



# Social unrest in the Northern Netherlands due to government decisions

## Case analysis and action perspective

- RUG KNOWLEDGE PLATFORM JANUARY 18TH 2022
- Ron van Wonderen
- Senior Research Verwey-Jonker Institute
- [rvanwonderen@verwey-jonker.nl](mailto:rvanwonderen@verwey-jonker.nl)
- Twitter @RWonderen





# Backgrounds for the research

- Many issues in the Northern Netherlands complicate relationships between citizens and government: windmills, solar parks, salt production, earthquakes.
- Social unrest can arise around such issues.
- Complicating factors: a history of experienced injustice/deprivation and experienced victimization in the Northern Netherlands.
- Regionaal Bestuurlijk Politie Overleg (RBPO) asked us (Verwey-Jonker Institute) Ron van Wonderen) en RUG (Tom Postmes) to make an analysis of social unrest, now and in the future, in relation to government decisions in the Northern Netherlands.



# Research questions

Two cases:

- (First case). How and why has social unrest developed? What factors further fueled the social unrest?
- (Second case). Which factors have limited / channeled social unrest? Which preconditions were relevant here?

What can public administration and police learn from these cases about support for government decisions and about preventing unrest?



# Case 1

- 1) Decision making process and protests against the planning and arrival of wind farms along the N33 and the Drentse Veenkoloniën. A lot of social unrest arose which has continued for a long time.
- 2) A lot of things concerning the involvement of citizens and other local actors in the decision-making process have gone wrong.
- 3) The complex administrative relationships between layers of government (municipalities, provinces and national government) did make the case even more problematic.

We will focus on N33 case



## Case 2

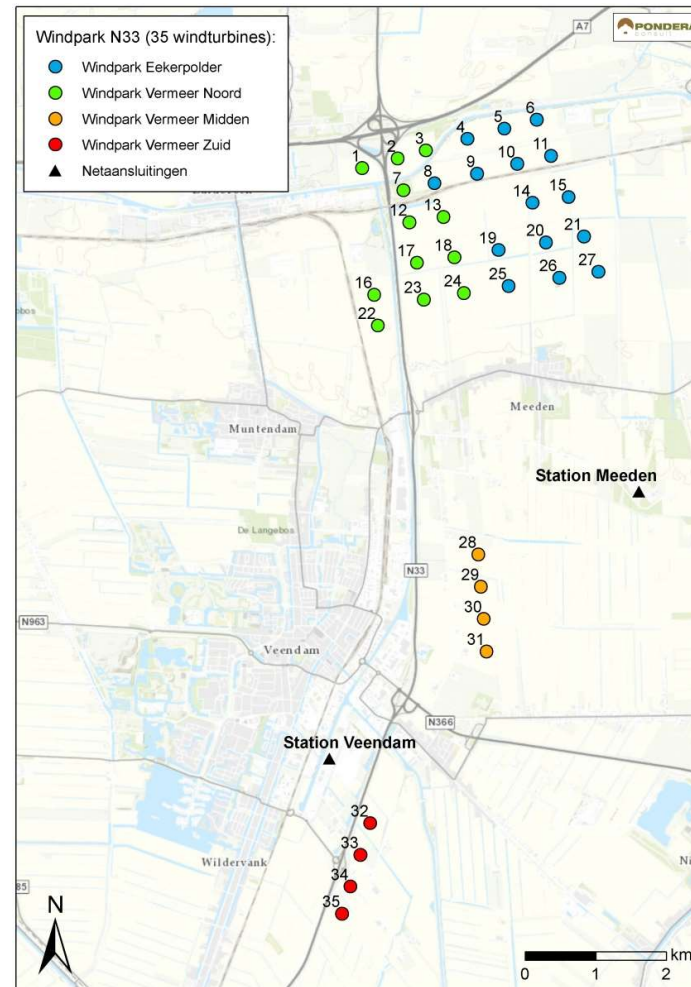
- 1) Salt extraction in the Wadden Sea near Harlingen, where, despite a problematic history with salt extraction and despite the risk of subsidence and potentially serious consequences for the historic city of Harlingen, there have been no unrest and incidents.
- 2) This is the result of proactive involvement of citizens and other local stakeholders and good cooperation with the operator. Durk will tell you more about this case later.



# Conducting of the research

- 1) In-depth interviews with involved actors, including representatives of (local) authorities, police, residents/activists and other stakeholders.
- 2) Topics:
  - Reconstruction of the dynamics (process of decision-making)
  - Sentiments. What sentiments are involved in the case that contribute to the development of unrest?
  - Timeline of unrest, protest, resistance and violence.
    - Causes of social unrest.
    - Why did the protests hardening over time?
3. Analysis: Lessons from the cases for the future? What can local government and police learn from the cases in order to achieve greater support for government decisions and to prevent unrest?

# Decision making process and protests against the planning and arrival of wind farms along the N33









# Facts

- December 2000, the concentration areas of wind turbines were established in the first Provincial Environmental Plan (POP) of Groningen. That was not very specific and the size of a possible wind farm was also unclear.
- From 2010 the Wind Turbines area in Groningen became a national matter (Crisis and Recovery Act) Central government coordinates, input of local authorities (municipalities en province) and civilians in decision-making is severely limited.



# Facts

- In all phases of the process, there was great resistance to the realization of wind turbines among the local population. Objections were not honoured. Council of State declared all objections to the wind farm unfounded.
- Lack of fundamental possibilities of influence was the main reason why process participation by local residents was not achieved.
- Uneven playing field citizens and initiators of windparks in access to the competent authorities (province, national government) and therefore opportunities to communicate interests.
- Alternatives by activists and local entrepreneurs were not considered because of the time pressure to achieve energy transition targets.



# Protest and social unrest

- Lot of social resistance against the N33 Wind Farm from the start. For residents, the wind farm also came (too) close.
- Proponents and opponents of the wind farm were diametrically opposed to each other. Farmers and citizens. Unequal distribution of benefits and burdens.

*"The old antagonism between peasants and workers has returned. Farmers are not very wealthy and can earn quite a bit of income in this way, they make their land available for this, but they enrich themselves by doing so. It does nothing for the villagers. This put pressure on the relations in the village".*



# Protest and social unrest

- The opponents of the wind farm have united and tried in all sorts of ways to prevent the arrival of the wind farm, without success.
- Opponents manifested themselves in a playful way, but over time the relations have hardened. In addition to collective expressions and protests in groups, there were also criminal offenses by individuals against persons, companies and on locations.



MW MENTERWOLDE INFO



Stelpstra - 3<sup>de</sup> ontvanger van het foute  
groene keurmerk uit een lange te vervolgen reeks

DE BEUL VAN  
DRENTHE



Burgemeester Munniksma  
2<sup>de</sup> ontvanger van het foute groene keurmerk

DE BEUL VAN  
DRENTHE &  
FOUTE KNECHT  
IN GRONINGEN



... is the most and best  
... information in the world!





# Recommendations

## Preventing unrest: the importance of good relations beforehand

- Preventing social unrest is more successful if there is already established successful cooperation between initiators/operators-government-citizens prior to exploitation. .

## Responding to unrest: action perspective

- Initiators should invest in dialogue and good relations with residents and interest groups.
- Residents Should be able to exercise effective countervailing power. Authorities and operators should invest in organizing an effective counterforce with support from society.