG), Province of Drenthe, Assen, May 16, 2001, and subsequent two-weekly meetings.
11. DG, October 3, 2001.
12. DG, May 30, 2001; July 4, 2001; June 18, 2001; October 3, 2001.
13. The Netherlands has a national system of tariffs for bus transport. Prepaid tickets are stamped in the bus. The earnings from ticket sales are collected nationwide and distributed among transport companies according to the national WROOV system, proportionate to the number of passengers. In the current situation, Arriva received the money and the sharing between Arriva and MTI should be arranged bilaterally. Source: DG, September 5, 2001.
14. DG, November 14, 2001.
15. MTI hired the personnel formerly operating the lines served by Arriva: Hoogeveen and the regional lines. In the case of Meppel a transition was not needed, because Meppel did not have a city transport network of its own.
16. DG, September 19, 2001; October 3, 2001.

17. Minutes of a meeting about the negotiations Arriva/MTI, Province of Drenthe, Assen, January 21, 2002.
18. DG, September 19, 2001. The taking sides of the boards of Arriva and MTI actually took place in (letters to) the Development Group. This should perhaps have been presented as another (articulating) displacement of the issue.
19. Dagblad van het Noorden February 27, 2003; October 22, 2003; October 27, 2003. DG, January 13, 2003.
20. *Arriva en MTI bereiken akkoord. Gezamenlijk persbericht van de provincie Drenthe, de gemeenten Hoogeveen, Meppel, Westerveld, De Wolden en vervoersbedrijf Arriva en vervoersbedrijf MTI*, [Arriva and MTI reach agreement. Joint press release of the Province of Drenthe, the Municipalities of Hoogeveen, Meppel, Westerveld, De Wolden, transport company Arriva and transport company MTI] Assen, August 14, 2002.
21. Dagblad van het Noorden, October 22, 2003.
22. Ibid.
23. See also DG, August 15, 2002.
24. Ibid.
25. The province also considered the conflict a legal issue. In response to a councillor's questions by letter, the deputy rejected a political qualification of the conflict. "The province is not the prime controlling institute in matters of compliance with CLA conditions." Source: Letter 3/6.12/2004000306 to State member Beerda, Province of Drenthe, January 20, 2004.
26. Letter from provincial official Rijpstra to the Development Group, August 21, 2003. Minutes of Consumer Platform, provincie Drenthe, Assen, October 27, 2003.
27. Het Financieële Dagblad, April 25, 2001.
28. Ibid.
29. User panel (UP), MTI, Hoogeveen, January 30, 2001; July 27, 2001; October 8, 2001; July 3, 2002.
30. UP, September 17, 2001; November 6, 2002; December 4, 2002; March 6, 2003.
31. UP, October 27, 2002.
32. UP, March 6, 2003.
33. UP, January 8, 2003; February 5, 2003.
34. UP, December 4, 2002.
35. UP, September 17, 2001; November 5, 2003.
36. The overview was sent to members of the Development Group as an appendix to the minutes of the meeting of January 13, 2003.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. See also DG, February 10, 2003.
40. E.g. DG, May 19, 2003; June 16, 2003.

41. Diepens & Okkema, op. cit., note 21.
42. Statencommissie RIM, January 19, 2004.
43. Ibid. Provinciale Staten, March 17, 2004.
44. *Aanbestedingsdocument InterHoMe concessie Zuidwest Drenthe*, [Tender document InterHoMe concession Southwest Drenthe], Provincie Drenthe, Assen, October 16, 2003. Statencommissie RIM, January 19, 2004. Provinciale Staten, March 17, 2004.
45. Ibid.
46. Statencommissie RIM, January 19, 2004. Provinciale Staten, March 17, 2004. *Dagblad van het Noorden*, January 15, 2004.
47. User panel (UP), MTI, Hoogeveen, November 5, 2003.
48. *Dagblad van het Noorden*, October 27, 2003.
49. *Brabants Dagblad*, February 20, 2004.
50. *Dagblad van het Noorden*, February 6, 2004.
51. E-mail from Rover representative Wippoo to the other members of the Consumer Platform, March 25, 2004.
52. *Dagblad van het Noorden*, March 9, 2004.
53. MTI was not a member of the employer's association, had not signed the current CLA, and therefore thought that it could develop a company CLA. However, to prevent companies to compete on labor conditions, the minister has ordered general applicability of the CLA, even for public transport companies that have not signed it. In other words, MTI should have become a member of the employer's association to have direct impact on the content of the CLA.
54. <http://vakwijzer.adp.nl/nieuws/CLAs/2003/11/21-3/>.
55. *Het Financieële Dagblad*, April 29, 2004. *Dagblad van het Noorden*, May 5, 2004.

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