Dutch PA Project Memo

To: All Agendas Projects collaborators
From: The Dutch Agenda Project Enthusiasts

Investigators and project status
Our project includes the following scholars:

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(no project website yet…)

We started discussing possibilities for a large scale agenda setting project in the Netherlands in the spring. All participants had already some interest in political agenda setting, but none of us was involved in systematic coding of parliamentary documents, media, or budgets.

A research proposal will be submitted in the fall. The proposal contains a number of subprojects, each dealing with an important element of issue attention, connecting it to the general data on political agendas and policy outputs which are the central part of the project, as in other countries. Common in our subprojects is that they focus on *agency* in the agenda setting process. The subprojects explore the role of different actors - interest groups, political parties within and outside government, the media, and possibly other actors such as experts. This implies that we set out to use or construct different datasets that can be related to one another. In addition, in our analyses we intend to deal explicitly with multilevel agenda setting (and shifts between multilevel venues), in particular the national and European level. We will also take the European level into account in our coding (as has been done in Denmark).

Data sources
We intend to use the following sources for dataset construction:

Political agenda
• Plenary debates, including interpellations: Handelingen Eerste (Senate) en Tweede (Representative) Kamer. We may decide to focus on Tweede Kamer only, depending on time and resources.
• Questions from MPs to a minister (Kamervragen)
• Parliamentary supplements/documents (Kamerstukken)
• Agenda's (Eerste en Tweede Kamer)
• Coalition government programs/declarations (produced when a new government takes office), possibly also annual Speeches of the Throne (equivalent of the Queen's Speech in the UK). These documents are more strategic and for planning purposes, and as such they also may be compared to the other political agenda sources.
Public agenda: media
• Newspapers (landelijke dagbladen. Available through LexisNexis). We may focus on one newspaper, NRC Handelsblad.
• Television news (8 o'clock news service, public braodcast)
• Radio news (public broadcast)
• Paper clippings (knipselkranten van ministeries) – depending on resources.
Public agenda: public opinion
• National Electoral Research (Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek), this ongoing longitudinal survery includes questions about the 'most important problem', analogous to Gallup in the U.S.
Policy outputs (policy stability and change)
• Bills (Regelgeving Staatscourant)
• Budgets (Statistics)
• Database on transposition of EU regulation into national legislation, constructed by Bernard Steunenberg (Amsterdam Institute for Labor Studies)
Agendas of political parties and interest/lobby groups
• Party programs (Manifesto Research Group data on Netherlands)
• Interest group manifests/activity. We have access to a database on trade associations of AIAS, which contains info on interest representation of companies over the past 50 years. It tracks changes in names and gives us a precise area of interest. It is based on the format and data of the European Organisational Interest database.
European influence on national agendas
• Existing databases of national transposition of European directives
Institutional data (used for assessing institutional friction)
• Comparative Parliamentary Democracy Data Archive (a large international dataset on coalition governance)
• National voting turnout
Note: these data are not part of the central coding work

Topic coding
As our starting point, we will use the Danish coding scheme because we believe this is closest to the Dutch situation. From there, we will make some subcategory adaptations to fit the Dutch case, and in doing this we will also keep a close eye on the (updated) U.S. coding system. We will stick to the main 19 coding categories, and minimize changes in subcategories. Some subcategories may be moved from one main category to another if this fits the Dutch institutional situation better.

Topic codes for matters relating to the EU will be made similarly to the Danish project: EU 'institutional' affairs will be coded separately from other, more substantive issues in which the EU was involved. We may develop somewhat more refined coding categories than in the Danisch system, given our interest in multilevel agenda dynamics.

Also the following points need consideration (this is not exhaustive):
- A subcategory for coding issues of religious schools (these are funded with public money, a recurring issue on the political and public agenda). Since this is an institutionalized artifact, we are inclined to make a specific subcategory in the Education main category.
- For issues relating to the Netherlands Antilles (and until 1975 Surinam as well), a subcategory for Kingdom relations is needed – the Dutch counterpart of Greenland issues for Danemark, but less fish, more people, and a lot hotter! We also need to decide how to distinguish such issues from immigrant/integration issues which are coded differently. One option is to use the new subcategory systematically and exclusively for all issues relating to (former) residents of the Netherlands Antilles/Surinam.
- What to do with subcategory 529, migrant and seasonal workers – deleted from the Danish coding system.
- Several subcategories of 20, Government Operations. Some may be deleted, others may need to be added, in particular relating to the parliamentary system and legislative-executive relationships – maybe adapt subcat. 2011 ?

Since we have not embarked on the coding work yet, more points will be encountered. But we will be conservative and create new subcategories rather than delete or collapse existing ones (and also avoid coding many issues as 'other').

Funding opportunities
- We intend to submit proposals to several government departments in the fall. We expect interest in this project. We will also try more open tenders at the National Science Council and related funding agencies.
- In addition, we hope that a pilot study of automated coding by the Royal Library will bear fruit, so that we can apply that technology on large scale and economize on hiring people (see below).
- Finally, we support the idea of submitting a European 7th Framework proposal specifically for comparative work. But that's for later.

Automated coding pilot study
The Royal Library is interested in doing (and paying!) a pilot study of computer coding; the Dutch parliamentary documents are only digitally available from 1995 onwards. However, the Dutch royal library is digitalizing all documents from 1995 backwards until 1814. They will finish 1990 at end of this year and next year they will be back already until 1975, and so on. When we spoke with them, they offered to run a pilot to code (with our code-book) their newly digitalized documents by computer (want to see their work put in practice). Some of their people have experience with lexicographical coding software. One of our worries is to maintain consistency with the manually coded datasets of mainly the US and Denmark, for comparative reasons. This is something to find out during the pilot. Which software we will use is unknown. Beside the running program on parliamentary documents, the Royal Library also prepares a digitalization of all major Dutch newspaper as far back as 1750. Yes, that's writing history!