

# Meta-governors as guardians of legitimacy: a theoretical fairy-tale or not?

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*An empirical study of meta-governors and their perceptions about democratic legitimacy in the Dutch National Climate Agreement*

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## Summary

An increasing amount of complex societal issues like COVID-19, Climate change or the banking crisis require governments to more often rely on institutional relations with society to address these problems. These institutional relations are in this research defined as governance networks. However, in these networks decision making processes shift from formal democratic arena's to informal networks. Different perceptions are found about what this means for democratic legitimacy, thereby providing different norms about how legitimacy in these networks should look like. Furthermore, scholars point towards the crucial role of meta-governors, who via various shaping and steering methods should ensure safeguarding of legitimacy in governance networks. This role is often bestowed on politicians or administrators, but scholars remain sceptical about their capability of democratising networks due to several identified barriers. In addition, as the debate about democratic legitimacy remains unlinked from the application of meta-governance it is unclear how the different norms stemming from the perceptions are reflected in how meta-governors set out to democratise networks.

Therefore this research set out to link these debates and study what role meta-governors' perceptions about democratic legitimacy might have in how they shape networks to become democratic. Thereby exploring which theoretical norms are found in their perceptions and if democratic norms are the dominant factor in meta-governors' democratising strategies. By interviewing meta-governors and analysing documents in the context of the Dutch National Climate Agreement several insights are provided. While a group of administrative, political and independent meta-governors has managed to provide a full-fledged meta-governance strategy aimed at democratising the NCA, their perceptions show that critical dilemmas of the theoretical debate are evaded. Furthermore, the role meta-governors give to Parliament seems to have directly influenced the design of the agreement. However, regarding other choices in the managing and shaping of the agreement trade-offs between effectiveness and legitimacy are identified. Though the perceptions about democratic legitimacy are reflected in meta-governors' strategies, effectiveness arguments thus also have a role.

Although the conclusions of this study might be more indicative than providing empirical prove, in the valuation of the democratising capacity of meta-governance it is vital to take this role of effectiveness into account. Future research would do well to further explore the role of effectiveness and perceptions about democratic legitimacy in the application of democratising meta-governance strategies.

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# 1 Introduction

*“We should cherish and defend our free democratic constitutional state, because only that offers protection from arbitrariness and madness.” – Willem-Alexander van Oranje, King of the Netherlands (van Oranje, 2020)*

Democracy and the constitutional state are important pillars in our society and should be cherished and protected, as mentioned by the Dutch King in his speech during the commemoration of the death. However, the increasing amount of complex societal issues like climate change, the economic crisis or COVID-19 pressurise democracy as we know it. These complex societal problems force governments to work in governance structures outside traditional democratic mechanisms: “Globalization, the fragmentation of social and political life, the growing number of wicked problems, and the new ideas of how to govern through ‘regulated self-regulation’ make it clear that public agencies cannot govern alone” (Torfing, 2012, p. 100). Governments therefore increasingly make use of collaborations with a multitude of public and private sector parties in so called ‘governance networks’. In these networks of ‘regulated self-regulation’ decision making processes shift from formal democratic arenas to informal networks, which has consequences for the democratic legitimacy of policy stemming from these networks.

The literature on ‘network governance’ (governance through governance networks) is contested about what these consequences are. Some point towards the exclusive and closed nature of networks, which damages an adequate representation of citizen’s interests and is in conflict with the hegemony of elected politicians (Papadopoulos Y. , 2016; Klijn & Skelcher, 2007). Whereas other scholars see opportunities to enhance citizen participation and re-engage them with public life, thereby regaining the lost trust in politics of recent years (Fung, 2003; Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2016; Wagenaar, 2016). Different perceptions thus exist about the democratic quality of governance networks. Though scholars agree that networks have a democratic potential, their exclusive and closed character and multi-actor setting troubles this potential (Börzel & Panke, 2007; Mayer, Edelenbos, & Monnikhof, 2005).

To address these troubles, governance theorists point towards the theory of meta-governance. Meta-governors are believed to be able to institutionalise these networks, without intervening in their organisational flexibility deemed crucial for effective mitigation of complex issues (Sorensen E. , 2013). In doing so, meta-governors can enhance the democracy legitimacy in networks, but their efforts may also target effectiveness, the advancing of personal preferences or the coordination of the network (Gjaltema, Biesbroek, & Termeer, 2019; Bell &

Hindmoor, 2009). With a range of 'soft' steering methods meta-governors should ensure an open character that allows for fair deliberation, inclusive representation of citizen's interests and accountability. In theory, any actor in the network can be a meta-governor, yet this role is often bestowed on politicians or public officials, as they have the authoritative powers and provide a crucial anchorage to democratic institutions (Ayres, 2019). Meta-governance is thus considered an important factor in democratically legitimising network governance.

However, meta-governance is not without critique. Though several studies speak of meta-governors and their skills, challenges and potential (Sorensen & Torfing, 2016; Ayres, 2019; Rhodes, 2012; Klijn, Steijn, & Edelenbos, 2010), little empirical research about its application is done. Some scholars empirically determined the positive effect meta-governance has on network outcomes and legitimacy (Klijn, Steijn, & Edelenbos, 2010), or explored how meta-governors' role-perceptions influence their strategies (Sorensen E. , 2006). However, generally meta-governance is left without much operationalisation, risking it to become a mere theoretical solution to complex problems (Gjaltema, Biesbroek, & Termeer, 2019) and leaving scholars sceptical about their actual democratising capability (Koppenjan, Kars, & van der Voort, 2011). Considering the crucial role meta-governance is given in democratising networks, further empirical research into the subject is vital. Especially as governance networks are increasingly used in all policy areas (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016; Sorensen E. , 2013), it is urgent to further empirically explore how networks can be legitimised and if meta-governors can be the guardians of legitimacy scholars think them to be.

Connecting the democratic debate regarding networks with the application of meta-governance is pivotal for this. The perceptions distinguishable in this debate provide different norms about how the democracy in networks should look like and thus how meta-governance should be applied. Consequently, meta-governors are likely to have different ideas about how to shape the democracy in networks. However, considering the theoretical nature of the democratic debate, it is questionable whether these norms have merged with empirical ideas about legitimacy (Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen, 2016), and thus whether these norms are used to make networks democratic. Furthermore, though meta-governance can be employed to target democracy, other objectives, like effectiveness, might also determine their strategies. To explore how the theoretical norms are reflected in practice and how these are factored in the application of meta-governance strategies, this research proceeds with the following research question:



*What role might meta-governors' perceptions about democratic legitimacy have in the way they shape governance networks to be democratic, in case of the Dutch National Climate Agreement?*

This research is relevant in academic terms for a few reasons. First of all by providing empirical insight in the relationship between meta-governance and the democratic legitimacy of governance networks. As mentioned, the gap in empirical and practical literature on meta-governance hinders its theoretical and practical development. This research aims to fill this gap by offering insights in the application of meta-governance. Insights in how meta-governors manage governance processes will offer a better understanding of how meta-governors can fulfil the role that is bestowed on them. With these insights empirically testing the hypothesis that meta-governors have a crucial role in democratising governance networks might be a step closer.

In addition, this study hopes to shed light on which normative theories about democratic legitimacy in governance network are reflected in the perceptions of meta-governors. Does what meta-governors perceive as democratic legitimate stroke with these theories or is democratic legitimacy considered differently in theory and empiricism? Scholars of interactive governance have provided several democratic models as a source for democratic legitimacy in governance networks. Different opinions exist, however, about how these models offer legitimacy to networks and to what degree they are compatible with traditional representative democracy (Klijn & Skelcher, 2007; Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2016; Molin & Masella, 2016). By looking into meta-governors' perceptions an empirical insight is provided about whether the normative arguments in this debate are found in practice. Furthermore, by investigating the democratising potential of meta-governance empirical arguments might be added to this debate.

The societal relevance of this research roots in providing insights into how governance networks can become fully legitimate. With an increase of complex societal problems (Christensen & Laegreid, 2010) the use of governance networks is deemed inevitable. Especially regarding climate policy, where governance networks are found regularly and are even considered crucial by some scholars (Ottens & Edelenbos, 2018). With the climate debate rising to the top of political agenda's in the 21st century (Bernauer & Schaffer, 2012), the importance of networks and how to democratise them is increasing. Yet, democratising these networks remains challenged. The case of the Dutch National Climate Agreement (NCA) exemplifies this. In 2017 the Dutch government initiated a governance network in typical Dutch form, a societal agreement. With over 150 societal actors the government negotiated over policies that would address the objectives of the Paris Climate Agreement. In this agreement a broad range of

politicians, high-level civil servants and chairs aimed to shape and manage the network, which can be regarded as meta-governance. Though the Netherlands has a long tradition in societal agreements and the NCA was managed by a range of different meta-governors, an evident struggle is witnessed between the democratic power of governing parties and the required cooperation with societal actors (SER, 2019; ROB, 2020).

The insights of this research might provide practical recommendations on how to avoid these democratic struggles which can help in future societal (climate) agreements. Furthermore, an enhanced democratic legitimacy has proven to positively affect the effectiveness of governance networks (Klijn & Edelenbos, 2012) and provide a broader support base of citizens for policies coming from these networks (ROB, 2020). Following the prospect of more climate agreements coming (ROB, 2020), understanding how to make them democratic is therefore needed. By providing theoretical and practical insights into the governance of climate policy, this research tries to address the urgent call.

First, the existing literature on the concepts of democratic legitimacy and meta-governance are examined:

1. How can democratic legitimacy in governance networks be defined?
  - What are sources of democratic legitimacy in governance networks?
  - Which perceptions are found in the debate about democratic legitimacy in governance networks?
2. How can meta-governance be conceptualised?
  - What is the relation between meta-governance and democratic legitimacy?
  - Who can be meta-governors?

Second, a thorough conceptualisation of the Dutch Climate Agreement is needed:

3. What is the Dutch National Climate Agreement?
  - How does network governance relate to the NCA?

Third, the role of meta-governors' perceptions and strategies in the NCA will be empirically examined:

4. How can the meta-governance strategies in the NCA be described?
5. What perceptions of democratic legitimacy are present with meta-governors in the case of the NCA?
6. How do the perceptions concerning democratic legitimacy relate to meta-governance strategies in the NCA?

## 2 Theoretical framework

*This research focusses around two main concepts: meta-governance and democratic legitimacy.*

*As network governance is the overarching theoretical context, first this context is defined.*

*Hereafter, democratic legitimacy and meta-governance are explored. Thereby aiming to answer sub-questions 1 and 2.*

### 2.1 Defining network governance

To fully grasp the theoretical debate of democratic legitimacy and meta-governance their context of network governance needs to be defined. This section provides a brief introduction to the concept. Governance theory originates from the 1990's when scholars recognised a shift of government to governance (Kooiman, 1993; Rhodes, 1996; Jessop, 2002; Milward & Provan, 2000; Osborne, 2006). This refers to the increasing reliance of government on institutional relations with society to produce public value. Classical top-down government cannot rely solely on its own knowledge, resources and power due to globalisation, fragmented social and political life and an increasing amount of complex societal issues (Torfing, 2012; Peters & Pierre, 2016). Governments therefore complement their resources by engaging in institutional relationships with society.

Over the past decades, governance theory has produced many definitions for governance, but this research will adopt the common definition of network governance. In this definition these institutional relationships are described as governance networks, being:

*“more or less stable patterns of social relations between mutually dependent actors, which cluster around a policy problem, a policy programme, and/or a set of resources and which emerge, are sustained, and are changed through a series of interactions” (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016, p. 11)*

The steering attempts and interactions within these networks that result in solutions, policies and services are understood as network governance. It is in the context of these networks that the debates around democratic legitimacy and meta-governance are held.

### 2.2 Conceptualising democratic legitimacy

With democratic legitimacy being a broadly discussed but ever fuzzy concept, diving into its essence before considering the theoretical debate around legitimacy in governance networks is vital. Legitimacy is commonly understood as the justification of authority, or in other words how the delegation of power from citizens to government can be justified (Bekkers & Edwards, 2016,

p. 37; Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen, 2016). The principles that justify this delegation are determined by nature of the political regime (e.g. monarchy/democracy/theocracy) (Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen, 2016). When speaking of democratic legitimacy, it are thus democratic principles that determine the legitimacy of government and its authoritative decisions. These principles may regard who is legitimised to make authoritative decisions or which process and procedures should be followed (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016; Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen, 2016; Easton, 1965; Scharpf, 1999; Luhman, 1975). These principles are often summarised using the three phases for obtaining legitimacy, namely the input, throughput and output phase (Scharpf, 1999). The values forthcoming of this distinction can be summarised in the themes of voice, due deliberation and accountability.

*Voice* regards the inclusion of relevant interests in the decision-making process. As direct participation is usually highly unpractical, voice usually reflects the adequate representation of interests: to provide a democratic decision all relevant interests should at least be represented in the decision-making process. Important is to not only include 'loud voices' of powerful or knowledgeable actors but also less mouthy interests (Bekkers & Edwards, 2016; Klijn, van Buuren, & Edelenbos, 2012). Conditional for an adequate representation are therefore equality in the inclusion of voices (Dreyer Hansen, 2007), and the quality of representation, which describes whether representatives actually stand for the interests of the group they claim to represent (Bekkers & Edwards, 2016).

*Due deliberation* reflects the conditions for a qualitative democratic debate and forthcoming procedures, as some scholars state: "the source of legitimacy is not the predetermined will of individuals, but rather the process of its formation, that is, the deliberation itself" (Manin, 1987, pp. 351-352). The deliberation process is thus essential. A qualitative debate is a process where all relevant arguments are discussed which requires an open and fair process. Rules and procedures are therefore crucial and should safeguard "fair entry, reciprocity, freedom of coercion, open information access and transparency" (Klijn, van Buuren, & Edelenbos, 2012, p. 304; Dryzek, 2012; van Meerkerk, Edelenbos, & Klijn, 2015). These rules should allow for all arguments to enter the argumentation process and thus produce a qualitative deliberation.

*Accountability* summarises the arguments valuing the effectiveness, efficiency and responsiveness of policy, which is safeguarded by rendering account (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016; Scharpf, 1999; Bekkers & Edwards, 2016). With the delegation of power to government, government policy should be held against high qualitative criteria and when one has the authority to make decisions this also implies a certain accountability for these decisions and their effects (Bekkers & Edwards, 2016; Michels & Meijer, 2008). Important is therefore the process in which the authoritative party communicates about its performance and renders

account for this performance with corresponding consequences: the process of accountability (Bovens, 2007).

Though there are many different distinctions in the literature on democratic legitimacy, in one form or another these three themes are presented. Furthermore, in the debate about democratic legitimacy in network governance these themes are widely reflected (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016; Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2016; Mayer, Edelenbos, & Monnikhof, 2005; Sorensen & Torfing, 2005). These values are therefore adopted as the conceptualisation of sources for democratic legitimacy in network governance.

### 2.3 Perceptions about democratic legitimacy in governance networks

The democratic legitimacy of interactive network governance is an ongoing and inconclusive debate. Traditionally the democratic values of voice, due deliberation and accountability are safeguarded in the representative model of democracy, providing policy with legitimacy. However, in governance networks these values are reflected differently, as presented in figure 1. Different perceptions exist about what the consequences of these differences are for the democratic legitimacy of network governance and to what degree networks are compatible with the representative model. Where some scholars recognise networks as a challenge to legitimacy, others perceive them as an opportunity to enhance legitimacy (Wagenaar, 2016; Papadopoulos Y. , 2012; Fung, 2003; Sorensen E. , 2013). For ordering the perceptions and their arguments an useful framework is presented by Klijn and Skelcher (2007) who distinguish four different conjectures about the compatibility of network governance with representative democracy.

**Figure 1 Sources of democratic legitimacy in representative democracy and governance networks.**

	<b>Representative Democracy</b>	<b>Governance networks</b>
<b>Accountability</b>	Accountability is simple and clearly demarcated	Accountability is diffuse and spread among different actors.
<b>Voice</b>	Voice is arranged by fixed voting procedures (elections). In general, active possibilities for voice are not that many in pure representative democracy	Voice is complex because many actors are involved and clear rules are often lacking. However, in principle, there are many opportunities for voice in networks
<b>Due deliberation</b>	Representative democracy is characterized by a set of clearly developed rules for procedures.	Networks are characterized by a wide variety of institutional rules coming from various sources . Which rules apply may be unclear.

*Source: Derived and adapted from Klijn & Koppenjan (2016, p. 220).*

### *2.3.1 Incompatible conjecture*

The incompatible conjecture argues that representative democracy conflicts with network governance as it challenges the core doctrine of representative democracy: ‘the primacy of politics’. This doctrine states that, being delegated through electoral procedures to represent ‘the will of the people’, politicians should be the primary source of policy. Elected politicians are thus the only rightful party to make judgements about which values and visions should lead to policies. Consequently, accountability is reserved for elected political officeholders, who are accountable for their administrative subordinates (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016, pp. 207-208; Wagenaar, 2016; Sorensen & Torfing, 2006a).

Governance networks are argued to be incompatible with this doctrine as multiple stakeholders are involved in making public policy. These stakeholders, being unelected, are considered unfit for representation and challenge elected politicians as the primary source of policy. Furthermore, decision-making often takes place in closed arenas that tend to be exclusive. Therewith obscuring chains of accountability and prohibiting an open and predetermined process (Wagenaar, 2016; Papadopoulos Y. , 2016). It is therefore argued that the characteristics of networks are incompatible with the essence of what provides the legitimacy to representative democracy, the primacy of politics. The democratic values are thus considered inadequately represented in networks.

### *2.3.2 Complementary conjecture*

The complementary conjecture argues that incompatibilists fail to recognise two challenges towards the representative model. The first being that complex societal issues force government to engage in arenas outside of mechanisms of representative democracy (Klijn & Skelcher, 2007; Wagenaar, 2007). The second complexity stems from citizens feeling increasingly distanced from politics due to developments in media (Bennet, 2007) and new cleavages in society. This has resulted in a general decrease of trust in both the actors and mechanisms of representative democracy (Papadopoulos Y. , 2016, p. 146; Hirst, 2002; Fung, 2003; Wagenaar, 2016; Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2016).

Network governance addresses these complexities by offering opportunities to design these new arenas as quasi-governmental institutions anchored in representative democracy. Thereby, these networks help to address complex societal problems, while providing opportunities to include more interests and arguments in the debate, broadening voice and due deliberation. Furthermore, these networks may help to re-engage society with government (Klijn & Skelcher, 2007; Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2016; Fung, 2003). Networks thus potentially complement the legitimacy of representative democracy by addressing the challenges of this model. However, the networks would have to completely safeguard the democratic values. Critics state that power and knowledge inequalities could lead to elite capture and that the exclusive and closed character makes a successful safeguarding of democratic values difficult (Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2016; Mayer, Edelenbos, & Monnikhof, 2005). To maximise the complementary potential of networks therefore management is required (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016; Sorensen & Torfing, 2006a).

### *2.3.3 Transitional conjecture*

The transitional conjecture argues that the earlier described pressures on representative democracy severely decrease its legitimacy. Networks can restore this legitimacy by moving away from the representative model towards a network democracy (Hirst, 2002; Wagenaar, 2016). Thereby shifting vertical power and accountability to horizontal mechanisms, which is typified by a paradoxical power struggle: while politicians initiate societal involvement, they are reluctant to give power to these new governance modes fearing to lose their primacy as decisions-makers (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000; Klijn & Skelcher, 2007).

Eventually, however, the value-judging and decision-making role is transferred from politics to the networks. Where value-judgements are being made during the decision-making

process. As the open construction of values and fair decision-making in the network is not a secured given, management and organisation is required to enhance their open character, politicians will therefore become process facilitators (Klijn & Skelcher, 2007). The transitional conjecture thus presents similar arguments to the complementary conjecture, but claims that a transition away from representative democracy is necessary to deal with increasing complexity.

#### *2.3.4 Instrumental conjecture*

The instrumental conjecture argues that powerful governmental actors use governance networks as an instrument to enhance their authority and capacity to shape public policy. The conjecture thus rejects the belief that the primacy of politics is damaged by governance networks, but argues that these networks will be used to enhance the authority and capacity of government officials. These officials try to reinforce their interests by facilitating and/or initiating interactive governance processes. Strong political actors will thus define and initiate these networks (Klijn & Skelcher, 2007; van Meerkerk, Edelenbos, & Klijn, 2015). Although generally applicable in countries with strong political and governmental institutions, this conjecture is not widely accepted. Dominant notions about networks reflect the more transitive view on values and the exchange of knowledge and resources in networks with mutual relationships (Klijn & Skelcher, 2007).

#### *2.3.5 Democratic legitimacy in governance networks*

The four conjectures thus put forward four different perceptions on how democratic legitimacy is viewed in relation to network governance. The core values in these perceptions are represented by voice, due deliberation and accountability and their differences stem from how these values should find expression within networks. The overarching component in these values is democratic anchorage, which describes how networks should be democratically anchored in representative democracy. On the one hand is argued that governance networks tend to be exclusive and disrupt accountability structures. On the other hand they are considered as a way to complement or even replace the representative model through more direct citizen involvement and representation of voices, thereby offering solutions for the challenges of disconnection citizens feel from politics.

Illustrated in these perceptions is that the safeguarding of voice, due deliberation, accountability and democratic anchorage is not an automated given. To ensure the democratic potential of these self-regulating networks management is needed. The following section will elaborate on this idea.



## 2.4 Conceptualising Meta-governance

In the literature on governance, the problems surrounding network governance are considered to be solved through the steering of networks, which is conceptualised as meta-governance or network management. The concept of meta-governance (Kooiman, 1993; Jessop, 2002) or network management (Kickert, Klijn, & Koppenjan, 1997) was introduced in the mid 90's and concerns the 'governance of governance' or more specifically: *"the effort of legitimized public authorities in steering networks through rules and other strategies, with the ultimate goal of shaping and directing particular forms of network governance"* (Molin & Masella, 2016, p. 499). These efforts can be aimed at enhancing effectiveness, democratic legitimacy, advancing personal preferences or simply coordinating the network (Gjaltema, Biesbroek, & Termeer, 2019; Bell & Hindmoor, 2009). Though overlap between the functions exists, considering the purpose of this research this section will focus primarily on the function relating to democratic legitimacy.

The literature on meta-governance is dominated by two schools of thought. The Danish school (Sorensen & Torfing, 2009) of meta-governance provides a political science view with a distinct role for politicians in making networks effective and democratic. The Dutch school (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016) offers a more managerial perception conceptualised as network management, that tasks public managers to make complex networks effective (Molin & Masella, 2016). Although from a different perspective both schools argue for the critical role of meta-governance in the democratic legitimacy of networks. The Danish school does so explicitly, elaborating the role of politicians in the legitimacy of networks (Sorensen & Torfing, 2009). The Dutch school does so more implicitly, by indicates the importance of management and design to ensure inclusion and effective accountability structures (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016).

### 2.4.1 Meta-governance strategies to enhance democratic legitimacy

The task of meta-governance in making networks legitimate is aimed at remedying the democratic challenges inherent to these networks. As seen in the different perceptions these challenges entail the risk of exclusiveness, elite capture, undemocratic procedures and obscured accountability chains. In addressing these challenges, meta-governors should find the golden in-between oversteering, which damages the network's self-organising capacity, and understeering, which has an insufficient effect (Torfing, 2012; Sorensen E. , 2006). Different from traditional hierarchical or market instruments, meta-governance therefore consists of more facilitating and distant types of steering. These are categorised in the hands-off techniques of framing and institutional design, exercised at a distance and hands-on techniques of process

management and direct participation, which require more direct intervention (Ayres, 2019; Sorensen & Torfing, 2009).

Sorensen and Torfing (2009) provide a number of examples how each of the meta-governance tools can be used to address aforementioned challenges. In Figure 2 the goal of each meta-governance tool and forthcoming measures to enhance democratic legitimacy are summarised.

Figure 2 Meta-governance strategies aimed at enhancing democratic legitimacy.

Tool	Goal	Possible measure
<b>Framing</b>	Seeks to determine the political goals, fiscal conditions, legal basis and discursive story-line of networks	Communicate the political, fiscal, legal and discursive framework of the network
		Monitor the performance of the network in relation to the framework
		Decide whether non-compliance should lead to sanctions or adjustments to the network
<b>Institutional Design</b>	Aims to influence and shape the scope, character, composition and institutional procedures of networks	Ensure publicity about the formation of the network and the policy outputs it produces
		Ensure a broad inclusion of relevant and affected actors (avoid external exclusion)
		Create or support alternative and competing networks
<b>Process management</b>	Attempts to reduce tensions, resolve conflicts, empower particular actors and lower the transaction costs in networks by providing different kinds of material and immaterial inputs and resources.	Empower the weak and marginalised network actors in order to promote equality within the network
		Ensure transparency through the circulation of relevant information
		Probe whether the private stakeholders enjoy the support of their respective constituencies
<b>Direct participation</b>	Endeavours to influence the policy agenda, the range of feasible options, the premises for decision making and the negotiated policy outputs.	Maintain a broad policy agenda supported by a vaguely defined story-line (avoid internal exclusion)
		Insist on an open and responsive deliberation of alternative options
		Ensure that the network evaluates its own performance in relation to common democratic standards

Source: Contents derived and adapted from Sorensen & Torfing, 2009, pp. 246-248. Adaptions derived from Klijn & Koppenjan, (2016) and Ayres, (2019).

*Framing* can be used to set a narrative and conditional framework to ensure the network is aware of what is considered politically feasible, thereby enhancing democratic anchorage. An important factor herein is the monitoring of compliance to this framework, which enhances the accountability in the network (Sorensen & Torfing, 2009).

*Institutional Design* can be used to design equal opportunities and rules about the inclusion of stakeholders that prevent systematic exclusion, thereby enhancing voice. Furthermore, by designing deliberative procedures and arena's the conditions for a qualitative debate can be set. An essential part of this design is the accountability structure. It is argued that by combining horizontal structures, that let stakeholders hold each other accountable, and vertical structures, which provide anchorage with political officeholders, accountability problems in networks can be solved (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016, pp. 234-238; Esmark, 2012; Doberstein, 2013).

*Process management* can be used to secure an open and transparent deliberation process to enhance due deliberation, an important aspect therein is facilitating a levelled playing field during negotiations. Additionally, by probing the quality of representation of stakeholders, the support base of representative stakeholders can be validated, which helps safeguarding voice (Sorensen & Torfing, 2009; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016).

*Direct participation* can be used to steer the network from the inside to ensure that the deliberation is inclusive, open and responsive and stakeholders are held accountable (Sorensen & Torfing, 2009). Though, there is a risk of being lost as just one of the stakeholders in the network as the meta-governor has to leave his authoritative position (Ayres, 2019).

Each of these tools provides opportunities to help safeguard the democratic values while not directly disturbing the self-organising capacity that makes networks an interesting governance mechanism. However, these tools only target a part of these values. Empirical study has proved that merely using tools individually is insufficient, a successful meta-governance strategy thus combines the four tools (Sorensen E., 2006). With only little guidelines, finding an effective balance is not without dilemma's. Apart from staying between under- and oversteering, possible trade-offs between democracy and effectiveness exist. Although both could reinforce each other (Klijn, Steijn, & Edelenbos, 2010), more inclusive and democratic networks could hinder effective negotiations (Provan & Kenis, 2008). Meta-governors should therefore be reflexive adapt their strategy if needed.

#### *2.4.2 Roles and types of meta-governors*

With the meta-governance tools conceptualised it is time to identify who will employ these strategies. In principle any actor with enough resources can meta-govern a network.

Nonetheless, often this role resides with either political or public officials. Their formal authority and legitimacy provides steering resources inaccessible to non-public actors (Ayres, 2019). Furthermore, the Danish school even argues that political meta-governors are crucial for democratic legitimacy (Sorensen & Torfing, 2005; Ayres, 2019). With politicians as meta-governors the legitimacy of the network is automatically anchored in traditional representative institutions, thereby addressing compatibility problems with representative democracy. Furthermore, politicians are argued to be the only type of meta-governors with the competences, political authority and legitimacy required to democratise networks (Sorensen & Torfing, 2016).

While the Dutch school deems public administrators more fit to meta-govern, given their expert knowledge and proximity to policy implementation (Molin & Masella, 2016; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016). Both schools acknowledge the crucial role of politicians in setting the goals and objectives and value judgements in the network and render (vertical) account (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016; Sorensen & Torfing, 2016). Political meta-governors in that sense provide the democratic anchorage with representative democracy and are crucial for the safeguarding of democratic legitimacy in networks (Sorensen & Torfing, 2005).

However, politicians may often be too occupied with securing party interests and reluctant to fully take on the demanding task of meta-governor. In practice politicians will therefore delegate more executive tasks to administrative leaders, while trying to stay linked to the process (Sorensen & Torfing, 2016). Considering the expert knowledge of administrative leaders, they are more capable of these hands-on tasks. However, especially regarding the pursuit of enhancing democracy, openness or equality, administrators are dependent on the judgements of politicians. Though it might be tempting to delegate executive tasks, in reality meta-governance will demand for a close cooperation between politicians and their administrators to produce a full-fledged meta-governance strategy (Sorensen & Torfing, 2016). It is thus important that politicians, being legitimised to make value judgements and final decisions, stay connected in both the hands-off as hands-on tasks of meta-governance.

When politicians become meta-governors, however, their roles change from primary decision-maker to distant facilitator and process manager. This change is not without struggle, politicians are often reluctant to give away their power and dramatised media demands for strong political leadership and not for distant facilitators (Sorensen & Torfing, 2016; Bennet, 2007). There are thus barriers to changing the roles of politicians. Meta-governors are supposed to be a jack of all trades and, being a demanding task, leaves politicians little room for other tasks. Critics therefore remain sceptical about the ability of political meta-governors to produce a full-fledged meta-governance strategy (Koppenjan, Kars, & van der Voort, 2011).

In addition, pointing at the lack of empirical study and abstractness of the theory, critics recognise the danger of meta-governance becoming a theoretical fairy-tale, used to solve every complex problem with little practical and empirical backing (Gjaltema, Biesbroek, & Termeer, 2019; Molin & Masella, 2016). Acknowledging these flaws, scholars have been trying to add more empirical knowledge to the theory. A literature study (Gjaltema, Biesbroek, & Termeer, 2019) has identified that in practice meta-governance is often shared among different actors or even between networks. Meta-governors thus come in many form and while politicians are identified as crucial actors in making networks democratic, administrative meta-governors are usually involved as well.

## 2.5 Moving towards a conceptual framework

While governance networks are considered a viable tool for mitigating complex problems, their characteristics make them democratically challenged. Traditionally the democratic values of voice, due deliberation, accountability and democratic anchorage are safeguarded in representative democracy, but network governance requires a different approach. Four perceptions are identified about what this means for democratic legitimacy, thereby indicating how the democratic values should be safeguarded in networks. Several of these perceptions point towards meta-governance as a way to safeguard these values in the network, as this is not an ensured given. Meta-governors are thus believed to be able to shape the safeguarding of democratic values in the network and are argued to be a crucial factor herein.

However, empirical studies about how and which strategies meta-governors actually employ to shape the legitimacy of networks are scant (Gjaltema, Biesbroek, & Termeer, 2019). Furthermore, the different perceptions about democratic legitimacy provide rather inconclusive norms about how meta-governors should shape these networks. Should they incorporate a close link with Parliament, or can stakeholders also be adequate representatives? Should accountability be structured between stakeholders, or can only political officeholders render account? The literature about legitimacy in networks and the literature about democratising meta-governance thus remains largely unlinked. It is therefore questionable which theoretical norms about legitimacy are reflected in the practice of meta-governance. Considering that meta-governance is also aimed at enhancing effectiveness, norms about legitimacy may not even be a factor in the meta-governors' strategies. The crucial role given to meta-governors in enhancing legitimacy thus needs to be empirically explored.

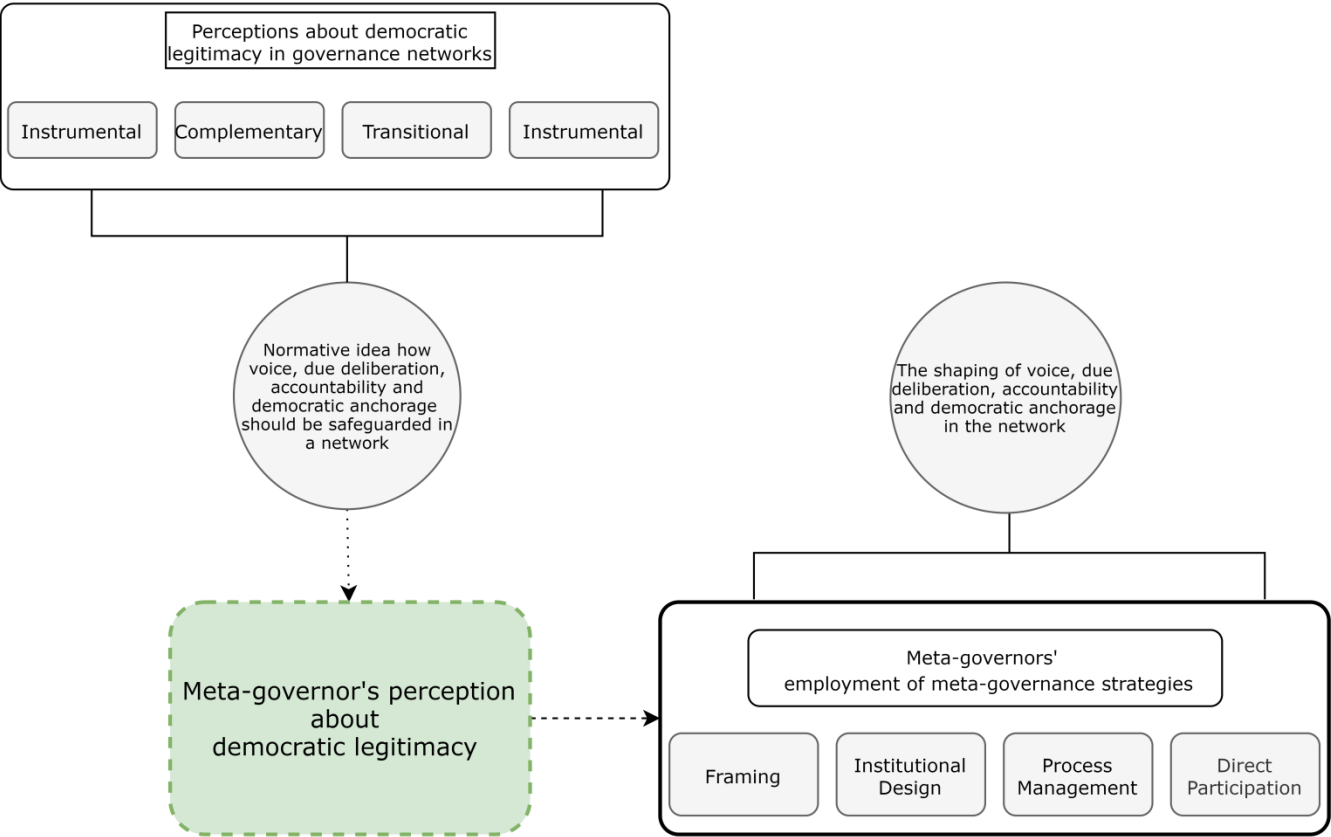
The missing link between these bodies of literature seems to be meta-governors' perceptions about democratic legitimacy. Figure 3 tries to visualise this by showing how the four perceptions provide norms about the safeguarding of these values on the left, and visualising

the employment of meta-governance strategies to shape these values on the right. The link between these two processes might be found in how the norms provided in theory shape a meta-governor's perception, which should provide him with guidance on how to shape the network to become democratic. By looking into the role meta-governors' perceptions might have on how they shape networks, insights are given into what of the normative debate is reflected in these perceptions and whether their perception is the only factor in shaping democratic legitimacy. Most likely effectiveness or other factors are also of influence, but insights in this are vital to better understand the practical application of democratising meta-governance.

The independent variable in this research will therefore be meta-governors' perceptions about democratic legitimacy. The dependent variable is the employment of meta-governance strategies aimed at enhancing democratising the network. The study of this variable is aimed at determining how and which strategies are employed to enhance democratic legitimacy. Meta-governance strategies aimed at anything other than democratic legitimacy are not specifically researched as it is only the democratising strategies that lie within this researches scope.

As not all possible components of meta-governance are researched, generalisable statements regarding the causal impact of perceptions on meta-governance cannot be made. Nevertheless, the aim of this study is to identify which perceptions and meta-governance strategies are present and in what way the former may be reflected in the latter. Thereby providing empirical insight in how the theoretical norms are put into practice and how meta-governance aimed at legitimising networks comes about.

Figure 3 Conceptual Model.





### 3 Methodology

*With the theoretical and conceptual framework established, this section discusses how these concepts will be researched. First by elaborating the research strategy, forthcoming methods and the operationalisation. This section will also introduce the Case of the National Climate Agreement, answering sub-question 3.*

#### 3.1 Research Strategy

This section proceeds to set out the research strategy and operationalisation. The goal of this research is to explore the role meta-governors' perceptions have in how they aim to democratise networks. Thereby providing empirical insights in the role of meta-governors as guardians of legitimacy. Considering the explorative research goals, this research proceeds with a qualitative research strategy. A qualitative approach provides the best opportunity to identify social processes and underlying causal mechanisms by digging deep into the concepts (Neuman, 2014). From the range of qualitative methods the case-study offers an adequate way to do this, by allowing the researcher to zoom in on a certain moment, situation or event and thereby offering him in-depth knowledge and specific insights to build theory (Bryman, 2012). To really dive into the perceptions of meta-governors, their strategies and the underlying processes relating both concepts a case-study thus provides an outstanding method.

Considering the limited time and scope of this research combined with rather complicated research concepts, a single-case design is chosen as this allows for a more in-depth look than when time and resources are split over multiple cases. As a comparative design might provide more generalisable insights, a versatile case is picked in an area where this research might be most beneficial, namely climate policy. Hereon is elaborated in the next section, whereafter the data-collection, operationalisation and data-analysis, and limitations are discussed.

#### 3.2 Introducing the National Climate Agreement

As discussed in the introduction, governance networks are increasingly used in climate policy. With climate rising to the top of political agendas (Bernauer & Schaffer, 2012), insights into democratising climate networks are much needed. This section argues that the Dutch National Climate Agreement (NCA) case can provide relevant insights in this area.

Governance networks in the Netherlands often follow the Poldermodel. In this model government aims to depoliticise societal issues by making a societal agreement with societal representatives (trade unions, employers organisations, businesses) wherein comprises lead to solutions and support base ('draagvlak') for these solutions (Dyk van, 2006). Regarding climate and energy, two societal agreements were initiated, first the Energy Agreement for sustainable growth (EA) and later the NCA. The EA, signed in 2013 by 47 parties, was aimed at increasing sustainable energy production and energy saving. Although successful in reaching an agreement and obtaining Parliamentary approval, members of Parliament felt excluded from the process. Therefore in the NCA different design choices were made. Now focussing on the broader issue of climate, the NCA aimed to reduce Greenhouse gasses (GHG) with 49% in 2030, as is formulated in the coalition-agreement of 2017 (Regeerakkoord, 2017, p. 37). Thereby addressing the objectives of the Paris Climate Agreement (2015).

This coalition-agreement also announced that a societal agreement would be initiated to reach this objective. The NCA is thus initiated by political decision. The minister of Economic Affairs and Climate (EZK), as a representative of Cabinet, is made responsible for executing the NCA and is thereby accountable in Parliament. However, several other ministries are affiliated to some of the negotiation-tables. To ensure the political obligation of Cabinet to these climate objectives the Climate Act was passed. Herein also the governance and monitoring framework of future Dutch Climate policy is set. The task of the NCA is divided over 5 negotiation-tables, each with their own objective (Figure 4).

**Figure 4 Reduction objectives in the NCA.**

<b>Table</b>	<b>Objective</b>
<b>Electricity</b>	20 Mt Co2-reduction
<b>Mobility</b>	7 Mt Co2-reduction
<b>Industry</b>	22 Mt Co2-reduction
<b>Agriculture and land-use</b>	3,5 Mt Co2-reduction
<b>Built environment</b>	7 Mt Co2-reduction

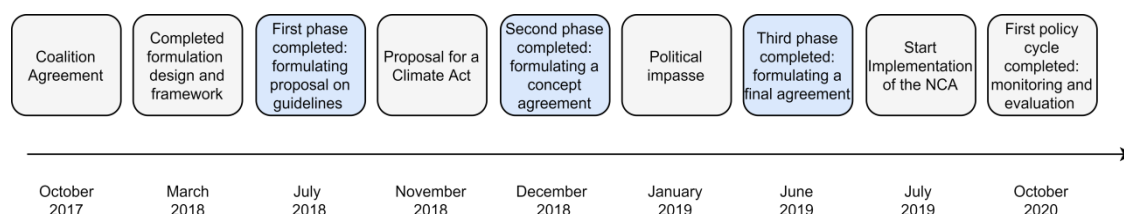
Each table has their own constituent subset of actors, an independent chair, an administrative representative of the affiliated ministry and secretaries. The general process is streamlined by an independent chair of a sixth table, the 'Klimaatberaad' (the climate council). The Social Economic Council (SER) assists EZK in facilitating the agreement. Together with politicians, these

actors shaped and managed the NCA and are therefore considered the NCA's meta-governors. The process was divided in three phases after which intermediary results were presented. Though these phases allowed for a closer incorporation of Parliament in relation to the EA, after the second phase a political impasse took place which let to politics taking back control (SER, 2019). Here the democratic struggle that makes the NCA so interesting is witnessed. As the first policy cycle is yet to be completed, little can be said about the implementation of the NCA. This research will therefore focus primarily on the negotiation phases up until June 2019 (Figure 5). The organisation of the NCA is visualised in Figure 6.

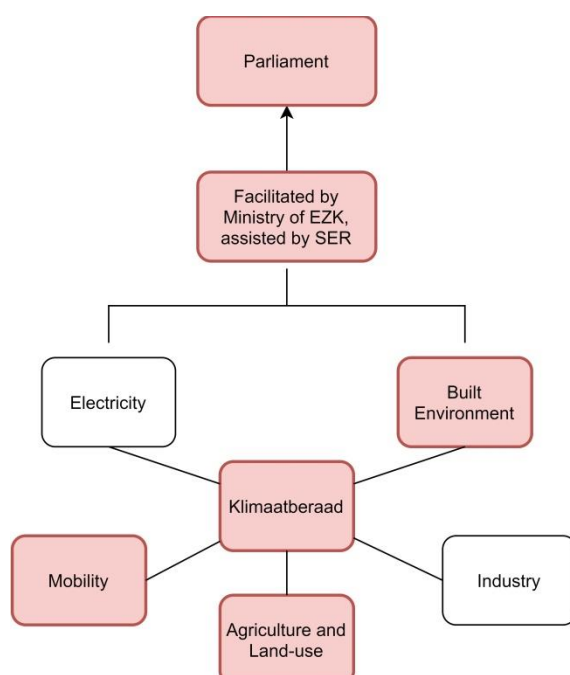
Considering the limited time of this research next to the general process only three negotiation tables are studied. Which is considered enough to provide a solid reflection of the process but also gather enough in-depth data.

Considering the political agency, wide range of managing actors and deliberate design choices regarding democratic legitimacy and the anchoring of the network with Parliament, the NCA provides a very insightful case. While offering opportunities to analyse democratic meta-governance, studying the NCA might also provide practical recommendations for other climate related networks.

**Figure 5 Timeline of the NCA.**



**Figure 6 The organisation of the NCA. The scope of this research in red.**



### 3.3 Data-collection

To collect data this research uses two sources, documents and semi-structured interviews. The documents aim to chart the meta-governance strategies employed in the NCA. Two sets of policy letters are analysed:

- **Parliamentary Letters:** Letters from Cabinet and its administrative to inform Parliament about their design, intentions and progress for the NCA. These letters also report on the implementation of Parliamentary resolutions, the steering method of members of Parliament (MP's). Thereby indicating meta-governance strategies of administrators, political executives and MP's.
- **Letters between Cabinet and the NCA:** Letters from Cabinet that define the tasks for independent actors in the NCA's (chairs and SER secretaries) or letters of the NCA's chairs reporting on intermediary results. Thereby indicating meta-governance strategies of Cabinet, while also showing steering methods of chairs and secretaries.

A total of 15 letters was analysed, 9 Parliamentary Letters and 6 letters between Cabinet and the NCA (Appendix 2). All letters are publicly available at the website of the NCA, [klimaatakkoord.nl](https://klimaatakkoord.nl), except for D1. Though referred to on [klimaatakkoord.nl](https://klimaatakkoord.nl) this letter was not on the website as it is Cabinet's first letter about the NCA. Showcasing the first design choices, this letter is very relevant and therefore included.. All other letters are available on [klimaatakkoord.nl](https://klimaatakkoord.nl). How to find these letters is mentioned in Appendix 2. The selection was made based upon:

- **Period:** 10-10-2017- 28-06-2019, from signing of the coalition-agreement to the presentation of the final NCA.
- **Relevance:** Letters were selected that indicate employment of meta-governance strategies aimed at democratic legitimacy of the NCA.

The interviews aim to chart the meta-governor's perceptions and identify how and which meta-governance strategies they employed. Three types of meta-governors can be identified in the NCA:

- **Administrative meta-governors:** High level civil servants involved in shaping and guiding the NCA, ranging from the administrative representatives of the ministries, government secretaries, government facilitators and ministerial advisors. These meta-governors were either active in the design of the process or at the negotiation-tables.

- **Political meta-governors:** MP's of the parliamentary commission for climate policy, who oversaw and guided the NCA via Parliament. Executive political officeholders were not approached as they are often unavailable and their views are considered v represented by their administrative representatives.
- **Independent meta-governors:** The chairs and secretaries involved in facilitating the process, which were independent of government. These meta-governors are therefore identified as independent meta-governors.

A total of 16 interviews is conducted with 6 administrative, 4 political and 6 independent meta-governors. The list of interviewees and interview questions is provided in Appendix 1. Interviews with almost all relevant administrative and independent meta-governors were conducted, however regarding the political meta-governors only one coalition member was able to provide an interview. Though this particularly challenges a full-fledged analysis of perceptions, the broad range of other relevant meta-governors is considered to provide a solid indication of the perceptions and strategies in the NCA.

### 3.4 Operationalisation and data-analysis

Before elaborating on the data-analysis it is vital to operationalise the researched concepts.

#### *3.4.1 Perceptions about democratic legitimacy in governance networks*

To operationalise meta-governors' perceptions the four themes recognised in the literature are used: democratic anchorage, voice, due deliberation and accountability. While the first theme helps indicating the meta-governor's idea about the core challenge in the theoretical debate, the network's link with Parliament, the others indicate how a meta-governor the sources of democratic legitimacy reflected. By incorporating both these factors of democratic legitimacy, this operationalisation aims to capture the perceptions of meta-governors in the most complete way. Figure 7 elaborates on this operationalisation and forthcoming indicators.

**Figure 7 Operationalisation and indicators of perceptions of democratic legitimacy.**

<b>Perceptions about democratic legitimacy</b>	<b>Operationalisation</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
Democratic anchorage	To what degree should the governance network be linked to Parliament	Ideas reflecting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The relation of Parliament with the network.</li> <li>- Role of Parliament in accountability</li> <li>- Who makes final decisions?</li> <li>- Who may determine frames and conditions?</li> </ul>
Voice	Adequate representation of interests	Ideas reflecting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who may represent citizens' interests</li> </ul>
	Equal opportunity for participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who may participate</li> <li>- Who provides input in the final decision</li> </ul>
	Representation of interests in decisions made	
Due Deliberation	Transparency of the process	Ideas reflecting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Which information and processes should be distributed/made transparent</li> </ul>
	Quality of participation and deliberation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- (Dis)empowering of stakeholders</li> <li>- Institutionalisation of the deliberation process</li> </ul>
Accountability	Horizontal and vertical accountability structures	Ideas reflecting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The value of a public accountor</li> <li>- The value of horizontal accountability</li> </ul>
	Consequences for (un)compliance to these rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Formal or informal consequences</li> </ul>

### *3.4.2 Meta-governance strategies aimed at enhancing democratic legitimacy*

To operationalise meta-governance strategies aimed at enhancing democratic legitimacy the divide of framing, institutional design, process management and direct participation is adopted. As elaborated in the theoretical framework both the Danish and Dutch school's strategies fit well into this divide. The operationalised strategies and forthcoming indicators are elaborated in Figure 8, which are primarily based upon Figure 2 and synthesises arguments of both schools.

The meta-governance roles are operationalised as political, administrative and independent meta-governors, as already discussed in the case-introduction and data-collection.

Although the operationalisation of both the dependent and independent variable surround the same democratic values, they are not operationalised the same. Such a similar operationalisation would risk the researching an influence of a variable on itself. Though similarly operationalised, the independent variable concerns the perceptions about how the democratic core values should be reflected, while the dependent uses these values to analyse how these are applicated. Thereby providing the opportunity to analyse whether the values presented in the perception are actually applicated in the meta-governance strategies.

**Figure 8 Operationalisation and indicators of meta-governance strategies aimed at enhancing**

<b>Meta-governance strategies aimed at enhancing democratic legitimacy</b>	<b>Operationalisation</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
<b>Framing</b>	The meta-governor shapes the political, fiscal, legal and discursive framework of the network to be democratic.	Statements regarding the formulation and communication of: - Form of decisions - Type of decisions the network can make - Discussable themes in the network - Monitoring of the framework
<b>Institutional Design</b>	The meta-governor shapes the scope, character, composition and institutional processes in the network to be democratic.	Statements regarding design choices concerning: - Inclusion and exclusion protocols - Norms and rules about deliberation processes - Accountability structures
<b>Process management</b>	The meta-governor facilitates and manages processes and interactions to be democratic.	Statements regarding interventions in the network concerning: - (Dis)empowering of actors - Distribution of information - Monitoring the quality of representation - Intervening in the network's composition
<b>Direct Participation</b>	The meta-governor participates in the network and actively influences the policy agenda and deliberation processes to be democratic.	Statements regarding participatory activities concerning: - Keeping a broad agenda - Guide deliberation processes to be open - Ensure performance evaluation

### *3.4.3 Data analysis*

For a systematic data-analysis both data-sets are analysed with the same framework. First the interviews are transcribed and, same as the letters, uploaded to Atlas.TI a qualitative data-analysis software. Hereafter a coding tree is formulated following the indicators of the operationalisation (Appendix 4 ). As such, a thematic analysis can be done, which allows for thorough and systematic analysis of qualitative data (Bryman, 2012). In this analysis the results from both data-sets are compared on codes, subject, type of interviewee/document and between the data-sets. To report on the identified themes and linkages exemplifying quotes are gathered that will be presented and analysed in the findings section.

### 3.5 Considering validity, reliability and replicability

The qualitative research design and forthcoming methods come with several limitations. While a quantitative approach can offer a higher level of external validity, a case-study is less able to provide generalisable results as its context specific. Forthcoming conclusions should therefore be adopted with caution and acknowledgement of the context. Furthermore the reliability and internal validity of qualitative case-studies can be at risk by losing oneself in a case, also affecting focus and leading to researcher biases and replicability, considered typical for qualitative research (Riege, 2003). To counter these limitations in the research design several safeguards are applied.

First, internal validity is safeguarded by collecting data in two ways, which allows for triangulation and cross-checking of results (Riege, 2003). Second, while the open character of the semi-structured interviews allows for diving deep into the perceptions and strategies, the structured character helps safeguarding reliability using semi-structured interview schemes (Appendix 3) (Bryman, 2012). Third, while the transcriptions help to validly analyse the interviews, the structured and transparent method of analysis safeguards reliability and replicability. Finally, while this study deals with perceptions, subject to change and subjectivity, both the validity and reliability of this research might be at risk. Nevertheless, the amount of interviewees and triangulation with documents and systematic analysis thereof is considered to outweigh this disadvantage.



## 4 Findings

*With the research strategy established and NCA-case introduced, in this chapter the findings of the research will be presented. Moving along two sets of data, first the documentary analysis is presented, whereafter the findings of the interviews are discussed. In doing so this section aims to answer sub-questions 4 and 5.*

### 4.1 Dataset 1: document analysis

The first dataset consists of two type of documents, letters to Parliament and letters between Cabinet and the NCA. As discussed in the methodology a selection of 17 letters was made. A list of these documents is found in appendix 2. This documentary analysis aims to identify employed meta-governance strategies in the NCA and cross-reference it with the data from the interviews. This section will therefore discuss each type of strategy (framing, institutional design, process management, direct participation) for both type of documents. As this research is aimed at finding strategies aimed at enhancing democratic legitimacy, only these examples of meta-governance are discussed. Naturally there are more examples of meta-governance with other purposes to be found.

It must be noted that regarding the political meta-governors it is important to distinguish between coalition and other MP's. As will be seen, the coalition had additional influence over the NCA. In addition, when spoken of Cabinet, both the executive political officeholders (political meta-governors) and their administrators (administrative meta-governors) are meant. As it is recognised that these political executives are supported by civil servants in all their tasks.

#### 4.1.1 Framing

Framing is aimed at shaping the political, fiscal, legal and discursive framework. In the NCA, exclusively MP's and political executives employ framing. The coalition's MP's set the NCA's guiding conditions in the coalition-agreement:

*"The coalition-agreements is the starting point of the NCA. This means that several affairs are non-negotiable" – D2*

These include the objectives, financial resources, but also boundaries and tasks and restrictions per sector, like a taboo on billable driving or reducing of livestock. Formulated by MP's of the coalition, these discursive frames are set by political meta-governors and are considered the starting point of the conditional framework. Cabinet develops the deliberative frames, which are

based upon “8 pillars” (D2), containing conditions for both the form and content of measures (e.g. the clarification of roles and tasks to ensure accountability). These pillars should safeguard the general direction, however:

*“Cabinet realises that the NCA is not only ‘from’ Cabinet, but other parties will have opinions about the process and its conditions.” –D2*

Though setting these frames, Cabinet acknowledges that societal parties may have beneficial contributions. The 8 pillars therefore guide the NCA’s direction, yet allows for additional ideas from society. This is even encouraged by asking for ambitiousness and creativity as Cabinet mentions being *“not deaf for verifiable better ideas to realise the climate objective”* (D2). Cabinet thus values the involvement societal parties.

However, in Parliament, MP’s also had the opportunity to contribute through parliamentary resolutions:

*“Conform the resolution Mulder c.s. (Kamerstuk 30 196, nr. 586) Cabinet considers the building and maintaining of support base an important frame for the Cabinet’s effort” – D9*

Exemplifying one of several resolutions of MP’s aimed at contributing or refocussing the framework. Though predominantly the coalition and Cabinet determined the conditions, in Parliament adjustments and contributions could be made. However, the documents did not indicate that any other actor than Cabinet or MP’s have attributed to the framework of the NCA.

#### *4.1.2 Institutional design*

Institutional design is aimed at shaping the scope, character, composition and processes in the network. The general design of the NCA as discussed in the case-introduction, was formulated by Cabinet, yet regarding democratic legitimacy several remarks can be made. The first regarding the composition of the network. One of the letters states that only *“parties participate that contribute to the transition”* (D1). Which is later defined:

*“The concrete contribution can be own measures for CO2-reduction, but also an active contribution to the building and maintaining of societal support.” – D2*

Cabinet indicates that not only tangible contributions are required, but building of support base is valued too. Though showing willingness for a broader inclusion of stakeholders, non-contributive actors are thus excluded. Though Cabinet decided upon the composition criteria, who picks the participants is not formulated. Only in the task-letters is mentioned:

*“The chair determines the organisation of the sector table, including the composition of the table, the frequency of meetings and the design of possible sub-tables.” – D3*

While this seems to indicate that the chairs determine the composition the interviews proved differently, which is discussed later. Nevertheless, the chairs thus organise the deliberative process of the sector-tables. They are herein assisted by the SER and administrative secretaries. Considering that the further process of the NCA is *“developed in good consultation with the SER”* (D1), the role of independent meta-governors in the institutional design should not be underestimated.

Furthermore, through the design of the three phases (first a proposal on guidelines, then a concept-agreement and a final agreements) three steering moments are incorporated:

*“these phases allow to monitor, during the process until the summer, whether the agreements on guidelines fit within the framework determined in this letter.” –D2*

This allows Cabinet to monitor and steer the network when necessary, but also helps to connect Parliament to the process. As the minister indicates that he will *“gladly discuss. and inform”* (D2) Parliament about the progress in the phases, allowing them to intervene on certain moments and render account. The democratic anchorage and vertical accountability structure of the NCA is thus designed by Cabinet in the beginning of the process.

#### *4.1.3 Process Management*

Process management is aimed at facilitating and managing processes to make them democratic. The facilitation roles are bestowed on the ministry of EZK, the SER and the chairs. Identified in the institutional design, the deliberative process is managed by the chairs. Cabinet tasks him to:

*“(...) create conditions in which participants feel shared interests for the results of the process and therefore take a shared responsibility.” –D4*

Cabinet thus demands that the chairs create commitment for the negotiated measures, but allows for the chair to decide how. The intention for safeguarding an open or fair deliberation is thus not explicitly mentioned. The chairs are supported by their secretariat who *“chart which issues and underlying interests could hinder agreement”* (D4). This should help the chair to organise the table and potentially benefits the quality, progress and openness of the negotiations. The independent meta-governors thus have a large role in the deliberations.

Additionally, the independent meta-governors are responsible for communicating the progress and distribution of information throughout the negotiations, aimed at safeguarding transparency and open deliberation. Affiliated ministries and their secretaries are herein also involved, by informing Parliament through letters and *“technical briefings”*(D6). Thus both administrative and independent meta-governors safeguard the transparency of the NCA. Furthermore, several MP’s interfered in the composition of the network with parliamentary resolutions, exemplified by the following:

*“Through the resolution Agnes Mulder c.s. (Kamerstuk 30 196, nr. 585) is specifically asked that in the design of the NCA citizens and small business are given the opportunity to submit suggestions...”* –D8

By demanding the inclusion of non-participants through allowing submitting of suggestions, the MP thereby interferes with the composition of the network. Similar resolutions ask for inclusion of e.g. NGO’s and scientific knowledge. Thus not only chairs, but also MP’s manage the composition.

#### *4.1.4 Direct Participation*

Direct Participation is employed to retain a broad policy agenda, keep an open and qualitative deliberation and ensure that the network evaluates its own performance. As seen before, the chairs and secretaries are responsible for safeguarding the quality of the negotiations. Both the broad policy agenda and qualitative deliberation are thus covered by the independent meta-governors.

The performance evaluation is, as identified, largely designed to run through Parliament. Nonetheless, for the implementation phase new cooperative structures are instated:

*“Under direction of the affiliated ministers implementation tables will be instated, which could be constituent to existing negotiation structures or with newly formed coalitions in the NCA.”* –

D15

The minister is thus responsible for safeguarding the implementation and should initiate horizontal accountability structures similar to the existing tables. Here participants can confront each other about the implementation of their agreed measures. For the implementation of these measures the participants are thus themselves accountable, as is stated later in the letter. In these tables are again chairs, secretaries and administrative representatives involved. Participating at these tables they thus ensure the networks deliberation, implementation and evaluation.

#### 4.2 Introducing dataset 2: interviews – meta-governance

As illustrated in the methodology, the second dataset of this research consists of interviews conducted with administrative meta-governors, political meta-governors and independent meta-governors. The full list of interviewees can be found in appendix 1. The focus in the interviews was to identify the present perceptions about democratic legitimacy and the employed meta-governance strategies. First will be elaborated on these strategies and how they stand in relation to the documentary analysis. Hereafter the found perceptions are discussed.

##### 4.2.1 Framing

As seen in documents, framing is only employed by political-meta-governors. The framework consisted of several non-negotiable affairs and deliberative and discursive conditions. Throughout the interviews these findings are confirmed and as one of the MP's states:

*"At the start of the proces several debates took place. In formulating the instruments Parliament was less involved, yet in the formulation of the framework very explicitly."* –ISNL0007

This MP's explains that in the design of the process was left to executive politicians (ministers, secretaries of state etc.), but in formulating the framework Parliament had a role. Especially by formulating the Climate Act which binds government to the formulated objectives, but also during debates in Parliament at the beginning of the process, MP's contributed to the framework.

Regarding the monitoring of the framework some interesting remarks are made. One of the secretaries states:

*"Cabinet has always sat at the table and has formulated the conditions and indicated the feasibility of measures"* – ISNL0004

Indicating that administrative representatives monitored adherence to the framework and its conditions. Their presence was however not always considered sufficient. A representative explains to have stayed at the background of the negotiations, especially in the beginning, as too much interference would be *“killing creativity”* (ISNL0010). To reach an ambitious agreement, it is considered that some governmental distance is required and in practice the frames were thus not always monitored strictly. Some respondents argue that this restraint caused confusion about the framework, which led to chairs requesting clarifications during the progress. Adequate monitoring thus seems important for a clear framework.

Nevertheless, several meta-governors argue that the framework was too restrictive, referring to the non-negotiable affairs like billable driving. The conditions *“hampered the variety in solutions”* (ISNL0011). Moving around these restrictions, societal parties were forced to negotiate towards less effective and ambitious solutions. Though formulated to leave room for societal parties, as seen in the letters, the non-negotiable affairs are thus considered too restrictive.

#### 4.2.2 Institutional Design

Institutional design is primarily employed by political meta-governors, specifically Cabinet, who is assisted by administrators and the SER. The interviews clarify that the general process was designed by a small group of civil servants at the ministry of EZK. Confirming the letters, two deliberate choices were made regarding democratic legitimacy.

The first is exemplified by:

*“We didn’t want to make the same mistake, therefore we split the process in phases and said that with every phase Cabinet would render account to Parliament and ask for guidance regarding the next step”* – ISNL0013

The phasing was thus done to involve Parliament in the process. Thereby addressing the ‘mistake’ of the Energy Agreement, where Parliament felt left out. Democratic anchorage is thus deliberately incorporated in the NCA.

The other deliberate choice concerns the open process of invitations, aiming to include a broad range of (contributive) stakeholders. However, unlike the letters suggest, it were administrative representatives and their ministers who invited the stakeholders. From the coalition-agreement on “long lists” with potential stakeholders circulated the ministries. As one of the chairs states:

*“When I arrived there had already been long discussions about the composition of the tables, whereafter I got the ability to adjust” – ISNL0012*

The chair further indicates to have globally adhered to the structure, only making small adjustments. It was thus Cabinet who decided upon most of the composition, yet final adjustments by the chairs were allowed.

Another noteworthy remark regards the design of accountability structures. The implementation tables for horizontal accountability (see section 4.1.4), have been formed similar to the structure of the deliberation tables. The tables’ chairs and administrators monitor the implementation process and render account by applying several ‘soft’ accountability measures like naming and shaming or ultimately involving the minister. However, as determined, the minister of EZK is formally accountable for the NCA’s performance.

#### *4.2.3 Process management*

The letters illustrate that process management tasks are predominantly left to independent meta-governors, which is confirmed in the interviews. In charge of the negotiations, chairs have an important role in safeguarding due deliberation. When being asked about this all chairs indicate to aim for consensus rather than majority voting, which also was the intention of Cabinet, every participant is thus given an equal voice:

*“At my table every voice weighed the same, they all talk equally loud while some had a constituency that was a 100 or 1000 times larger than the other” – ISNL0003*

This chair exemplifies that size or power does not matter in their employed deliberation strategy. All participants are treated equally. Nevertheless, no active (dis)empowering of actors was done. Therefore, some meta-governors remain sceptical about the equality of deliberation due to power differences between stakeholders. The chairs acknowledged that sometimes more charismatic speakers would gather more support, but deemed it characterising for negotiations. Whether consensus aimed negotiations sufficiently level the playing field is thus contested. Nevertheless, when consensus was reached the texts were drafted by the independent secretaries. This prevented individual stakeholders from having too much influence. Being also responsible for the NCA’s transparency, these secretaries distributed information. Additionally, the SER initiated a public website to inform citizens about the NCA. The independent meta-governors thus had an important role in safeguarding transparency and open deliberation.

#### 4.2.4 Direct Participation

The interviews largely confirm the participation strategies found in the letters. The secretaries and chairs were responsible for maintaining an open debate and agenda. Though indicating to consult administrative representatives, they had no direct influence on these matters. As mentioned in the institutional design section, the ensuring of accountability is done at the implementation tables, but as the implementation has just started performance is yet to be evaluated.

In the interviews, however, a remarkable development in the NCA is mentioned. After the first phase a first draft of measures was presented (July 2019), politicians became nervous:

*“The realisation with parties developed when they got that first product and saw what the impact was”*- ISNL0013

Only after this first draft certain coalition parties realised how impactful climate policy was going to be. The impact on society suddenly became tangible. To be closer to the negotiations, together with Cabinet, the political leaders initiated ‘the Cockpit’: a top-level political consultation with coalition leaders (MP’s) and ministers. Although deliberating separately from the sector-tables, the Cockpit tried to steer the negotiations more directly. A chair euphemistically indicates that *“not every chair was happy with that”* (ISNL0006), as it caused a lot of tension between the societal actors and politics. Tension rose even further when after the negotiation tables had submitted the concept-agreement (December, 2018), the Cockpit continued negotiating amongst themselves, making several adjustments *“in which participants were very limited involved”* (ISNL0004). After validation by Parliament, this adjusted agreement was presented as the NCA a few months later (June, 2019).

Via these direct interventions politics thus tried to take back control, which felt like changing the rules of the game for some societal actors. This might be considered more as hierarchical control than meta-governance. Nevertheless, politicians thus very directly interfered with the process and managed to take more control during the process than was initially intended. In the next section will be discussed how meta-governors relate this to democratic legitimacy.

The documents and interviews thus generally describe similar affairs. A clear role distribution can be identified. Where the political meta-governors are more involved in the institutional design and framing strategies, the independent meta-governors and administrative meta-governors are involved in managing and participating in the process. All meta-governance strategies are thus employed and all identified roles are actively involved.



### 4.3 Interviews – perceptions concerning democratic legitimacy

Apart from meta-governance strategies, the interviews were primarily focussed on identifying meta-governors' perceptions on democratic legitimacy. They were asked about the democratic values discussed in the theoretical framework: voice, due deliberation, accountability and democratic anchorage. As suggested in theory, the overarching theme proved to be democratic anchorage with the perceptions centring around the relation between the NCA-network and Parliament. While this relation was generally conditional for how voice, due deliberation and accountability were perceived, the distinctions were not always consistent with the general perception. Therefore the following section will first elaborate on the general perception stemming from democratic anchorage, whereafter the differences in themes are discussed.

#### 4.3.1 Complementary and instrumental perceptions

First of all, meta-governors stand generally positive towards the use of governance networks in climate policy. The complexity and vastness of the climate problem is recognised as well as the necessity to include society to help mitigate the crisis as government cannot do this alone:

*“If the government has to manage the climate and energy transition alone, nothing will come of it. The task is too vast and complex and dependent on too many factors. If societal parties don't put their weight behind it together, society cannot make such huge transitions happen.” –*

ISNL0013

This administrative meta-governor captivates the idea of several respondents that the climate and energy transition is too complex for government to handle alone. The NCA's meta-governors perceive a societal agreement as a viable way to get society behind the transition as they indicate that through the societal agreement, commitment for climate policy is greater than when it had been a mere political decision (ISNL0007). Its greatest service is therefore that co-designers not immediately challenge policies from the agreement (ISNL0003), pointing at the obtained commitment and support base. Other interviewees added that the agreement also helped *“to solve an information problem”* (ISNL0002) and get everyone on the same page and work towards the same goal. The meta-governors thus really believe in the benefits of using networks in the transition.

However, about the legitimacy of these networks different perceptions are presented. Where all meta-governors emphasise the crucial role of Parliament in legitimacy, only some meta-governors believe that societal parties can add to this legitimacy. Two perceptions are

distinguished, an instrumental and a complementary perception. The complementary perception indicates that including society has an complementary effect on democratic legitimacy:

*“When Parliament hierarchically puts a stamp on the agreement, one can call it formally politically legitimised in our democratic state of law. However I believe that material legitimacy, inclusion of societal organisations who unify citizens, (...) is strengtened by the NCA.” – ISNL0007*

Here the political meta-governor shows that it is not just the ‘stamp’ of Parliament, but also the inclusion of stakeholders that is a factor for legitimacy. The MP thereby indicates that the network can be considered complementary to the legitimacy obtained from Parliamentary approval. This view is shared by other meta-governors:

*“You have to deal with formal legitimacy, but also informal legitimacy. Democracy is more than the voice of the majority, it is also giving institutions and societal organisations a role in the proces.”- ISNL0012*

Hereby indicating that a majority in Parliament is not enough to speak of democracy, actually giving a role and listening to the input of societal organisations is just as important. This chair continues by explaining that a common misunderstanding about politics is that society cannot make decisions without it. He points out that societal parties can make agreements amongst themselves that are completely legitimate. However, they cannot make universal policy and when laws and regulations are needed Parliament has to be involved. Parliament is thus an important factor in the democracy of networks, but really just a factor. Involving citizens in policy making is complementary to democratic legitimacy and even necessary, as some complementarists would say:

*“It is unthinkable that government implements the energy transition without broadly involving citizens. Such a process is that deep-digging in our society that you have to involve society.”- (ISNL0006)*

For policy with such a penetrating effect citizens have to be involved. Be it material or informal legitimacy, these meta-governors thus perceive the involvement of society as an important factor for democracy. Democracy is not limited to a majority in Parliament but societal partners actually have to be involved, especially concerning issues that have a grave effect on society.

Nevertheless, other meta-governors depart from a more instrumental perception. Though acknowledging the benefits of engaging with society, in democratic legitimacy only Parliament can be considered a factor. Governance networks are perceived an instrument to consult society and cannot help to obtain legitimacy:

*“Politicians can consult society through formal and informal procedures in many forms. These can play a part, but that’s it. A consultation can never replace political decisionmaking (...).” –*  
ISNL0008

Parliament is thus the only place where legitimacy is obtained. The government may consult society which may be beneficial for policy, but society cannot make final decisions, only Parliament can do that. Legitimacy is thus a pure political judgement that cannot be complemented by society. One chair (ISNL0011) adds that the NCA should have been called a program rather than an agreement. As Parliament should be the one making decisions, there is no actual agreement. For legitimate policy, decision-making should thus lie in Parliament. Although engaging in society can be beneficial, legitimacy is obtained in representative democracy. Networks are therefore only seen as an instrument and not beneficial for legitimacy.

Where the complementary perception thus believes that engaging in society can strengthen legitimacy, the instrumental sees this engagement as an instrument to obtain commitment, support base and use society’s resources, while leaving legitimacy to Parliament. The development of the Cockpit, where politicians take more control, helps putting these differences in perspective.

The complementary perceptions frames the political intervention as taking the agreement away from society and thereby the additional legitimacy. The intention for the NCA shifted from making a societal agreement to a political decision (ISNL0010). Societal parties where thereby cut out of the endresult. For informal legitimacy, the input of society should have been larger in the endresult. A societal agreement is made between executive government and society and afterwards Parliament can give their judgement. Now Cabinet and the coalition interfered too soon, which resulted in a decreased support. Though chairs describe the events as *“not pretty”* (ISNL0012), the issues were not insurmountable. The complementarists rate the agreement not above Parliament. Thus although taking away from the potential legitimacy, these events did not make the NCA illegitimate. On the contrary, instrumentalists see politics taking back control as an enhancement of legitimacy:

*“Politicians realised that it was going to be impactful en moved the debate to politics where it belonged, not with a couple of substantive parties” –ISNL0011*

The chair indicates that decisions and debate should take place within politics. By taking more control politicians moved the primacy of decision-making back to where legitimacy is formally obtained. Hereby reflecting the idea that Parliament is the sole source of legitimacy. An administrator adds that when you make an agreement with government, you have to accept that Parliament can make changes. If you do not, no meaningful agreement can be formed (ISNL0013). Parliament thus may and should intervene in the societal agreement when deemed necessary. Instrumentalists thus perceive the political intervention in form of the Cockpit as an actual enhancement of the legitimacy of the NCA.

Although these differences between meta-governors might seem stark, several interviewees hover between the two perceptions. While on some matters they move towards an instrumentalist perceptions, on other the complementarist perception is expressed. These ambiguities come forward in the discussion about the other democratic values.

#### *4.3.2 Voice, due deliberation and accountability in the NCA*

Where democratic anchorage draws the outlines of the perceptions., the details of how democratic legitimacy should look like are reflected in the themes of voice, due deliberation and accountability. Within their broader perception of legitimacy the meta-governors expressed differences in their details.

##### *4.3.2.1 Voice*

For the representation of voices, most meta-governors point towards trade unions, branche organisations and other parties with a broad constituency. As complementary meta-governors indicate:

*“I think that if you add up the memberships of all 150 parties you would get an impressive amount of citizens (...), citizens are represented through both Parliament and the societal parties.” –ISNL0013*

Indicating that memberships are considered equal to representation. By inviting a wide range of societal parties with many members, large amounts of citizens are covered. Critical is to not only invite the *“usual suspects”* (ISNL0007), but cover all corners of the field with a wide range of

different parties. Voices unrepresented by these parties would find representation in Parliament, which emphasises the cruciality of the link with Parliament. Societal representatives are considered complementary to the representation in Parliament.

The common critique that citizens had no place at the negotiation tables is mostly disregarded by questioning whether random citizens would better represent society than actual societal representatives (ISNL0016). Although attempts were made to more directly involve citizens, meta-governors from both perceptions deemed these ineffective.

Though broadly including societal representatives is recognised to help gather commitment and support base, instrumentalists indicate that the input of these parties should only serve as a consultation. Voice is only covered in Parliament:

*“Isn’t the principle of democracy that YOU choose who is your representative? In no way have I had the opportunity to provide input to a proclaimed representative at those tables.”* –ISNL0008

The meta-governor explains that he considers electing your own representatives and providing them input conditional for qualitative representation. Therefore MP’s are legitimate representatives and societal parties not. Here the instrumentalist view is clearly demarcated, Parliament is the source of voice and not the societal parties. However, several meta-governors that indicate legitimacy only comes from Parliament, also argue that societal parties can represent citizens interests. These meta-governors seem to hover between the two perceptions. The differences are thus not so stark as they may seem.

#### 4.3.2.2 Due deliberation

Due deliberation regards an open and fair deliberation, safeguarded by clear process rules and transparency. Regarding open and fair deliberation, chairs and Parliament are crucial.

Interviewees recognise several power differences in networks as parties with a large constituency or resources have a position of power over smaller parties. Furthermore, an agreement with government is *“per definition uneven”* (ISNL0002), due to its authority. Negotiations are therefore never on a leveled playing field. On the one hand independent chairs are considered crucial to mediate these differences (ISNL0004). On the other hand the debate in Parliament is critical as, contrary to the network, there is an institutionalised voting procedure (ISNL0003). The chairs, but predominantly the link with Parliament is thus critical for safeguarding due deliberation in the network.

However, process rules are also considered critical. While politicians are critical for legitimacy, they should not go beyond their role:

*“Politicians have a clear role, but shouldn’t interfere all the time. They have an important role in the beginning, the monitoring and the evaluating, but they should not meddle with everything” – ISNL0012*

When politics interfered through the cockpit, the dynamic of the agreement shifted and politicians disrupted the rules of the game. If you have to interfere during the process, politicians have set insufficient conditions (ISNL0010), adds an administrative representative. Politicians can thus interfere in the beginning and ending of the process, but should “*keep their distance*” (ISNL0007) during the negotiations. Although you might expect otherwise, instrumentalist meta-governors generally agree with this. Not in the least because it was only a part of Parliament that intervened. As a chair indicates:

*“Because of that (red. the Cockpit) it was a political debate in a backroom, while the rest of the parties outside of government were put at a huge backlog which impeded a fair and open democratic debate.” – ISNL0011*

The Cockpit is thus believed to have hindered an open democratic debate in Parliament. Considering both perceptions deem the Parliamentary debate critical, this is indicated as a serious challenge to legitimacy by both perceptions. Nevertheless, even opposition MP’s acknowledge that in a multi-party coalition dualistic decision-making is not always the most effective. A trade-off between effectiveness and legitimacy can thus be recognised. Effectiveness is also considered regarding transparency. Though both instrumentalists and complementarists value transparency:

*“The idea of a breeding chicken should not be disturbed was important in all phases of the agreement” –ISNL0002*

Although transparency is important, public negotiations are believed to be ineffective as actors behave more cautious, impeding qualitative deliberation. Transparency should therefore be given about the process, participants, organisation and intermediary results and progress, but the content of negotiations should remain confidential (ISNL0004). Complete transparency is thus not deemed crucial for democratic legitimacy on behalf of effectiveness.

#### 4.3.2.3 Accountability

Concerning accountability the meta-governors are generally in agreement. First and foremost, all meta-governors state that formal accountability should flow vertically from the minister through Parliament. *“As it was Cabinet who signed Paris...”* (ISNL0011) Cabinet is responsible for that commitment and holds the primary accountability. All meta-governors find formal accountability being run through Parliament critical. Surprisingly, both instrumentalists and complementarists also acknowledge the value of horizontal accountability structures between stakeholders. As accountability helps safeguard performance, instrumentalists see the value of stakeholders holding each other accountable. Whereas complementarists argue that when societal parties help decide, they are also accountable for their agreements. This also helps in their performance:

*“If you make people co-accountable, you bind them and things get done. While if you impose how things should be done, noone will make a run for it”* – ISNL0010

For the implementation, it is thus important to make stakeholders accountable. Next to the formal accountability stakeholders thus should be tied in a horizontal form of accountability. Horizontal accountability thus largely stems from effectiveness arguments for both perceptions.

How this accountability should be enforced is dependent on how consequences are attributed. As government is the only party that can force, some see consequences only coming from government. However, within horizontal accountability naming and shaming is also considered a consequence tied to bad performance. Meta-governors indicate that severe consequences are unpreferable, as you want to work towards a solution and not actually punish. Generally this accountability should thus be informal. Though some meta-governors are sceptical about the informal consequences and root for more *“formally determined”* consequences in the horizontal accountability (ISNL0007).

Meta-governors thus agree that formal accountability through Parliament is crucial for the democratic legitimacy of the process. However, as societal partners play an important part in the execution of the compromised measures, horizontal accountability is seen important for effectiveness.

## 5 Analysis

*With the findings of the documents and interviews presented, this chapter will reflect on these findings and consider its theoretical implications. First, a reflection on perceptions on democratic legitimacy is given, whereafter the meta-governance strategies are reflected on and finally the relation between perceptions and strategies is explored. Thereby continuing to answer research question 4,5 and 6.*

### 5.1 Reflecting on perceptions of democratic legitimacy in the NCA

The first part of this research set out to identify how the meta-governors of the NCA think about democratic legitimacy. While in theory four perceptions are identified, it is unclear how these theoretical perceptions are reflected in practice. The findings present two perceptions of meta-governors: an instrumental and a complementary perception. However, while the majority supports a complementary perception and a few an instrumental, several meta-governors seem to argue for ideas of both perceptions. Furthermore, both perceptions are found in all meta-governance roles. It thus seems that the perceptions are not linked to political, administrative or independent roles. This section will further elaborate on these findings and how they relate to the theoretical debate.

#### 5.1.1 Governance networks as instruments of effectiveness

The first identified perception is the instrumentalist perception. In this perception networks are considered a viable means to consult society about possible solutions for pressing societal issues and obtain commitment and support for these. However, legitimacy is obtained in Parliament. Reflecting the incompatible conjecture (Klijn & Skelcher, 2007), this perception uses the primacy of politics to show that Parliament should be the primary source of judgements and policy-decisions.

Contrary to this conjecture however, the instrumentalists do not perceive networks as a threat to representative democracy. When politicians establish a clear framework, stay connected to the process and are in charge of the final decision, democratic legitimacy is not harmed. The fact that networks are considered an instrument, rather than a decision-making body, seems crucial in this argumentation. As final decision are made by representative institutions, accountability structures stay in place, representation of voices is safeguarded in Parliament as well as process rules and transparency. Though the instrumental role of networks reflects arguments of the instrumental conjecture (Klijn & Skelcher, 2007), here this tool is not used to advance partisan interests, but for effective policy-making and implementation.



### *5.1.2 Governance networks as factor in democratic legitimacy*

The complementary perception also acknowledges the value of networks in addressing complex issues, but recognises a complementary value for democracy. They add that democracy is more than representing the majority, but should also include the minority in decision-making. Especially regarding issues with a deep-digging effect on society, like climate policy, it is necessary to involve the affected more directly and not only through Parliamentary majority. Although Parliament is still considered the formal source of democratic legitimacy and should set conditions and make final decisions, complementarists argue that informal legitimacy obtained in society is just as important. Within a societal agreement between societal parties and Cabinet, society has a considerable influence on the formulation of policy while also leaving room for Parliament to formally legitimise this policy. The formal legitimacy of Parliament is thereby considered complemented by an improved informal legitimacy.

Reflecting the complementary conjecture, this perception thus considers networks to attribute to legitimacy. However, the reasons for engaging in a network are slightly different. While the conjecture of Klijn and Skelcher (2007) emphasises challenges to representative democracy regarding citizens' decreasing trust and engagement with politics being mediated by networks (Hirst, 2002; Fung, 2003; Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2016), none of the NCA's meta-governors identify these challenges. Engaging in networks is therefore not considered a general necessity. Only regarding impactful societal issues, the networks are an important complementation to democratic legitimacy. Though not stating so explicitly, this is strongly indicated in the complementarists argumentation. It thus seems that engaging in networks is only crucial in the specific context of grave societal impact.

### *5.1.3 Reflection of the democratic values in the NCA*

While the ideas of all interviewees are largely captured in these perceptions, some meta-governors take a more nuanced stance, arguing for both views. These argumentations are predominantly present in the reflection of democratic values, exemplified in the following: Apart from some pure instrumentalists arguing that only MP's can represent citizens, all meta-governors identify societal parties as adequate representatives, including some who argue legitimacy only obtainable in Parliament. Furthermore, while pure complementarists argue the Cockpit intervention as taking away from the added legitimacy of the network, several other complementarists describe this as beneficial for the legitimacy of the societal agreement. These ambiguities might be explained by the argumentation behind the meta-governors' perceptions around the safeguarding of democratic values, which are summarised in Figure 9.

The reflection of values is for both perceptions relatively similar, but stems from a different intention. The instrumentalist perception considers all values reflected in Parliament, but sees a broad representation of voices, open and clear deliberation process and both vertical and horizontal accountability structures beneficial for an effective network. Consequently, the instrumentalists shape their ideal network similar to complementarists. Thereby thus incorporating sources of legitimacy in the network. Similarly, complementarists see legitimacy issues like full representation, fair deliberation or formal accountability best covered in Parliament.

**Figure 9 Reflection of democratic values in meta-governors' perceptions.**

<b>Democratic value</b>	<b>Complementary</b>	<b>Instrumentalist</b>
<b>Voice</b>	A broad inclusion of societal parties adequately represents citizens. Unrepresented parties are covered in Parliament.	A broad inclusion of societal parties helps obtaining commitment and support base. Voice is however safeguarded in Parliament.
<b>Due deliberation</b>	Clear process rules, transparency about results and equal deliberation are important, however for an institutionalised voting ratio Parliament is crucial.	Clear process rules are important for a qualitative outcomes. Due deliberation is safeguarded in Parliament.
<b>Accountability</b>	Formal accountability in Parliament is crucial. But societal parties are accountable for their own agreements and render account via informal horizontal structures.	Formal accountability in Parliament is crucial. For safeguarding the implementation an informal horizontal accountability structure is beneficial.

The role both perceptions give to Parliament thus seems to influence how the meta-governors believe the democratic values should be safeguarded. In the theoretical debate these values are reflected in the full primacy of politics, or need to be completely covered in the network. Thereby requiring high standards for the representation of interests, openness and quality of the deliberation process and accountability structures. However, the identified perceptions thus allow Parliament to safeguard some (complementary) or all (instrumental) of these issues. By doing so the theoretical problems regarding the primacy of politics (Klijn & Skelcher, 2007; Sorensen & Torfing, 2009; Papadopoulos Y. , 2016) and a fully democratised network are evaded. The standards for safeguarding the values in the network are thus not as high as in the theoretical argumentation, while the broader anchoring of the network in Parliament might help overcome these theoretical boundaries.

The findings thus present two perceptions about democratic legitimacy, an instrumentalist and a complementary perception. While borrowing some theoretical arguments, the more pragmatic character of both perceptions seems to find a way around

some of the pressing issues in the theoretical debate, namely the primacy of politics, the challenges to representative democracy and the complete safeguarding of democratic values. Where some meta-governors are really explicit and rigid about their ideas about legitimacy, several meta-governors take a more nuanced stance, using arguments for both perceptions. It therefore seems that the two found perceptions are ends of a spectrum, with several tones of grey in the middle.

## 5.2 Reflecting on meta-governance strategies in the NCA

The second part of the research aimed to identify who employed which meta-governance strategies aimed at democratising the NCA. While the datasets largely confirmed each other's statements, the interviews provided several complementary insights about the motivation or practical application of certain strategies. All four meta-governance strategies are found in the NCA. In addition, the three identified meta-governance roles all seem to have had a part in shaping the democratic legitimacy of the NCA. These findings are summarised in Figure 10. Explaining this figure, first will be discussed how the different democratic values are targeted by meta-governance strategies, whereafter they are connected to the meta-governance roles.

Figure 10 Meta-governance strategies with their aim and employer.

Strategy	Measure	Targeted value	Function	Meta-governance role
<b>Framing</b>	Setting the deliberative, discursive and financial conditions and objectives	Democratic Anchorage, Due deliberation	Cabinet, coalition and MP's	Political + administrative
	Monitoring of adherence to the framework	Accountability, Democratic Anchorage	Administrative representatives	Administrative
<b>Institutional Design</b>	Open invitation of stakeholders	Voice	Cabinet + chairs	Political + administrative + independent
	Organising the link with Parliament	Democratic Anchorage	Cabinet	Political + administrative
	Setting up vertical and horizontal accountability structures	Accountability	Cabinet	Political + administrative
	Providing the building blocks for a qualitative deliberation through organising arenas and role divisions	Due deliberation	Cabinet + chairs + secretaries	Political + administrative + independent
<b>Process Management</b>	Managing the agenda, organising negotiations, distributing information and aiming for consensus	Due deliberation	Chairs + secretaries	Independent
	Interfering with the composition of the network	Voice	Chairs + MP's	Independent + Political
<b>Direct Participation</b>	Ensuring horizontal accountability in the implementation-tables	Accountability	Chairs + administrative representatives	Independent + administrative
	Direct interference via the Cockpit	Democratic Anchorage	Cabinet + coalition	Political
	Safeguarding an open deliberation and agenda	Due deliberation	Chairs + secretaries	Independent

### *5.2.1 Shaping the NCA – reflecting on meta-governance strategies*

As can be seen in figure 10, the meta-governors of the NCA managed to employ a full-fledged meta-governance strategy by combining all four tools. In addition all four values are targeted. The lion's share of the democratising meta-governance strategies are found in the hands-off strategies. Through framing the most important conditions are set that largely shaped the deliberations and allowed for politicians to have a considerable presence in the NCA. The fact that some meta-governors point towards the restrictiveness of these frames shows that the direction of the deliberations were largely shaped with this strategy. In the institutional design this role was deliberately developed further by phasing the process, allowing for Parliament to monitor and steer in-between the different phases.

Furthermore, the institutional design sets the most important directions for voice and accountability. Regarding voice, only contributive societal parties are invited. Though via a process of open invitations, non-contributive and opposing parties are excluded. Additionally, while the ministries are made formally responsible for a successful implementation, the implementation-tables allow for informal streamlining and committing stakeholders to their agreements. Thereby setting the vertical and horizontal accountability structures. As in the design also the general organisation and tasks-division for the independent meta-governors are determined, the building blocks for deliberation are also provided here.

This leaves little room for further shaping the democratic values in the hands-on strategies. However, though bound by the framework and task-definition, the chairs are left free to organise the deliberations. Shaping these to aim for consensus they try to level the playing field. Nevertheless no active (dis)empowering of stakeholders is done, as a levelled playing field is found in the final decision of Parliament. Together with organising the transparency of the NCA, process management thus safeguards most of due deliberation. While these process management strategies are largely employed by participating parties, these strategies are relatively similar to the direct participating strategies, with the addition of ensuring accountability in the implementation tables. The most remarkable direct participation strategy is the Cockpit intervention, which enhances democratic anchorage. As Cabinet and the coalition wanted more grip on the NCA they first indirectly shaped the agreement via the administrative representatives. While after the concept-agreement they made various adjustments without the societal parties, which led to the final agreement.

### *5.2.2 Shaping the NCA – reflecting on meta-governance roles*

Contrary to the perceptions, the employed meta-governance strategies are closely tied to the meta-governance roles. Again a clear divide is identified between the hands-off and hands-on

strategies. Where the hands-off strategies are predominantly employed by political meta-governors, assisted by administrative meta-governors, the hands-on strategies are left for administrative and independent meta-governors. Politicians thus indeed delegate more executive tasks, as identified in theory (Sorensen & Torfing, 2016; Gjaltema, Biesbroek, & Termeer, 2019). Nevertheless, being responsible for the better part of democratic anchorage, voice and vertical accountability, politicians can be regarded the most important meta-governors for democratising networks. Only regarding due deliberation the independent meta-governors dominate the field.

It must be noted, however, that it are predominantly politicians of Cabinet and coalition MP's that have this influence. The rest of Parliament was only involved in some framing and formalising the final decision. The role of administrative meta-governors herein must not be underestimated, as they heavily supported executive politicians in all their tasks. However, though most likely substantial, the influence of these administrators is difficult to determine as they are subordinate to the final judgement of political executives for most of their decisions. Administrators themselves confirm to correspond heavily with their ministers on multiple occasions. Nevertheless, the democratising of the NCA can really considered a group effort of all three meta-governors. Though this confirms the theoretical scepticism of political meta-governors providing full-fledged meta-governance strategies (Koppenjan, Kars, & van der Voort, 2011), as a group effort a full-fledged strategy was provided. Considering that politicians were left all value judgements and final decisions, this might not be as problematic as theorists would argue.

The role of independent meta-governors herein is rather interesting. Acknowledging the authoritative position of government, interviewees indicate that independent meta-governors are crucial. From their independent role they help level the playing field between society and government, deemed crucial for openness of stakeholders and thus qualitative deliberation. This seems a refreshing new insight, as in theory such a critical role for non-governmental actors in safeguarding due deliberation is not recognised.

### 5.3 The relation between perceptions and meta-governance strategies

In the NCA thus a broad range of meta-governance roles and strategies is found. While also two perceptions are distinguished. Though similarities can be identified between the perceptions and strategies, it is rather difficult to undeniably state that these perceptions have directly influenced the employed meta-governance. While meta-governance is neatly tied to the role-division, the perceptions are not and several interviewees are committed to arguments of both perceptions. Additionally, the NCA's meta-governance is employed by multiple actors. It is

therefore very difficult to link individual or groups of perceptions with certain employed strategies.

Furthermore, choices regarding democratic legitimacy are not easily isolated from choices regarding effectiveness. It is indicated that in the institutional design deliberate choices are made regarding democratic anchorage, that being a primary issue from the forgoing agreement (EA). However, regarding the other values several meta-governors implicate that there has been a dilemma between legitimacy and effectiveness. Regarding voice, for example, a conscious choice was made for an open process of invitations, to allow for a wide range of societal representatives participate. Nevertheless, the inclusion of opposing or non-contributive parties was considered to harm the effectiveness of the negotiations and these were therefore excluded. An effectiveness argument is also made with regard to keeping the negotiations in confidentiality, which aids a more open debate, but hampers full transparency. Though these may be considered reasonable choices, they do display a trade-off between democratic legitimacy and effectiveness.

On the other hand, within the choice for horizontal accountability structures a synergy with effectiveness is identified, as the implementation tables help to safeguard accountability as well as streamlining an effective implementation. While these synergies and trade-offs are not uncommon in network governance (Klijn, Steijn, & Edelenbos, 2010; Provan & Kenis, 2008), they do hinder the isolation of a perception of democratic legitimacy being the decisive factor in the choice for a certain meta-governance strategy. Nevertheless, it does show that democratic legitimacy is definitely not the only dilemma meta-governors deal with. Unsurprisingly, meta-governance is thus shaped by more than just ideas about democratic legitimacy.

### *5.3.1 The role of Parliament in the NCA*

Although there are thus several factors that make it difficult to attach hard statements to the link between perceptions and meta-governance, some interesting insights can be provided. The first is related to the role of Parliament in the NCA. Both perceptions indicate that Parliament is a crucial factor in democratic legitimacy. Though differing on the being it the only factor or not, both these perceptions value the safeguarding of democratic anchorage highly and indicate that Parliament should be closely linked to the NCA. It can therefore be assumed that all of the NCA's meta-governors would design a network closely anchored in representative democracy. Furthermore, as identified, in the design of the NCA is deliberately chosen to closely link Parliament into the network.

Considering the role of Parliament in the perceptions and the deliberate choice to strengthen the legitimacy of the NCA by involving Parliament closely in the network, it is safe to

assume that this part of the perception about democratic legitimacy has influenced this deliberate choice. This statement is only strengthened by the fact that in the theoretical debate about legitimacy in governance networks the role of representative democracy is not set in stone. As authors recognise several challenges to the representative model, some perceptions argue that the governance networks should complement or help transform representative institutions (Hirst, 2002; Fung, 2003; Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2016). The challenges of disengagement and decreasing trust are, however, not recognised by any of the interviewed meta-governors and they thus still consider the representative model the most legitimate.

It is thus strongly indicated that the democratic anchorage part of meta-governors' perception is an individual factor in the shaping of the network. However, it is very likely that in perceptions that value Parliament less crucial, this part of the perception stands not so separate from other dilemmas.

### *5.3.2 Perceptions and pragmatic meta-governance*

As seen in section 5.1.3, this mutually agreed role of Parliament allows for a similar, more pragmatic safeguarding of voice, due deliberation and accountability. While instrumentalists see all these values reflected in Parliament, complementarists find the reflection of values in the network important, but see issues regarding full representation, equal deliberation and formal accountability solved in the link with Parliament. Thereby the theoretical issues regarding primacy of politics or a fully democratised network are evaded. Consequently both perceptions allow for more pragmatic choices regarding these values. As seen in the inviting of only contributive stakeholders and keeping the negotiations in confidentiality, effectiveness was chosen over full safeguarding of voice and due deliberation. Additionally, while power differences are recognised, no active (dis)empowerment of stakeholders was employed. Meta-governors indicate to have made these choices because the link with Parliament was considered to account for a better safeguarding of these values.

It thus seems that the crucial role of Parliament in the perceptions provided room to make more pragmatic choices for the network. As Parliament safeguarded democratic legitimacy issues, in the network effectiveness could be chosen over legitimacy. This would indicate that the meta-governors' perception of democratic legitimacy made these more effective choices possible. The perceptions might thus have an mediating effect on the role of effectiveness arguments in choices for meta-governance strategies. However, this is merely an indication as it could also be effectiveness arguments alone that resulted in these choices. All in all, it is clear that effectiveness and legitimacy are difficult to isolate from each other. When



considering the democratising power of meta-governors their effectiveness goals should thus be taken into consideration.

### *5.3.3 Liquidity of perceptions reflected in the Cockpit*

The interventions of the Cockpit provide an interesting example regarding the liquidity of perceptions. The NCA's meta-governors indicate that the NCA started out with the intention to let societal parties be part of the policy- and decision-making regarding climate policy, as is also identified in the documents. An agreement was to be made between Cabinet and societal parties, in which Parliament would have a clear role in the three phases of the process and would make the final decisions about forthcoming policies. Herein can the complementary perception be recognised. Societal parties would not only be consulted, but would actually be a deciding party in the end-product, before the Parliamentary approval that is. Considering that the majority of meta-governors support this perception and indicate that this was how the NCA was intended in its design, it can be assumed that the NCA was designed from a more complementary perception.

Nevertheless, when after the proposal on guidelines (phase 1) the impact of the negotiated policies became tangible, the interviewees identify a shift in the NCA's intentions. With the Cockpit, the coalition and Cabinet tried to take back some of the control initially given to societal parties. After the concept-agreement (phase 2) they even took full control over the agreement, adjusting it without much inclusion of societal parties before presenting it to Parliament as the final agreement. Meta-governors indicate this as a shift from an agreement where societal parties are co-deciders, to a consultation where government makes the decisions. Herein the instrumental perception is recognised, where the network serves as a consultation mechanism. The perceptions of governing politicians thus seem to have shifted from a complementary to an instrumentalist perception. This would mean that perceptions are not rock-solid ideologies and can shift even in a short time span. However, as not almost no governing politicians were interviewed, this shift in perception remains an indication.

Nevertheless, while the shifting perceptions would provide the attractive indication that perceptions influence network design, theory provides another explanation for the identified change of heart. Namely, one of the barriers for politicians becoming meta-governors is the role shift from primary decision-maker to facilitator (Sorensen & Torfing, 2016). This shift results in a role-struggle, which is accelerated by media demanding for strong political leadership (Bennet, 2007) and politicians, as winners of the election, feeling responsible and entitled to be the primary decision-makers. Consequently, while willing to share their power at first, later politicians often try to regain control (Klijn & Skelcher, 2007). The Cockpit intervention displays a

similar situation where the winners of the election try to take back their decision-making power. While this political struggle might explain the assumed shift in perceptions, it might also explain the change of heart by itself. The shifting perceptions are thus not the only explanation for the changed intentions in the NCA.

Be it from a role-struggle or shifting perceptions, this change of heart has two serious implications. While several meta-governors perceive these interventions as enhancing the NCA's legitimacy, a threat to legitimacy for both perceptions is also indicated. Via the Cockpit, the coalition had an additional information and influence on the NCA, putting other MP's on an information and steering backlog. Thereby moving the political debate into '*backrooms*' and hindering a qualitative debate in Parliament. Considering the critical role of Parliament in both perceptions, this threatens legitimacy. In addition, the chairs indicated that the Cockpit was perceived as changing the rules of the game and led to discontented societal parties. Though generally committing to the agreement, when the input of society is continuously disregarded, the relation of society with politics might deteriorate (Edelenbos & van Meerkerk, 2016). While both perceptions indicate that therefore politics should keep their distance during the negotiations, the political struggle might thus result in challenges to democracy. When evaluating the democratising capacity of meta-governors, this changing behaviour should be taken into account.

Reflecting on the relation between perceptions of the NCA's meta-governors and their strategies it is thus clear that the crucial role Parliament given in these perceptions seems to have an important role in the shaping of the NCA. However, democratic legitimacy is not easily isolated from other factors that seem to influence meta-governance strategies, like effectiveness. For considering the meta-governors' role as guardians of legitimacy it is thus important to take its whole strategy into account.

## 6 Conclusion and Discussion

### 6.1 Towards a final answer

This study set out to examine what role meta-governors' perception about democratic legitimacy has in how they shape governance networks to be democratic. In doing so its aim was to learn more about how the theoretical perceptions about democratic legitimacy in governance networks are found in practice and gain much required empirical insights into the application of democratising meta-governance. This study therefore departed from the following research question:

*What role might meta-governors' perceptions about democratic legitimacy have in the way they shape governance networks to be democratic, in case of the Dutch National Climate Agreement?*

For answering this question the study has been centred around six sub-questions. To provide a full-fledged final answer, these sub-questions need answering first. This section therefore proceeds to answer the sub-questions, ultimately providing a concluding answer on the main question. Hereafter the limitations, theoretical, societal and practical implications and forthcoming recommendations are presented.

The first two questions set out to conceptualise democratic legitimacy in governance networks and meta-governance. Democratic legitimacy in governance networks can be obtained by safeguarding voice, due deliberation, accountability and democratic anchorage. Different perceptions were identified regarding how these values should be reflected in governance networks, namely an incompatible, complementary, transitional and instrumental perception, largely based on the conjectures of Klijn and Skelcher (2007). As is seen in these perceptions, the safeguarding of these values in the networks is not a ensured given. Therefore scholars point towards political and administrative meta-governors, who with a series of hands-off and hands-on strategies can shape and manage these networks to become democratic. Nonetheless, while the perceptions provide different norms about how these networks should be shaped, these norms remain largely unlinked with the theory about meta-governance. This research therefore set out to link these bodies of literature by identifying which norms are reflected in meta-governors' perceptions about democratic legitimacy and what role these perceptions have in how meta-governors democratise networks.

To do this 16 interviews and 17 documents were analysed in the context of the Dutch National Climate Agreement. With climate policy risen to the top of political agendas and network governance a common mechanism used to produce these policies, it is vital to analyse

how democratic legitimacy is safeguarded in this specific field and provide insights in how this might be improved. With a broad range of meta-governors and several deliberate choices regarding democratic legitimacy, the NCA has proven a relevant case in this field and provided several interesting insights.

#### *6.1.1 Conclusions regarding meta-governance in the NCA*

The fourth research question regarded the meta-governance roles and strategies identified in the NCA. While providing the empirical tools to answer the main research problem, several noteworthy conclusions can be drawn.

The first being that the NCA's meta-governors have managed to employ a full-fledged meta-governance strategy. By combining all four meta-governance tools and targeting all four democratic values, the requirements for a successful meta-governance strategy are fulfilled. Although the theoretical scepticism towards political meta-governors being able to provide a full-fledged meta-governance strategy is hereby confirmed (Koppenjan, Kars, & van der Voort, 2011), the political, administrative and independent meta-governors of the NCA did manage to produce a full-fledged strategy. Though hands-on strategies were delegated, as predicted in theory (Sorensen & Torfing, 2016), Cabinet and the coalition had the largest role in shaping the democratic values. The most important value judgements and decisions were therefore left for politicians. Considering that it are these judgements and decisions that make politicians crucial in democratising meta-governance, it might not be so problematic that other meta-governance tasks are delegated.

The second conclusion is related to the role of independent meta-governors. Though theory does not speak of non-governmental actors being crucial for the democratising capacity of meta-governance, for safeguarding an open and qualitative deliberation these were considered vital by the NCA's meta-governors. These independent meta-governors, when given enough authority by government, might thus better safeguard due deliberation than governmental actors could. Thereby potentially further easing the pressure on political meta-governance and increasing the democratic potential of governance networks. Being very preliminary, it is necessary to further explore this potential.

#### *6.1.2 Conclusions regarding perceptions in the NCA*

The fifth research question aimed to identify meta-governors' perceptions around democratic legitimacy. Two conclusions can be drawn.

The first of which confirms the assumption that the NCA's meta-governors would reflect different perceptions. Two perceptions are identified. The instrumentalist perception sees legitimacy only obtained in Parliament, but acknowledges the beneficial character of networks

to gather support, commitment and knowledge for addressing complex societal issues. The complementary perception also regards Parliament a key factor for legitimacy, but sees legitimacy complemented by an informal legitimacy obtained in networks. While the majority supports the complementary perception and a few the instrumentalist, several seem to hover between the two perceptions. The crucial role both perceptions give to Parliament seems to affect the way voice, due deliberation and accountability are reflected in the perceptions. Namely, these reflections are relatively similar. This might explain why several meta-governors take a more nuanced stance and present arguments for two perceptions. It therefore seems that the two found perceptions are ends of a spectrum, with several tones of grey in the middle.

The second conclusion drawn is that the theoretical norms are only partially reflected in empiricism. Though the NCA's perceptions reflect a similar main line, several crucial arguments from theoretical debate are disregarded. Both perceptions disregard the challenges of decreasing trust and engagement in representative institutions (Hirst, 2002; Fung, 2003; Wagenaar, 2016), while neither of the perceptions seem to recognise the incompatibility argument that networks would challenge the primacy of politics (Klijn & Skelcher, 2007). The role both perceptions give to Parliament leaves the primacy of politics intact, while also allowing the network to contribute to policy. As values are partially or completely covered in Parliament, the standard for safeguarding these values in the network is lower than legitimacy scholars would demand. The most pressing issues in this debate are thus not recognised by the NCA's meta-governors, which implicates that the theoretical norms are not completely reflected in empiricism.

## 6.2 Conclusions regarding perceptions and their relation with meta-governance-answering the main question

The sixth research question aimed to identify what role the found perceptions have in the employing of meta-governance strategies in the NCA, which leads to answering the main research question. It must be noted that this research will not be able to empirically prove a direct influence of an individual perception on a specific strategy due to several reasons, the most prominent being that it is impossible to isolate a perception as a motivation for a strategy from other possible motivations. Nevertheless, the aim of this research was to explore what role meta-governors' perceptions might have in their strategies to democratise networks and the following conclusion can be drawn.

The main conclusion with regard to the main research problem is that perceptions of democratic legitimacy are not the only factor in a meta-governor's shaping of democratic legitimacy in a network. This conclusion falls apart in two arguments.

The first regarding how perceptions are a factor. As is established in both perceptions, the role of Parliament is crucial for democratic legitimacy. Meta-governors indicate to therefore deliberately incorporated a clear link with Parliament in the design and process of the NCA. It is thus indicated that the incorporated link with Parliament stems from the meta-governors' perceptions, be it an instrumental or complementary one. In that sense, at least the democratic anchorage part of the perception is a factor in democratising meta-governance strategies.

However, the second part of this argumentation regards that effectiveness arguments are closely tied to the shaping of voice, due deliberation and accountability in the network. Namely, to benefit the effectiveness of the negotiations non-contributive and opposing voices are excluded and negotiations are kept in confidentiality. Effectiveness is thus related to choices regarding the safeguarding of these values, though it seems that the role Parliament is given in the identified perceptions leaves room for these pragmatic choices. The perceptions might thus have a mediating effect on the role effectiveness has in the choices regarding democratising meta-governance strategies. Confirming earlier findings, synergies and trade-offs regarding legitimacy and effectiveness are thus present in the democratising of networks (Provan & Kenis, 2008; Klijn, Steijn, & Edelenbos, 2010).

While regarding democratic anchorage the perceptions thus seem to have been an independent factor in the democratising strategies, regarding the strategies for safeguarding the other values effectiveness was an important factor. The perceptions about legitimacy is thus not an isolated factor in the employment of meta-governance, but at least tied to effectiveness. Furthermore, it is very likely that in perceptions that value Parliament less crucial, democratic anchorage stands not so separate from other dilemmas like effectiveness. Effectiveness and meta-governors' perceptions thus both seem to have a role in democratising meta-governance strategies.

Additionally, there is a strong indication that the role-struggle of politicians identified in theory (Sorensen & Torfing, 2016; Klijn & Skelcher, 2007) potentially harms the network's legitimacy. In the NCA a shift of intentions is witnessed regarding the decision-making power of societal parties. Which is possibly explained by a shift in perceptions caused by the struggle of politicians to give away parts of their primacy or explained by this struggle in itself. In the events that followed, both the relation with government and formal legitimacy were challenged. While scholars already identified this role-struggle as a potential barrier to political meta-governors

successfully democratising networks, these events seem to confirming this (Sorensen & Torfing, 2016; Klijn & Skelcher, 2007).

#### *6.2.1 Considering theoretical, societal and practical implications*

The findings of this research thus show that meta-governance has a real democratising potential, as exemplified by the conclusion that, unlike theory suggests (Koppenjan, Kars, & van der Voort, 2011), a group of different meta-governors can employ a full-fledged democratising meta-governance strategy, while leaving the crucial role of politicians intact. Some substantial barriers to meta-governors' democratising capacity are thus not insurmountable.

However, the normative ideas of meta-governors about democratic legitimacy are not the only factor in how they aim to shape the democracy in governance networks. Namely, effectiveness is closely tied to considerations about network design and management, possibly resulting in trade-offs with legitimacy. Though the role of effectiveness may not be surprising considering meta-governors objectives next to democratising networks, it is important to take these possible trade-offs into consideration when evaluating meta-governors role as guardians of legitimacy. When effectiveness choices outweigh the democratic norms, legitimacy is challenged and the crucial role of meta-governors needs to be revalued. However, the fact that perceptions might mediate the role of effectiveness arguments in meta-governance strategies brings hope for their democratising potential. It is thus worth further exploring this relation.

Furthermore, though the meta-governors disregard some of the most crucial arguments around democratic legitimacy in governance networks, the role they give to Parliament seems to help them evade some of these critical issues. The broader anchoring of governance networks in a political framework might thus provide a practical solution for these theoretical issues. On the other hand, governance scholars would most likely consider this evasion flawed. The unlinked theoretical debate about democratic legitimacy and application of meta-governance might therefore result in less legitimate networks. Extracting the theoretical norms into the practical application of meta-governance might thus be vital to further develop the democratic potential of governance networks.

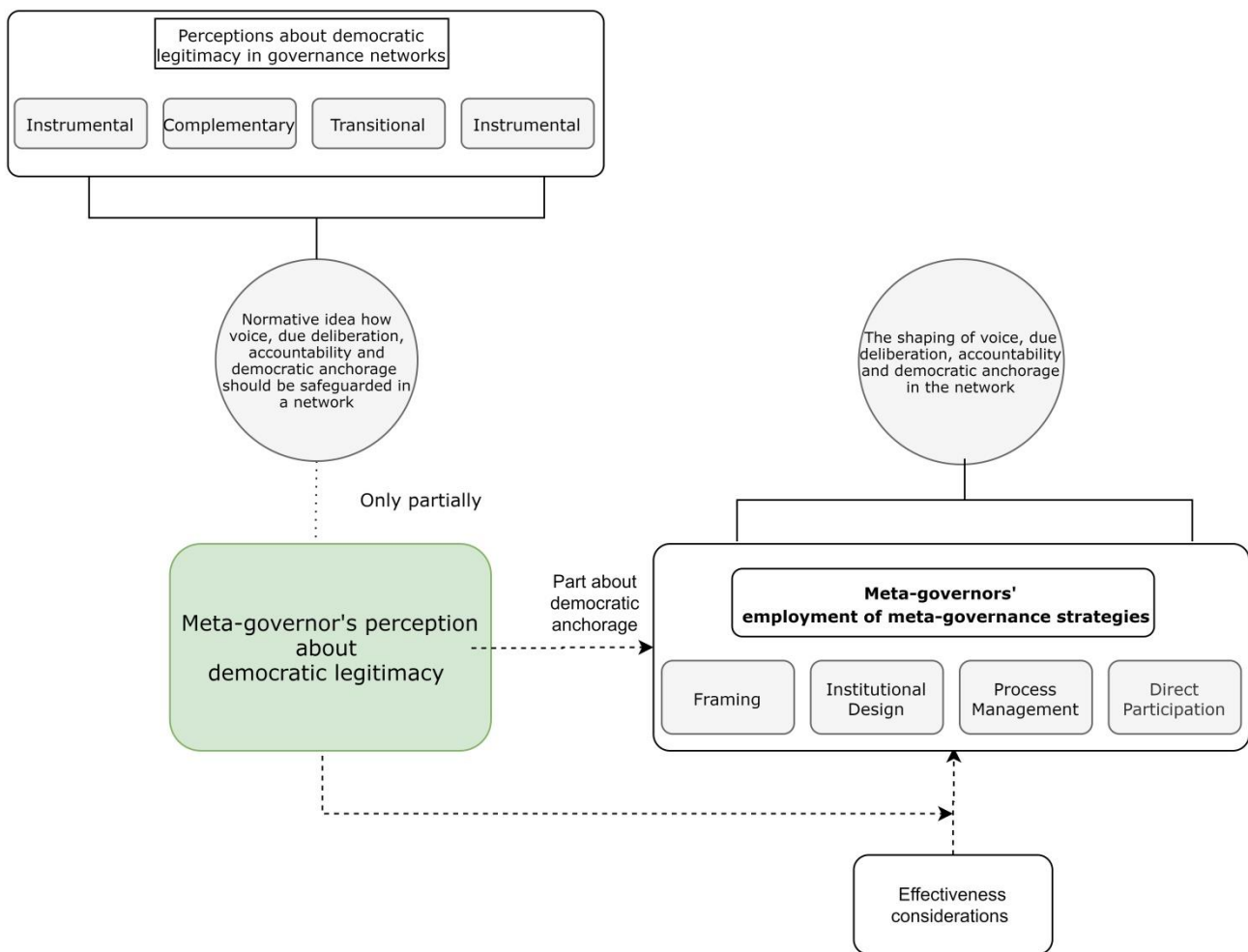
Though the NCA's meta-governors have done a valiant job at democratising their network, still several boundaries exist to meta-governors becoming the guardians of legitimacy. The last verdict about the legitimacy of governance networks and democratising capacity of meta-governors is thus not yet passed. Although not providing conclusive answers on how to democratise climate governance, considering the magnitude of climate issues and governance networks increasingly being used to address these, it is not unlikely more Climate Agreements are to come, definitely in the Netherlands. The findings of this study might prove helpful for

designing and managing the legitimacy of these future agreements by showing where possible struggles and pitfalls lie.

Furthermore, these insights can provide some practical recommendations that might help overcoming the democratic struggle in future climate agreements. Namely, the political role-struggle witnessed in the NCA was sparked when political parties realised the impact of climate policy only when the process was already initiated and a deciding role to societal parties had been given. When the process would commence with an exploring phase, where government together with societal parties explores potential policy routes, the impact of these routes would become tangible in this phase. Through political debate could then be decided if government would like to proceed with a network agreement or a more traditional policy development, possibly in cooperation with stakeholders. A certain process might help overcome the struggle of politicians and protect the relation between societal parties and government. Thereby future climate agreements, or other societal agreements for that matter, might be more effective and closer to a safeguarded democratic legitimacy. The research findings drawn from this case-study would suggest an adjusted conceptual model, captured in Figure 11.



**Figure 11 Adjusted conceptual model based on this case-study.**



### 6.3 Limitations and future research

These conclusions and indications should, however, not be regarded without its limitations. Although within the research strategy choices were made for safeguarding the validity, reliability and replicability of this study, being a qualitative single-case study certain limitations apply. While the qualitative approach has allowed to dive deep into the variables of this study, a real influence cannot be proved. Projection of its conclusions should thus be done with care. As this research was undertaken in the Netherlands, where bargaining and compromises typify the political culture, the practice of governance networks might be more common than other countries. Furthermore, considering the impactful and politically sensitive character of the NCA, governance networks in other countries or in less impactful policy fields might produce different results. Extracting the conclusions of this research out of its context should thus be done with care.

Furthermore, the validity of this study might have been improved by including the views of executive political officeholders. Though the administrative representatives are likely to

reflect their views, being responsible for several design choices and political interferences their views would have helped making a stronger case. Additionally, more MP's of the coalition might have a similar beneficial effect. These potential candidates were however limited in their availability due to the COVID-19 crisis during the data-collection phase and could therefore not be included.

Finally, the limited time and scope of this study prevented from exploring meta-governance strategies as a whole. In that sense, the role of effectiveness and other possible strategy motivations are not taken into account. Considering the findings, to fully grasp the democratising capacity and role of meta-governors future research would do well to further dive into how meta-governance strategies come about and how the perception about democratic legitimacy and effectiveness might be related. Additionally, further engaging in research that links the theoretical debate about legitimacy with meta-governance might help meta-governors fulfil their potential as guardians of legitimacy. When the theoretical norms about legitimacy become more closely incorporated into the practice of meta-governance, the legitimising of governance networks might be a step closer.

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# Appendices

## 1 Interviews

Here a full list of interviewees is provided. In total 16 meta-governors were interviewed, from which 6 administrative, 6 independent and 4 political. For the MP's is added if they were opposition or coalition. Furthermore, interviewees were asked how they wanted to be attributed in this report, therefore some roles are not named. All interviews were conducted between 10-04-2020 and 13-05-2020.

Interviewcode	Function/role	Type of Meta-Governor	Date
ISNL0001	–	Administrative	10-04-2020
ISNL0002	Independent Secretary/Civil servant	Administrative (in an independent role)	10-04-2020
ISNL0003	Chair	Independent	17-04-2020
ISNL0004	Independent secretary	Independent	17-04-2020
ISNL0005	–	Independent	20-04-2020
ISNL0006	Chair	Independent	22-04-2020
ISNL0007	MP (opposition)	Political	24-04-2020
ISNL0008	Civil servant	Administrative	28-04-2020
ISNL0009	MP (coalition)	Political	29-04-2020
ISNL0010	Administrative representative	Administrative	01-05-2020
ISNL0011	Chair	Independent	04-05-2020
ISNL0012	Chair	Independent	05-05-2020
ISNL0013	Government facilitator	Administrative	06-05-2020
ISNL0014	MP(opposition)	Political	08-05-2020
ISNL0015	Administrative representative	Administrative	13-05-2020
ISNL0016	MP (opposition)	Political	13-05-2020

## 2 Analysed documents

Here a full list of the 15 analysed documents is provided, ordered by date. The document code shows the documents reference in the text. All documents are publicly available via [klimaataakkoord.nl](https://klimaataakkoord.nl), by typing in the title in the search bar all documents can be tracked. Except for D1, while this document is referred to in other letters it is not on [klimaataakkoord.nl](https://klimaataakkoord.nl) as this letter is the first Cabinet's reference to the NCA. This document is publicly available at:

<https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/kst-32813-163.html>.



Document code	Document Type	Date	Title
<b>D1</b>	Letter to Parliament	08-12-2017	“Kabinetsaanpak Klimaatbeleid” Identification code: 32 813 Nr 157
<b>D2</b>	Letter to Parliament	23-02-2018	“Kabinetsinzet voor het Klimaatakkoord”
<b>D3</b>	Letters between Cabinet and the NCA	23-02-2018	“Opdracht voorzitter sectortafel Gebouwde omgeving”
<b>D4</b>	Letters between Cabinet and the NCA	23-02-2018	“Opdracht voorzitter sectortafel Landbouw en Landgebruik”
<b>D5</b>	Letters between Cabinet and the NCA	23-02-2018	“Opdracht voorzitter sectortafel Mobiliteit”
<b>D6</b>	Letter to Parliament	19-03-2018	“Aanbod technische briefing Klimaatakkoord”
<b>D7</b>	Letter to Parliament	26-04-2018	“Kamerbrief over doorrekenen inkomenseffecten Klimaatakkoord”
<b>D8</b>	Letter to Parliament	26-04-2018	“Kamerbrief over aanpak betrekken samenleving bij Klimaatakkoord”
<b>D9</b>	Letter to Parliament	12-06-2018	“Kamerbrief over voortgang Klimaatakkoord”
<b>D10</b>	Letters between Cabinet and the NCA	10-07-2018	“Aanbiedingsbrief Voorstel hoofdlijnen Klimaatakkoord”
<b>D11</b>	Letter to Parliament	10-07-2018	“Kamerbrief over voorstel voor hoofdlijnen van een Klimaatakkoord”
<b>D12</b>	Letters between Cabinet and the NCA	28-09-2018	“Aanbiedingsbrief van Klimaatberaadvoorzitter Ed Nijpels aan minister Wiebes van EZK n.a.v. analyses PBL en CPB”
<b>D13</b>	Letters between Cabinet and the NCA	21-12-2018	“Aanbiedingsbrief van Klimaatberaadvoorzitter Ed Nijpels aan minister Wiebes van EZK n.a.v. het Ontwerp van het Klimaatakkoord”
<b>D14</b>	Letter to Parliament	21-12-2018	“Kamerbrief minister Wiebes over aanbidding ontwerp- Klimaatakkoord”
<b>D15</b>	Letter to Parliament	28-06-2019	“Kamerbrief voorstel voor een Klimaatakkoord”

### 3 Interview questions

For the semi-structured interviews the following topic guide was used. The first part of the interviews aimed to identify the perception about democratic legitimacy. For these questions the operationalisation in the four democratic and forthcoming indicators were used to formulate the structure of the interview. This set of questions is considered to provide a complete indication of the perceptions about democratic legitimacy in network governance. All interviewees were asked the following set of questions:

#### 1. Introductory questions

- a. How do you look back at the NCA?
- b. What do you regard as the core values of democratic legitimacy?
- c. How would you see those reflected in a network, like the NCA?

#### 2. Voice

- a. How do you think that the interests of citizens should be included in a network?
  - i. Which interests should be included?
  - ii. Who might be adequate representatives?
  - iii. Who decides which stakeholders should be included?
  - iv. How should the input of stakeholders be attributed? (Are they co-deciding or only providing information)
  - v. (How )should the interests of possible non-participants be included?

#### 3. Due deliberation

- a. What do you regard as a qualitative deliberation process?
  - i. How should decisions be made?
    - a) In consensus or by majority?
    - b) Should all stakeholders get an equal voice?
  - ii. Is it necessary to (dis)empower certain stakeholders?
  - iii. Who can decide on the agenda?
- b. What do you consider a transparent process?
  - i. To what degree should negotiations be public?
  - ii. Is there a difference between transparency within and outside the process?

#### 4. Accountability

- a. How should accountability be organised?
  - i. Should there be horizontal or/and vertical accountability structures?
  - ii. What are the consequences tied to rendering account?
    - a) Are these formal or informal?

#### 5. Democratic anchorage

- a. How do you value the relation between Parliament and the network?
  - i. Who can set the frames in the network?
  - ii. To what degree should Parliament be connected before, during and in the end of the process?
  - iii. Should accountability run through Parliament?
  - iv. Who can make the final decision?

6. Societal Agreement

- a. How would you define the NCA?
  - i. As a societal agreement or as a political accord with societal parties?

For the second part of the interviews questions were asked regarding the meta-governance strategies employed by interviewees. For these questions the operationalisation of meta-governance strategies aimed at enhancing democratic legitimacy was used. As the different meta-governors had different roles in the NCA the interviews with different subsets of actors had a different focus. Nevertheless, all interviews followed these interview questions:

1. Role in the process

- a. Could you tell something about your role in the NCA?
- b. Within your role, was safeguarding democratic legitimacy an active dilemma?

2. Framing

- a. Were you involved in setting conditions or frames of the NCA?
  - i. What were these conditions? (setting restrictions on discussable themes, objectives, form of decisions?)
  - ii. What were the considerations behind these conditions?
- b. Were you involved in monitoring the conditions?
  - i. How would that proceed?

3. Institutional Design

- a. Where you involved in the design of the NCA? (organisation, process rules, composition?)
  - i. Was democratic legitimacy an active thought in the design choices?
- b. Composition
  - i. How were participants chosen? (which criteria and why)
  - ii. By whom were participants chosen?
- c. Negotiation process
  - i. How was the negotiation process shaped?
  - ii. Were votes equalised?
  - iii. Was decision-making institutionalised?
  - iv. How was the role of Parliament incorporated?
- d. Accountability
  - i. How is accountability secured in the design of the NCA?
  - ii. Who is considered accountable?

4. Process Management

- a. Were you involved in facilitating or managing the NCA?
- b. Managing deliberation
  - i. How was decision-making organised? (consensus/majority voting/final decisions)
  - ii. Were there power differences at the deliberations?
  - iii. Did you try to level the playing field? (institutionalised voting procedure/(dis)empowering of certain actors?)

- iv. Had every actor an equal voice?
    - v. What was the role of Parliament in the deliberations?
  - c. Transparency
    - i. How was information distributed?
    - ii. How was transparency organised?
    - iii. What was made public and what remained confidential?
  - d. Composition
    - i. Did you interfere with the composition of the NCA?
    - ii. Were there changes in the composition?
- 5. Direct Participation
  - a. Where you involved directly in the negotiations?
  - b. Open agenda and deliberation
    - i. Who decided on the agenda?
    - ii. Were there specific limitations to that?
    - iii. Did you actively opened up certain debates?
  - c. Evaluation and performance
    - i. How was the performance of the negotiation-tables monitored?
    - ii. Who were involved in such an evaluative process
    - iii. How was accountability organised at the tables?
    - iv. Who managed the accountability process?
  - d. Political intervention
    - i. Were you involved in the political intervention?
    - ii. What were the considerations for this intervention?
    - iii. How did that affect the negotiations?

4 Coding scheme

