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Underperforming institutions

Bovenhoff, Mariëlle

DOI:
10.33612/diss.553937541

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2023

Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database

Citation for published version (APA):
Bovenhoff, M. (2023). *Underperforming institutions: a multiperspective approach to trust and confidence*. [Thesis fully internal (DIV), University of Groningen]. University of Groningen. https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.553937541

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Underperforming institutions

A multiperspective approach to trust and confidence

Mariëlle Bovenhoff

The research presented in this book was conducted at the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences at the University of Groningen and Kenniscentrum NoorderRuimte at Hanzehogeschool Groningen, University of Applied Sciences, the Netherlands.

ISBN: 978-94-6419-697-9

Printed by: Gildeprint

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university of groningen

Underperforming institutions

A multiperspective approach to trust and confidence

PhD thesis

to obtain the degree of PhD at the
University of Groningen
on the authority of the
Rector Magnificus Prof. dr. C. Wijmenga
and in accordance with
the decision by the College of Deans.

This thesis will be defended in public on

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Part I Background

1. Introduction

From 1963 onward, the gas extraction in the north-east region of Groningen has brought huge benefits and revenues for the Netherlands as a whole. But from the 1990s onwards – and according to some even earlier than that – local residents had to deal with negative consequences due to soil subsidence, earthquakes, damage to buildings and unsafe houses. Gas extraction has gradually become a major problem. Over the years this has developed into a crisis in which trust plays a leading role. Groningen residents' trust has been eroded because of the roles of the gas company, government and other institutions in the settlement of damage and house fortification, necessitated by mounting seismicity and instability of the Groningen gas field. Put simply: the problem-solving capacity has proven insufficient, which has resulted in lengthy procedures, dissatisfying damage settlements, ongoing uncertainty about 'what will eventually happen to our house (or not)?'

Since late 2012, apparently after the earthquake near Huizinge, the problem of (lack of) trust has been reported frequently via the media[1]. This lack of trust and politicians' wish to restore trust, have since then been prominently featured in the Dutch media. Many statements on trust have been formulated by (political) representatives, civil society organizations, and administrators like ministers and CEO's. When finishing this thesis – November 2022 – with respect to restoring trust, however, nothing substantial seems to have changed in the past ten years.

The topic of 'trust' within the context of gas extraction in Groningen has also received due attention in scientific research. Two examples are the studies by Gronings Perspectief (see further chapter 3) and the dissertation of Georgina Kuipers (2021). The latter study contains a paradoxical observation about trust: although the government expressed its commitment to restoring residents' trust multiple times, instead 'the trust of Groningen residents in their government has declined' throughout the years[2] (2021: 537).

Most people would agree that trust is a positive quality, something worth pursuing. We also see this reflected in statements and appeals by (public) persons and institutions when they signal that trust in Groningen is low, or has even disappeared altogether and should be regained. In Appendix 1 we included a small selection of references to newspaper articles. To quote one such statement referring to the loss of trust, some years ago Prime Minister Rutte said: 'Residents' trust in the government is minus one hundred'[3] (Leeuwarder Courant, 2017). That trust is a positive quality, lacking in Groningen and therefore in need of restoration, is also touched in several scientific publications on the problematic consequences of gas extraction (see Van der Voort & Vanclay, 2015; Bakema, Parra & McCann, 2018; Bakema, 2019; Vrieling, Perlaviciute & Steg, 2021; Kuipers, 2021; as well as the series of studies conducted by Gronings Perspectief from 2016-2022, described in chapter 3).

[1] A selection of references to Dutch newspaper reports on trust in Groningen can be found in Appendix 1 (*appendices are available online*).
[2] Kuipers specifically points to decreased trust with regard to damage settlement until the introduction of the 'reversed burden of proof' (*omgekeerde bewijslast* of *bewijsvermoeden*, published December 21, 2016 in *Staatsblad van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden*, nr. 553) and the establishment of an independent claims office (*Instituut Mijnbouwschade Groningen*) in 2020.
[3] Original Dutch statement: ['Bij zijn bezoek aan Groningen zei Rutte gisteren] dat het vertrouwen van de inwoners in de overheid min honderd is'.

This positive and worthwhile qualification of 'trust' is generally not at issue, but its exact meaning and implication in a specific context remains unknown. As a consequence, the discourse surrounding 'trust' in Groningen runs the risk of meaning different things to different people. To use this term without further explanation creates the risk of a certain nothingness: claims with respect to trust (e.g. 'In order to restore trust government should …') risk being hollow, and promises related to trust (e.g. 'In order to restore trust we shall …') risk being idle. For this reason, we believe that a research project that thematizes 'trust' needs to begin with answering the question: What is trust in this specific context? More specifically in our case: How do people build, experience, judge or consider trust in the context of dealing with the negative consequences of gas extraction? The present dissertation is primarily concerned with the negative consequences of the fortification operation and to a lesser extent also with damage procedures for residents.

In that specific context, *to what* do statements like 'Groningen residents have lost trust' and 'Trust in Groningen should be restored' refer? *Who* should regain trust in *what* or *whom*? Is there also anyone who should *give* trust? As shall become clear below, if we don't consider these basic questions, Groningen residents and responsible institutional professionals could very well be left empty-handed because the trust restoration attempts were not founded in anything.

Purpose and main question

The overarching aim of this thesis is to unravel aspects of trust in a complex context, where many people and institutions are involved, and many procedures and interests play a role. Linked with this aim is our ambition to identify crucial aspects or elements which may be open to improvement. We try to unravel and identify these aspects by listening closely to how people talk about trust.

This dissertation seeks to answer the following overall, two-sided research question:

How does the complex institutional context regarding the consequences of gas extraction in Groningen affect processes and relations of trust, and what possible guidelines could contribute to restoring trust?

First of all we need to focus on different perspectives in order to be able to answer this question. Trust is a human quality that plays a role in all kinds of relationships, private and professional, with respect to other people, institutions, objects, and phenomena (see further chapter 3). In the gas case[4], trust plays a role in a number of different relations; between (groups of) residents, between residents and organizations, between professionals, and so on. For our research, we used a socio-psychological approach to trust, and conducted in-depth interviews with different people who are all in some way stakeholders with regard to the consequences of gas extraction in Groningen.

The overall research question is addressed using three sets of subquestions, tailored to the specific groups of respondents we interviewed. Our respondents roughly fall into three groups and we present these in separate chapters in the form of three case studies. The first group are Groningen

[4] In Dutch, the words *gasdossier*, *gaswinningsdossier* or *aardbevingsdossier* are common terms to refer to the problems that are a consequence of soil subsidence and earthquakes due to gas extraction. We choose the English term 'gas case' to be able to refer quickly to these problems.

residents who have been facing damage settlement procedures and/or fortification trajectories. The second group consists of case managers working for two institutions involved in the fortification operation. They all had frequent face-to-face contacts with many different residents. The last group includes various other professionals working for institutions dealing with the consequences of gas extraction; these professionals occupy positions more behind the scenes. The following research questions guide our analyses of the discourse:

Interviews with Groningen residents (first study, chapter 5 of this thesis):

1. What experiences with professionals of proximate institutions do residents report?
2. How do residents portray the procedures of proximate institutions involved in dealing with the negative consequences of gas extraction?
3. How are residents' experiences related to the way they depict and/or judge the damage settlement and fortification procedures by distal institutions?

Interviews with case managers (second study, chapter 6 of this thesis):

1. What concrete experiences do case managers describe regarding contacts with residents?
2. Case managers about the performance of their duties:
   a. How do case managers describe the degree of autonomy in their job?
   b. How do case managers talk about their organization? What obstacles and stimulating factors do they experience in performing their jobs?
   c. What experiences do case managers report with colleagues (in their own organization) and professionals of the organization they collaborate with (whether NCG or CVW)?
3. How do case managers portray distal organizations such as government, politics, oil companies?
4. What changes do case managers consider as essential changes to improve both their own performance and the fortification operation?

Interviews with professionals in positions more behind the scenes (third study, chapter 7 of this thesis):

1. How do these professionals describe their (organizations') ability to perform?
2. With regard to relations with other professionals and (where applicable) with residents:
   a. How do professionals reflect on these relations and what role do (aspects of) trust and trustworthiness play in their discourse?
   b. What do professionals see as main obstacles for building relations of trust and being a trustworthy actor?
3. What role does power play with regard to trustworthiness dimensions in the discourse of professionals?

Answering these research questions offers multiple perspectives on how relations and trust are experienced. In the final chapters we shall attempt to integrate these perspectives into an analysis that addresses the overarching research question, using a multiperspective approach. Although there are research studies that apply this approach, mainly in the context of (clinical) health care areas (e.g. Stevenson et al., 2014; Këllezi et al., 2021), to our knowledge, textbooks or articles elaborating this approach as a scientific method are very scarce. A couple of useful examples are Kendall and

colleagues' (2009) description of how to conduct such an analysis as well as benefits and pitfalls, and Vogl and colleagues' (2019) more philosophical oriented article.

Reader's guide

This dissertation consists of nine chapters, together forming four closely related parts that build on each other: background, research field and methodological approach, results, and conclusions and discussion.

Part I consists of the current and the next chapter which introduces the main question against a sketch of the backdrop. In chapter 2 we present a short overview of the history of the gas problems in Groningen and the complex network of organizations and arrangements that has been instituted in order to deal with these problems.

Part II gives an overview of literature on trust, the basis on which we have formulated our research questions and chosen our method to carry out the three case studies. First, chapter 3 gives a representation of relevant studies and reports specifically drawn to the social consequences of gas extraction in Groningen and trust being a major aspect. The following sections of chapter 3 focus on a broader scientific discussion on *trust*, as well as on the adjacent concepts *confidence, trustworthiness* and *distrust*. The discussion funnels down to *institutional trust* or *trust in government*, since the problems in the gas case are closely related to governmental regulations, institutional agreements, policies et cetera. Chapter 3 concludes with some observations on how trust has been investigated and some of the guidelines we have followed carrying out our research.

Subsequently, chapter 4 describes the methodological approach of our data collection and analysis. The complete study can be considered as a multiperspective approach to trust, and to its decline and possible restoration in this specific context. The interview discourse was analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis.

Part III explores in detail the discourse surrounding trust in the three interrelated case studies. The perspective of the first group of respondents, Groningen residents, is analyzed in chapter 5. Chapter 6 deals with the experiences of frontline professionals, and chapter 7 with professionals working in more senior positions. The analyses of the discourse on trust and related concepts are presented and illustrated with exemplary cases taken from the interviews. The three perspectives provide a deeper insight into trust and trustworthiness in a complex institutional context.

Finally, *Part IV* integrates the findings. Chapter 8 presents a summary of the main research findings in relation to the research questions that were answered in chapter 5, 6 and 7. Subsequently, it synthesizes the conclusions drawn from the individual case studies and links these conclusions to the trust literature. The wider implications are discussed in chapter 9. Furthermore, a reflection on the methodological approach and the results is included in this chapter, as well as suggestions for future research and implications for stakeholders.

2. Dealing with the consequences of gas extraction: a brief overview

What once started as a source of energy and welfare for the Netherlands, half a decade later turned into an experience of disillusion and harm for a specific Dutch region. We refer to the discovery of the big gas field in Groningen in 1959 (see figure 2.1), the subsequent bonanza of gas extraction and exploitation that brought great wealth during many years, followed by a very gradual awareness of the negative impact the gas extraction was having since the 1990's – and possibly earlier already. This has culminated into a disaster 'in slow motion'(Havermans, 2015), one that is not only technical-natural, but also societal and institutional (Bakema, 2019: 148-149).

Figure 2.1: Gas fields in the Netherlands. The big green circle in the north-eastern part represents the Groningen gas field. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Groningen_gas_field

We will draw a short chronological outline of the developments from the 1960's until 2021.

2.1 Discovery, exploitation and profits of the Groningen gas field

From 1963 onward, the *Nederlandse Aardolie Maatschappij* (NAM, translated as Dutch Oil Company), which is a joint venture of multinationals Shell and Exxon Mobil, has been extracting gas in the province of Groningen. At the basis of NAM's mining activities lies a perpetual concession of the Ministry of Economic Affairs. The exact agreements between these private and public parties were not revealed until early 2018[5]. Then it became clear that the Dutch state and oil companies are very closely wedded to each other in the decision-making process about the level of gas extraction. Furthermore, the Dutch state receives a major share in the gas revenues. Regarding these profits,

[5] These agreements were revealed via resident and farmer Sijbrand Nijhoff's lawyers Marco Kalmijn and Marcella Spithoff, https://www.vandersluisvanderzeekalmijn.nl/geheime-gasdeal-1963-onthuld/; see also: Maaike Wind (2018), Hier zijn ze dan, die geheime stukken uit 1963 over de gaswinning in Groningen (*Here they are, those secret documents from 1963 about the gas extraction in Groningen*). *Dagblad van het Noorden*, January 31, 2018.

NAM and the Dutch state had agreed that NAM would sell 85%-90% of the gas to the Dutch state, who sells this gas on the national and international markets[6]. (Partly) Due to the profits on this gas trade, the Netherlands turned into a welfare state. Between 1959 and 2019, natural gas revenues for the Dutch government amounted to nearly 417 billion euros. The total extractable amount of natural gas from the field in Groningen is now estimated at about 2,740 billion cubic meters. Of that, one-fifth is still in the ground[7].

The activities of NAM, whose headquarters are based in Assen, also meant an increase in employment in this traditionally poorer area of the Netherlands. At the same time, the financial construction between the Dutch state and the oil companies also means that when costs of gas extraction rise, the exploitation becomes less profitable and therefore unattractive for the oil companies much sooner than for the state. Here we should add that the state not just needs the gas for economic reasons, but also to secure the energy needs of its inhabitants and companies.

2.2 Awareness of negative consequences of gas extraction

Merely a handful of politicians and experts warned for possible negative consequences of gas extraction, but their voices did not get a big podium and they were even mocked. Probably the three best known politicians and experts who mentioned possible negative consequences, were Willem Meiborg, Jan Terlouw and Meent van der Sluis. Architectural engineer Meiborg was an early warner for large scale soil subsidence. He was ridiculed in 1963 by NAM and his reputation was tarnished (Andere Tijden, 2015[8]). In 1972, member of parliament Jan Terlouw succeeded in uncovering 'secret research' that proved that gas extraction could cause soil subsidence. The subsequent recognition of this causal relation resulted in the establishment of the *Commissie Bodemdaling* (translated as Committee on Subsidence) in 1983 (OvV, 2015: 35). Although soil subsidence was then recognized by NAM, the possibility of earthquakes as a consequence of gas extraction kept being denied. In 1986, Meent van der Sluis, a geographer and provincial politician, gained media attention with a claim that gas extraction could cause earthquakes. However, both NAM, the KNMI[9] and the responsible ministers denied the possibility of induced earthquakes (Verdoes & Boin, 2021: 153). And what had happened to Meiborg before, also befell Van der Sluis: his expertise and reputation were questioned too (Andere Tijden, 2015).

Nonetheless, the correctness of these warnings gradually became clear in the subsequent decades, when increasing numbers of tremors above the Groningen gas field were registered. The biggest earthquake thus far – near the village of Huizinge, August 2012 – became historic because it proved to be a turning point in the history of gas extraction. But notably, the total amount of seismic energy released from the Groningen field was already very high in the years 2003 and especially 2006, when

[6] Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal 2017-2018, 33529 nr. 499; see also 'Acht vragen over het stoppen van de gaswinning in Groningen' (*Eight questions about stopping gas production in Groningen*). April 19, 2021, Shell.nl.
[7] Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (*Central Office for Statistics*) (May 28, 2019), Aardgasbaten uit gaswinning bijna 417 miljard euro (cbs.nl) (*Gas revenues from gas production almost 417 billion euros*).
[8] *Andere Tijden* ('Different Times') is a series of history programmes of two Dutch public broadcasting companies, NTR and VPRO. https://anderetijden.ntr.nl/over#about
[9] KNMI: *Koninklijk Nederlands Meteorologisch Instituut* (Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute), which is responsible for measuring seismic activity in the Netherlands.

a major earthquake occurred in Westeremden, just a few miles away from Huizinge. That 2006 earthquake resulted in at least 412 damage claims[10], but somehow did not cause the regulator[11] to intervene or raise safety concerns. The regulator's reaction was the key difference when, in 2012, there was this other major earthquake near Huizinge. Now, for the first time, the regulator intervened and expressed concern for people's safety (see OvV, 2015). Here, the term 'creeping crisis' as defined by Boin and colleagues certainly applies. In their definition, creeping crises are slowly emerging threats, characteristic for modern societies: 'threats where authorities act insufficiently, or fail to act at all, essentially sleepwalking into greater troubles in the indeterminate future' (Boin et al., 2021: 2).

Figure 2.2 shows that, even before 2012, earthquakes took place in the Groningen area, however, these tremors did not attract much attention outside of Groningen.

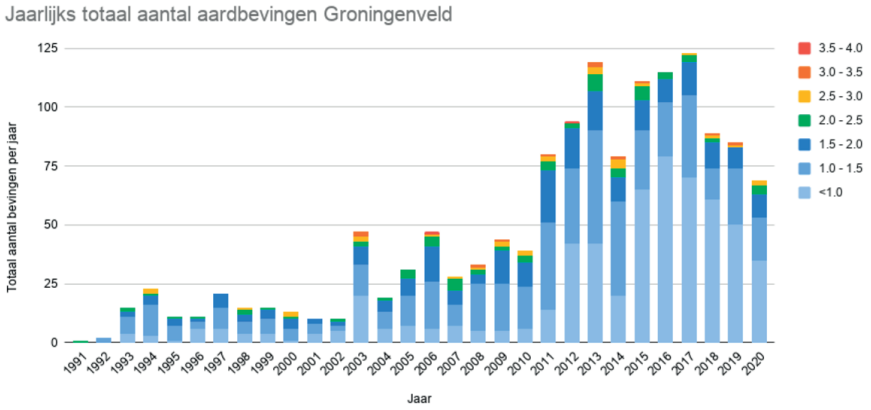

Figure 2.2: Number of registered earthquakes per year, 1991-2020 (source: KNMI[12])

One of the key reasons for this creeping crisis appears to be that the fact that earthquakes (and possibly soil subsidence) could cause damage to buildings in the Groningen area, remained unacknowledged for a long time. Before the Huizinge earthquake (M_w 3.6)[13] all damage was settled underhand by NAM and for reasons unknown there was not a good record kept of what damage was reported. As mentioned above, already in 2006 there was an earthquake of magnitude 3.5 in Westeremden, after which there were hundreds of damage claims. But these were not included in a central register (Postmes et al., 2020). Further, this earthquake in 2006 was one of very many: it appears that residents must have reported many more concerns and damages than that. But as of today, it is not public how many damages NAM settled in the decades before 2012. As a result of not

[10] Roo, R. de (2006), Bodem onder Loppersum blijft beven; zeven aardschokken sinds zware beving augustus (*Ground below Loppersum continues to tremble; seven earthquakes since severe tremor in August*). *Dagblad van het Noorden*, June 6, 2006. See also Postmes et al., 2020: 48.
[11] State Supervisor of Mines (*Staatstoezicht op de Mijnen,* SodM).
[12] Retrieved via https://www.knmi.nl/kennis-en-datacentrum/uitleg/aardbevingen-door-gaswinning.
[13] In case of natural tectonic earthquakes which take place about 10 km below earth's surface, this would be a minor earthquake. In case of the Groningen earthquakes, which are man-induced, take place about 3 km below earth's surface and where the upper part of the soil consists of weak clay, the impact of such an earthquake on built structures is much heavier than in other soil conditions (like sand).

systematically recording the impact on residents, the problems for residents remained invisible and hence unknown. Only after the 2012 earthquake did the magnitude of the problem gradually become clear: only when a register was established could it be noticed that damage to houses and other buildings has been manifold (Postmes et al., 2020). The 2012 earthquake was a turning point of problem *awareness*, therefore.

But awareness of damage did not immediately raise awareness of how residents were affected. Civil society organizations such as *Groninger Bodem Beweging* (GBB, translated as Groningen Ground Movement) had warned about this since 2007. In research, however, only since 2014 the resident's perspective in the earthquake region of Groningen was taken into account. Initially, this was mainly through the lens of attitudes that residents held about the housing market (De Haan, 2014; De Kam & Raemaekers, 2014; De Kam & Mey, 2017; De Kam, Van den Broek & Van Maanen, 2018; Hoekstra et al., 2016), or about damage settlement claims (Faber, van der Veen & De Jong, 2015) or about the continuation of gas extraction activities (Vrieling, Perlaviciute & Steg, 2017)[14]. The socio-emotional impact on residents themselves was not investigated systematically until the research project of Gronings Perspectief began, which reported its first results in April 2016 (Postmes et al., 2016). In research, therefore, the impact of residents' *experiences* with damage settlement and fortification did not become a focal point until at least one decade after damage became reported wide-scale.

2.3 Damage settlement: developments and institutional context

At the start of this PhD-research, in late 2017, a complex institutional set-up to deal with damage and fortification had already grown, but this institutional map also kept changing and growing (see also Groninger Gasberaad, 2020). We refer to one of the attempts to map this complex institutional context by *Groninger Gasberaad*[15] in 2020 to give a quick impression of the complexity:

[14] See Sluiter et al. (2018) for an overview of these studies (and many more):
Haan, de, F.L. (2014). *Invloed van Groningse aardbevingen op woongenot*. Groningen: Sociaal Planbureau Groningen. Kam, de, G.R.W. & Raemaekers, J. (2014). *Opvattingen van bewoners over de effecten van aardbevingen op het woongenot en de woningwaarde in Groningen; Een vergelijkend onderzoek in drie woonbuurten in Middelstum, Loppersum en Slochteren in 2009 en 2013*. URSI Research Report 346, Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.
Kam, de, G.R.W. & Mey, E. (2017). *Ervaringen bij verkoop woningen in aardbevingsgebied; Eindrapport*. URSI Research Report 361, Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.
Kam, de, G.R.W., Broek, van den, J. & Maanen, van, J. (2018). *Gegijzeld in eigen huis: Zorgen en problemen rond hypotheken in het Groningse Aardbevingsgebied: Verslag van een onderzoek onder leden van de Groninger Bodem Beweging*. URSI Research Report 363, Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.
Hoekstra, J., Dol, K., Jansen, S., Lamain, C., Mariën, G. & Simon, C. (2016). *Wonen en aardbevingen in Groningen; Een onderzoek in negen gemeenten. Onderzoek voor de gebouwde omgeving*, faculteit Bouwkunde, Delft: Delft University of Technology & Groningen: CMO STAMM.
Faber, D., Veen, van der, S. & Jong, de, P. (2015). *Onderzoek naar de tevredenheid met de schadeafhandeling door de NAM: in opdracht van de Dialoogtafel Groningen.* Den Haag: APE Onderzoek & Advies, rapport 1281.
Vrieling, L., Perlaviciute, G. & Steg, L. (2017). *Uw mening over gaswinning uit het Groningen-gasveld; Rapportage; Vragenlijstonderzoek Fase 4.* Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.

[15] Translated as 'Groningen Gas Council'.

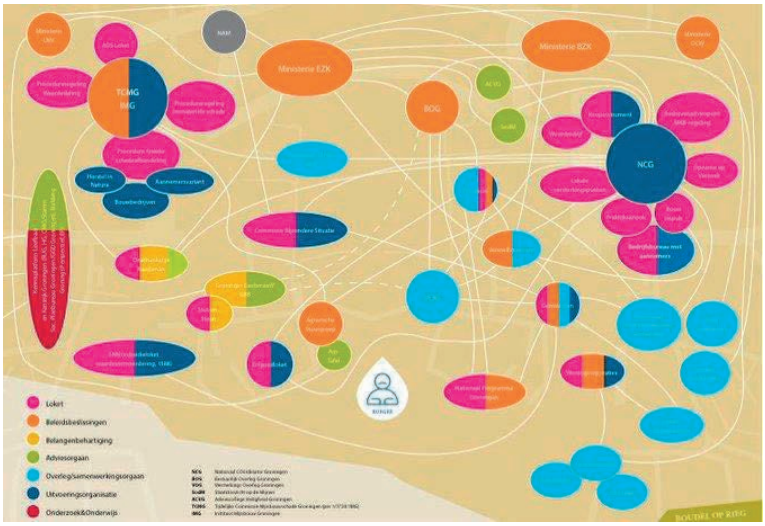

Figure 2.3: Infographic of institutions and relations in the gas file (Source: Groninger Gasberaad, 2020[16])

For the purpose of our research, we shall mainly focus on the developments – including (new) institutions – from 2015 until 2020 which is the most relevant period because data were collected during this time period, until September 2020. 2015 is also a turning point in legislation and approach. Until that time, based on the Mining Act[17], gas extraction company NAM was liable for all damages caused by soil subsidence and earthquakes. This means that the state officially had no role in dealing with the consequences of the gas extraction: it was a private matter between company and residents. But in 2015, the *Onderzoeksraad voor Veiligheid* (OvV, translated as Research Council for Safety) pointed out that the government had neglected its duty of care for the safety of residents and the Council of State annulled the government's decision to continue extracting gas for the same reason (OvV, 2015; Raad van State, 2015). It was inevitable that things would change.

Until the end of 2014, NAM took care of all damage assessments and settlements. In terms of governance, this created a situation in which 'the roles of the causer and the solver were in the hands of the same institution' (Bakema, 2019: 143). In practice, it appears to have been the case that many residents were satisfied with damage settlements by NAM, but a proportion were not. And because the number of damage claims was so high, the net result was that an objectively large number of people felt treated unfairly; in 2018, NAM still had to settle over 6,000 cases in which many residents had to contribute money themselves to repair their damage[18]. In practice therefore, a large number of residents were frustrated by what they experienced as being a slow, random and

[16] An enlarged and sharp figure is retrievable at Barometer Boudel op rieg - Groninger Gasberaad

[17] Dutch: *Mijnbouwwet*. In June 2018, the Mining Act had been revised; however, NAM is still held liable for bearing all costs with respect to damage settlements and fortification measures. The revised Mining Act (Dutch: *Mijnbouwwet*) can be downloaded (in Dutch) from https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/kst-34957-14.html.

[18] Rijksoverheid (December 17, 2019). *NAM vergoedt meerkosten herstel 6000 oude schades* ('NAM reimburses additional costs of repairing 6,000 old damages'). Dagblad van het Noorden (March 17, 2020). *Zeker tachtig mensen met oude aardbevingsschade krijgen nabetaling van de NAM* ('At least eighty people with old earthquake damage will receive back payments from NAM)'.

uncertain damage procedure. Later research has shown that this exacted its toll on their well-being. This later research showed that approximately half of those with multiple damages feel unsafe in their own home. And 10 % of the residents experience various health complaints, which researchers believe are likely due to chronic stress (Postmes et al., 2018; Stroebe et al., 2021a; Stroebe et al., 2021b). In sum, the damage settlement procedures have a deep impact on peoples' lives, health and prospects for the future (Postmes et al., 2018). And thus, a breeding ground was created for distrust in the settling of damage claims.

A new situation for damage settlement began in 2015, when the damage settlement was moved to a newly formed institution. In 2015, the new company was founded on behalf of NAM and called *Centrum Veilig Wonen* (CVW, translated as Centre for Safe Living). This company was developed in order to ensure independency of the damage claims processing and accordingly it was meant to act 'at a distance' from NAM. However, CVW's damage settlement did not produce satisfactory solutions for many residents. One possible reason for this was that it became clear that CVW in practice could not operate independently from NAM (Postmes et al., 2020). This gradually eroded the reputation and perceived trustworthiness of CVW. So, in 2017 the Minister of Economic Affairs decided to make damage settlement a public affair; to implement this policy choice, a new institution was founded: *Tijdelijke Commissie Mijnbouwschade Groningen* (TCMG, translated as Temporary Commission Mining damage Groningen). A detailed overview of the different regimes of damage settlement is provided by Postmes and colleagues (2020: 23-26).

With the decree Mining Damage Groningen, date of commencement March 19, 2019, damage settlement was turned into a *public* law procedure in which the *private* liability law applies (Groninger Gasberaad 2020: 85). In July 2020 this temporary commission was enshrined in law[19] and thus made permanent, with the institution's name changing into *Instituut Mijnbouwschade Groningen* (IMG, translated as Institution Mining damage Groningen). The main difference in comparison to the situation before 2018 is that TCMG/IMG is a public organization, where NAM and CVW are private companies. Moreover, TCMG/IMG has the status of an 'independent governing body'[20], which means it can make decisions on its own and is not accountable to the Ministry. After TCMG/IMG had taken over the damage settlement, CVW remained active in carrying out inspections until the end of 2019, when the company was closed down.

2.4 The fortification operation: developments and institutional context

As noticed above, the Dutch state, who receives the major share of gas revenues, has found itself in contradictory roles: 'simultaneously striving for profitable gas revenues and guaranteeing the safety of the population' (Bakema, 2019: 147). However, the *Onderzoeksraad voor Veiligheid* (OvV) concluded in 2015 that in the decision-making on the exploitation of the Groningen gas field, the parties involved have not dealt carefully with the safety of the citizens of Groningen in relation to the

[19] Tijdelijke wet Groningen (*Temporary Law Groningen*), date of commencement July 1, 2020.
[20] English translation for *zelfstandig bestuursorgaan* (zbo). In the Netherlands, the responsible minister only has 'system responsibility' for independent governing bodies, which can act and make decisions on their own.

earthquakes caused by gas extraction[21]. In January 2013, the Dutch government announced that it would ensure that homes in Groningen were safe, by carrying out inspection and fortification procedures in the earthquake region – apart from damage procedures and apart from consideration on reducing gas extraction. It was then estimated that about 22,000 houses in the earthquake region would need to be inspected and maybe fortified (see Stroebe et al., 2019a). In 2021, the number of houses was estimated to be 27,000[22].

In 2015, a new governmental institution was founded to coordinate this inspection and fortification operation: the National Coordinator Groningen (NCG). The NCG acted under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Economic Affairs. Initially the NCG's role was announced as a broad one: it would not only carry out the fortifications and ensure that the region's future would be secure, but also achieve an important ambition: restoring trust (NCG, 2015). In the original intentions of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the National Coordinator Groningen – as the name suggests – would have considerable executive power to coordinate the entire operation[23]. But over the years, the organization's task has been cut back. Since 2018, its tasks have been reduced to merely executing the building operations that ensure that residents are physically safe: the *execution* of fortification ended up being NCG's only task. The name 'national coordinator' has therefore become a bit of a misnomer, since its role is effectively that of local operator.

The fortification procedure essentially consists of four stages: inspection of the house, engineering (calculations to determine the ability of a house to withstand earthquakes), making a plan for how to solve any structural problems, and finally the building work to fortify the house. For residents this process looks as follows: An inspection procedure starts with an extensive inspection of their home, which takes one or more days. Next, all data from the inspection activities are assessed and engineered in order to determine whether a house meets safety standards. This process can take extremely long (sometimes years), in part because there are so few engineers who are equipped to carry out these calculations, and also because so few houses turned out to be 'standard houses'. What follows is an assessment report and fortification advice, which then has to be discussed with the resident. The final stage of the process is the actual carrying out of the fortification measures, which sometimes is accomplished by demolishing the house and building a new one. In practice, the period from the announcement of inspection to start of the building work takes several years.

In April 2018, the Minister of Economic Affairs (Eric Wiebes) decided to pause the inspection and fortification operation. The reason was that shortly before, he had decided to gradually reduce gas extraction to zero by 2030. The ministry assumed that decreased gas extraction would mean that

[21] Decision-making by the parties involved in the so-called 'Gasgebouw', which is designed to maximize profits and supply security. Parties are: NAM, Ministry of Economic Affairs, EBN, GasTerra, Shell and Exxon Mobil (OvV, 2015: 88).

[22] Bestuurlijke afspraken versterking Groningen | Versterken: hoe werkt het? | Nationaal Coördinator Groningen (nationaalcoordinatorgroningen.nl). ('Administrative Agreements regarding the fortification operation in Groningen | Fortification, how does it work?')

[23] Ministerie van Economische Zaken (2015), Instellingsbesluit Nationaal Coördinator Groningen, besluit d.d. 1 mei 2015, nr. WJZ/15057631. (*Establishment decision National Coordinator Groningen by Ministry of Economic Affairs, May 1, 2015).*

Groningen would become much safer very quickly[24]. In the meantime, technical experts developed new guidelines and models: the NPR (*Nederlandse Praktijk Richtlijn*) and HRA (Hazard and Risk Assessment)[25] for determining the safety of buildings in specific areas. The interviews with residents, used for analysis in chapter 5, took place shortly after this break in the fortification operation, between April and June 2018.

2.5 Actual and semantic problems with 'trust'

For many residents, there has been great uncertainty surrounding inspection and possible fortification of their homes since April 2018. As a result of the above-mentioned political decision and the changes in guidelines (NPR, HRA), many residents developed doubts whether their house was safe. Furthermore, partly because of the low reliability of authorities in delivering on their promises, thousands of people live in uncertainty: they still don't know if their homes will be fortified. This was reflected in one of the Dutch newspapers in the statement: 'Confidence is extremely low. The enthusiasm about Wiebes's resolute action – he reduced gas production to ultimately zero – has turned to suspicion' (Grol, 2019).

Even before this break in the fortification operation, statements along the lines of 'Groningen residents have lost trust' were often made by politicians and CEO's in newspapers and on television programmes, and by representatives of government institutions. In an attempt to restore residents' trust in institutions, the CVW and NCG – in itself quite large and bureaucratic organizations – had chosen a more personal approach in the fortification operation: each resident (household) was assigned a permanent contact person. Assigning permanent contact persons to each resident may be considered as an attempt to build personal relationships via 'one-on-one conversations at the kitchen table'[26] which could contribute to restoring residents' trust. That this might be a challenging ambition is underscored by the expression 'trust is hard to gain but easy to lose' (in Dutch: *vertrouwen komt te voet en gaat te paard*; an expression mentioned spontaneously by several respondents). In this reasoning, the statement 'Groningen people should regain trust' might also symbolise little more than empty rhetoric.

Even though it became almost a given that 'Groningen residents have lost trust', it remains unclear what this statement exactly means: Who is the referent of this loss of trust? In which institution(s) or representative(s) should Groningen citizens regain trust? Moreover, what does 'trust' in this specific context actually mean? Note that we use the English term 'trust' as a translation for the original Dutch word *vertrouwen*. This word can refer to at least two distinct concepts in the English language:

[24] Already in 2013, the State Supervisor of Mines had advised the Minister of Economic Affairs to reduce gas extraction as soon as possible, to minimize the risk of more, and more severe, earthquakes. See *Staatstoezicht op de Mijnen*, *Aardbevingen in de provincie Groningen*. Brief aan Minister van EZ d.d. 22 januari 2013, ref. 13010015.

[25] NPR 9998 is the Dutch Practice Guideline for designing and assessing earthquake resilient buildings in Groningen. https://www.nen.nl/bouw/constructieve-veiligheid/aardbevingsbestendig-bouwen.
HRA, the Hazard and Risk Assessment, is a model developed by NAM to calculate seismic threat and risk as a consequence of gas extraction. https://www.sodm.nl/documenten/vragen-en-antwoorden/wat-houdt-het-hra-model-in.

[26] Dutch: *keukentafelgesprekken*, a term from social work that is used by National Coordinator Groningen in their multi-annual programmes (NCG, 2015; 2016).

'trust' and 'confidence'[27]. The fact that in Dutch the word *vertrouwen* does not distinguish between 'trust' and 'confidence' might contribute to the lack of clarity in everyday language. We will attend to the possible confusion around these concepts in the next chapter.

In sum, little is made clear about what trust actually means in the context of problems in North-east Groningen, or what is referred to as the recipient(s) of trust. In the next chapter we will first look specifically at research reports on societal impacts of the Groningen earthquakes, and focus on the role of trust insofar as it is addressed in these studies. Then, we zoom in to a scholarly discussion on the meaning of trust, on trust in institutional contexts, as well as on related concepts such as trustworthiness and distrust.

[27] In the research literature, considerable attention has been paid to the difference between trust and confidence. Chapter 3 elaborates this difference in more detail.

Part II Research Field and Methodological Approach

3. *Trust* and *confidence*: practical expectations and theoretical possibilities

This chapter focuses on trust as a characteristic of relations between people and institutions. As we shall see below, academic research suggests that trust is a variable and complex phenomenon. Despite being hard to pin down, the *relevance* of trust as a factor in human cooperation is not up for debate. Several researchers deem trust the glue, the cement that keeps society together (a.o. Mosch, Prast & Van Raaij, 2005; Bachmann et al., 2012). And as we shall explain further in this chapter, also the institutions (nationally and in Groningen) see trust as playing a central role.

In this chapter, we shall first explore how trust has been defined and used in relation to the problems surrounding gas extraction in Groningen. In the first section we discuss how relevant institutions have talked about the role of trust in Groningen: as we shall see, there have been high expectations of the restoration of trust. We then discuss research publications that deal specifically with the situation in Groningen. In section 3.2 we look at the concept of trust from a theoretical perspective and at how researchers across different literatures have conceptualized and measured trust so far. We then consider various forms of trust (3.3), look in detail at trustworthiness and its dimensions (3.4), consider the concept of distrust (3.5) and the reciprocity of trust and distrust in relationships within an institutional context (3.6).

3.1 Institutions and experts on trust in Groningen

In chapter 2 we indicated that the word *vertrouwen* has received a lot of attention in relation to gas extraction in Groningen, and especially in relation to the negative social consequences. In the following subsections we first discuss how institutions have described the issue of trust before turning to the applied scientific literature on this issue.

3.1.1 Relevant institutions

The institutions involved in damage settlement and fortification as well as various layers of government have commented on trust and trust restoration. Some of the key policy documents are discussed in the next section.

Without aiming to be exhaustive, we discuss some institutional publications and statements on the erosion of trust and its restoration in Groningen. In the context of damage settlement and fortification trajectories, residents and professionals of institutions have (face-to-face) interactions. In chapter 2 we mentioned the establishment of several new institutions throughout the years, such as the CVW, NCG, TCMG and IMG. All these institutions have employed *case managers*[28] to guide residents through the challenging processes of fortification and more complex damage claim

[28] CVW and NCG: *bewonersbegeleiders*; TCMG/IMG: *zaakbegeleiders*. In this study we refer to these professionals with one term: case managers.

settlements[29]. In various policy documents this kind of support of residents has been related to the need to (re)build residents' trust.

But also at a more distal policy level, in some of the key documents which describe the principles and objectives of different phases of the mitigation and recovery effort, trust has been mentioned. Below we outline a short description of institutions' own communication about the ambition to restore residents' trust.

2013-2014: The Meijer-Committee and the Governmental Agreement

In 2013, after the earthquake in Huizinge (August 2012), the Meijer-Committee[30] published an advisory report that later served as input for a settlement between key actors (the three layers of government and the NAM) to develop a recovery and mitigation program. The Meijer report emphasized the importance of trust between residents, entrepreneurs, directors, national government, and NAM. In this publication we also find the phrase *wederzijds vertrouwen* ('mutual trust'), which indicates that also institutions' trust in residents and entrepreneurs should be taken into consideration (Commissie-Meijer, 2013: 26). In response to the subsequent Governmental Agreement[31], the Dialogue Table Groningen[32] was established. Striking is the use of the word *vertrouwen* (trust) in the titles of both publications. In their evaluation of the Dialogue Table, Stoker and colleagues conclude that four tracks, or sub-goals[33], from the Meijer report should ultimately result in achieving the main goal of restoring trust (Stoker et al., 2015: 5-6).

Mitigation and damage repair 2015-2016

Measures to mitigate damage are a responsibility of the gas extraction company NAM. See for example, Mining Act, Articles 34 and 35 (1f) on measures to prevent damage and damage repair[34]. From 2015 onwards, mitigation and damage repair are in the hands of two organizations: CVW and NCG. The organization CVW was established by NAM and the NCG by the government. The roles and responsibilities of the two organizations change over time, but formally the responsibility for damage compensation lay with CVW and the formal responsibility for restoration of safety lay with NCG (although the execution remained CVW's responsibility until the centre was closed down at the end of 2019).

[29] About case managers of IMG (previously TCMG): "Het is veelzijdig werk waarin vertrouwen centraal staat […] Je moet goed kunnen aanvoelen waaraan mensen behoefte hebben en hoe je hen het best kunt helpen." (translation: *It is a versatile job in which trust is central […] You must be able to sense what people need and how you can be of help to them*). Retrieved November 15, 2021 from https://www.schadedoormijnbouw.nl/nieuws/zaakbegeleiders-leggen-eerste-contacten.
[30] In Dutch: *Commissie-Meijer* (shortened term for: Commissie Duurzame Toekomst Noord-Oost Groningen).
[31] Dutch: *Bestuurlijk Akkoord* (2014), Vertrouwen op herstel, herstel van vertrouwen (translation: *Trust in restoration, restoration of trust*).
[32] *Dialoogtafel Groningen*, which was terminated in September 2015, after which the participating civil society organizations partly constituted the Groningen Gas Council (*Groninger Gasberaad*).
[33] Four sub-goals: Increasing safety and preventive fortification of houses and buildings; Improving damage settlement and value enhancement; Improving liveability; Improving the economic perspective.
[34] Mijnbouwwet (*Mining Act*), Valid from May 1, 2022 to present (July 18, 2022, retrieved from wetten.nl - Regeling - Mijnbouwwet - BWBR0014168 (overheid.nl).

In policy documents, reports and other communication of the CVW and NCG, we find the term *vertrouwen* frequently until around 2018. For example, in 2016 Eenhoorn[35] writes that CVW:

> "by carefully communicating with residents, by keeping agreements, by speeding up damage settlement, by performing damage repair professionally and by demonstrating that fortified homes and buildings are becoming safer […] [CVW] can make a start in gaining trust of the Groningen population. This regaining of trust is very necessary because of the perception and the heavy burden from the past."
>
> *Original wording in Dutch*:
> "door zorgvuldige communicatie met bewoners, gemaakte afspraken na te komen, door snelheid te maken in de afhandeling van schades, door schadeherstel professioneel uit te voeren en door te laten zien dat versterkte huizen en gebouwen veiliger worden […] een begin kan maken met het winnen van vertrouwen bij de Groningse bevolking. Dat herwinnen van vertrouwen is zeer noodzakelijk vanwege de beeldvorming en de zware hypotheek uit het verleden."

For this research, it is relevant to note that professionals working for these organisations, including the case managers, are expected to perform their roles in relation to the restoration of trust. Until the end of 2019 the CVW website mentioned the following text under the button 'Working for CVW', in which future employees are addressed:

> "The impact of earthquake damage is enormous and emotions sometimes run high. You have an eye and a heart for that. In everything you do, you put the resident first. In doing so, you work on repair. Of homes and buildings. And of trust."
>
> *Original wording in Dutch:*
> "De impact van de aardbevingsschade is groot en emoties lopen soms hoog op. Daar heb je oog en hart voor. In alles wat je doet, zet je de bewoner centraal. Je werkt daarmee aan herstel. Van woningen en gebouwen. En van vertrouwen."[36]

In both multi-annual programmes which set out the NCG's long-term policy strategy, the word *vertrouwen* occurs frequently and plays a central role as a policy objective. It is especially emphasized that this trust should be regained 'with deeds' (Nationaal Coördinator Groningen, 2015; 2016). As in the other policy documents, there is no clear definition or description of what 'trust' means concretely, in this setting. In the 2015 multi-annual programme, the word *vertrouwen* is accompanied with the indicators 'degree of social trust' and 'degree of institutional trust'; neither indicator is further concretized. Both policy documents also make it clear that residents should be put first, or in other words that residents are to be the central concern of NCG and its actions. Both multi-annual programmes consider this social aspect to be related to trust:

> "By having an eye and ear for their [= residents'] interests, needs and motivations we can make the fortification operation contribute to the restoration of trust. The fortification operation is also a social challenge."
>
> "Essential in working to restore trust is clear, transparent and accessible communication [with residents]."

[35] Mr Bas Eenhoorn was chairman of the supervisory board of CVW. In the report quoted here, he also concluded that CVW should be placed at a greater distance from NAM.
[36] Website visited on October 1, 2018.

Original wording in Dutch:
*"*Door oog en oor te hebben voor hun belangen, behoeften en beweegredenen kunnen we de versterkingsopgave laten bijdragen aan het herstel van vertrouwen. De versterkingsopgave is ook een sociale opgave." (NCG 2015: 129)

"Essentieel bij het werken aan herstel van vertrouwen is heldere, transparante en toegankelijke communicatie [met bewoners]." (NCG 2016: 129)

From 2018 onwards: National Coordinator Groningen (NCG) and Administrative Agreements

From about 2018 we see a turning point in the original emphasis on trust. In the NCG's quarterly reports[37], the word *vertrouwen* is no longer present – except in relation to the housing market and as a reference to measurements of Gronings Perspectief. As time goes by, *vertrouwen* seems to be slowly disappearing from official documents of NCG. In the annual figures of 2020 we only encounter it once, and that is with reference to the degree of trust that NCG experiences itself: 'However, the results also give us confidence in the future.'[38] (Nationaal Coördinator Groningen, 2021).

In the Administrative Agreements regarding the fortification operation in Groningen[39] (November 2020) we do not read about trust even once, which is strikingly different from the Governmental Agreement of 2014 which discusses trust repeatedly and even mentions trust explicitly in its title[40].

So we observe that, throughout the years, *vertrouwen* in the sense of restoring Groningen residents' trust, has disappeared from the public governmental documents. However, we do not observe this for all institutions' documents. A remarkable observation is that the Institution for Mining damage Groningen (IMG) emphasizes its task of restoring trust:

" 'Our main mission is to restore trust in government, which has been mostly lost. Our independence is essential for that, as well as offering generous and fair compensation', says IMG-chairman of the board Bas Kortmann."

Original Dutch wording:
" 'Onze belangrijkste opdracht is het vertrouwen in de overheid, dat veelal verloren is gegaan, weer te herstellen. Onze onafhankelijkheid is daar essentieel voor en het bieden van een ruimhartige en rechtvaardige vergoeding', zegt bestuursvoorzitter Bas Kortmann van het IMG[41]."

Other institutions that are involved in the gas case, but not responsible for damage settlement or fortification, also continue to highlight trust, such as *Staatstoezicht op de Mijnen* (2020) (SodM, translated as State Supervisor of Mines), *Onafhankelijke Raadsman* (2020) (translated as Independent Counsel), *Groninger Gasberaad* (2020) (translated as Groningen Gas Council). The Onafhankelijke Raadsman notices a shift from a lack of trust in NAM and CVW, to a lack of trust in

[37] the ones that were still available in March 2021.
[38] Original Dutch text: *De resultaten geven ons echter ook vertrouwen in de toekomst*. On the difference between *trust* and *confidence*: see section 3.3.3.
[39] Dutch: *Bestuurlijke Afspraken versterking Groningen.*
[40] Report Commissie-Meijer (2013).
[41] Website IMG, July 1, 2020.

the national government and the Ministry of Economic Affairs (Onafhankelijke Raadsman, 2018; 2020):

> "In the past, this lack of trust was expressed particularly towards NAM and CVW. In recent months, however, the lack of trust among Groningen residents has increasingly been directed at the state government, the Minister and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate. This is a sad observation."
>
> And:
>
> "In the past, procedures have been changed more often, which usually did not enhance residents' trust in a fair and equal treatment. It is therefore sensible to also consider the social effects of a possible change of approach in the decision-making process."
>
> *Original Dutch texts:*
>
> "In het verleden werd dit gebrek aan vertrouwen met name geuit richting NAM en CVW. De laatste maanden richt het gebrek aan vertrouwen onder Groningers zich echter steeds meer op het Rijk, de minister en het ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat. Dit is een trieste constatering." (2018: 10)
>
> En:
>
> "In het verleden zijn de regels vaker veranderd, wat vaak niet goed was voor het vertrouwen van inwoners in een rechtvaardige en gelijkwaardige behandeling. Het is daarom verstandig ook de maatschappelijke effecten van een mogelijke wijziging van aanpak mee te wegen in de besluitvorming." (2020: 27)

The overall conclusion that can be drawn from public communication of the various institutions is that the word *vertrouwen* (trust) was frequently used and, especially in the early years when institutions were formed to tackle problems that residents struggled with, high expectations were formulated regarding the restoration of trust. At the same time we note that the meaning(s) of 'trust' tend to be taken for granted in these publications. We hardly noticed any specification of the term, which might (unconsciously) undermine ambitions and efforts to restore trust. The lack of specification might be due to the psychological complexity and sociological variability of *trust:* 'peoples' views [on trust] are ambiguous and can vary depending on the subject and the mood of the day' (Peeters et al., 2021: 3).

The following subsection discusses some scientific studies that have looked specifically at social and societal impacts of damage repair and fortification in Groningen.

3.1.2 Applied scientific research into trust in Groningen

Several researchers have studied social consequences of damage and fortification procedures in Groningen. This section is limited to three sources, namely the research group Gronings Perspectief[42], the Knowledge Platform (*Kennisplatform*) *Leefbaar en Kansrijk Groningen*[43] and the dissertation of Melanie Bakema (2019).

[42] University of Groningen, see https://www.groningsperspectief.nl/summary-results-english/

[43] Jointly established by the University of Groningen, Hanze University of Applied Sciences Groningen, CMO-STAMM/Social Planning Bureau Groningen and GGD Groningen (Municipal Health Department Groningen), see https://en.kennisplatformleefbaar.nl/

Since 2016, Gronings Perspectief has studied changes in health, safety perceptions and future prospects of residents in Groningen. Until January 2021, they conducted six surveys among 7,000 residents in Groningen of which over 3,000 participated (Stroebe et al., 2021a). One of the survey questions concerns trust of Groningen residents with regard to damage settlement and fortification; the question asks 'How much trust do you have in the following institutions or persons?' followed by a list of targets which include: 'The national government, your local government, the province of Groningen, the fire department / Safety Region Groningen, the police, the Dutch Oil Company (NAM), the Centre for Safe Living (CVW), the Temporary Commission Mining damage Groningen (TCMG)[44], the National Coordinator Groningen (NCG), the Groningen Ground Movement (*Groninger Bodem Beweging*), the Groningen Gas Council (*Groninger Gasberaad*), Neighbours.'[45] Respondents were asked to score their rate on a 5 points-scale from 'no trust at all' to 'high trust'.

Results of this longitudinal survey research show that Groningen residents have low trust in institutions concerning damage settlement and the fortification operation (Stroebe et al., 2020; 2021a). These institutions are CVW, NCG, TCMG/IMG. Highest trust levels have always been measured with regard to the Safety Region Groningen, the police and neighbours. Trust in national government has scored significantly lower than trust in local and regional government; trust in NCG and CVW turned out to be even lower, and trust in NAM scored the lowest of all institutions (Stroebe et al., 2019; 2021). A difference was observed between *groups* of residents: those who had claimed damage with TCMG (and its successor IMG) only once, had more trust in this institution. The group of residents who had been struggling with multiple damages for a longer period, reported the lowest trust in institutions of all groups (Stroebe et al., 2019b; 2021a). The only organizations in which this group of residents had more trust than the other groups, are the Groningen Ground Movement and the Groningen Gas Council (Stroebe et al., 2019b).

Although over the years, Gronings Perspectief has provided a clear picture regarding the degree of trust in the various institutions involved, it is neither possible to say *in what* exactly these respondents have (no) trust, nor what this (lack of) trust *means*. This is due to the type of research; the questions about trust in institutions refer to institutions 'as a whole', not to individual professionals, procedures, performance, communication and also not to the frequency of and experiences with (contact persons of) these institutions. To gain more insight into the nature and development of the (lack of) trust, the present PhD-project focuses on discourse; it concentrates on peoples' perspectives of interpersonal contacts – relations between residents and professionals of the institutions – and on the way people talk about these institutions. The idea behind this is that through repeated interactions, relationships can be built, with (lack of) trust being a feature of these relationships. Moreover, views of and opinions about institutions can develop in various ways which include personal experiences, hearsay, stereotypes and media reports.

[44] Since July 2020 renamed into Institution for Mining Damage Groningen (IMG).
[45] Original Dutch question: 'Hoeveel vertrouwen heeft u in de volgende instanties of personen? De Rijksoverheid, Uw gemeente, De provincie Groningen, De brandweer/ Veiligheidsregio Groningen, De politie, De Nederlandse Aardolie Maatschappij (NAM), Het Centrum Veilig Wonen (CVW), De Tijdelijke Commissie Mijnbouwschade Groningen (TCMG), De Nationaal Coördinator Groningen (NCG), De Groninger Bodem Beweging (GBB), Het Groninger Gasberaad, Buurtgenoten.'

This relational approach aligns with the conclusions of Hupkes and colleagues (2021), based on their extensive literature study of publications with regard to the Groningen gas case. They note that *relational* repair, which they consider a fundamental dimension – besides the material and procedural repair – has received too little attention. Their subsequent advice is based on a conclusion that in Groningen, not only the relation between government and citizens has been damaged, but also the relations between different levels of government (national, regional and local), as well as between governments and NAM. As part of a solid solution for the situation in Groningen, they emphasize the need for material, procedural ánd relational repair. Specific for relational repair is trust – which they suppose as a desire of *all* the institutions involved – and it should be top priority to investigate what the system of institutions can do to be trustworthy and to repair trust. Above all, the awareness should return that government is a trustworthy ally. Key pillars to realize this are recognition of residents' situation and suffering, and compensation and fair treatment (Hupkes et al., 2021: 33-40).

From Bakema's study on disaster governance we learn about the role of institutions and institutional arrangements ('governance') in the gas case, in which entangled relationships at the macro level are considered a possible obstacle for residents' trust:

> 'The entangled relationship between the state and the NAM consequently triggers questions about the veritable interests of the involved parties, in a context in which local people believe that economic interests are prioritized at the expense of their safety' (Bakema, 2019: 15).

Furthermore, the *position* of the National Coordinator Groningen as a part of the Ministry of Economic Affairs (from 2020-2022: the Ministry of Interior Affairs) complicates this situation, because the NCG cannot be completely independent 'as long as it is part of the gas extraction for energy supply and export revenues.' (Bakema, 2019: 174). The relevance of the diverging interests of the parties involved will be further discussed from a theoretical perspective in section 3.4.

Although trust is a variable and complex phenomenon, its *relevance* is clear from the policy documents we discussed. Especially in the early years of the Dialogue Table and NCG, trust was one of the key policy objectives, at least in the rhetoric of policy documents. All the more important, therefore, to take a much closer look at the concept of trust and the process of restoring it from a scientific point of view.

3.2 Defining and measuring trust in scientific research

Many research articles, handbooks and dissertations have been dedicated to *trust* – there are even scientific journals solely devoted to the subject, like the *Journal of Trust Research* and the *Journal of Trust Management*. This indicates the widespread relevance of the concept. Before setting our course in the meandering field of trust research, we present a short overview of what trust is thought to mean (section 3.2.1) and some remarks on the measurement of trust in scientific research (section 3.2.2).

3.2.1 Common elements in definitions of trust

A concise summary of the challenges in researching trust is given by Lyon and colleagues: '[Trust is] one of the most fascinating and fundamental social phenomena yet at the same time one of the most elusive and challenging concepts one could study' (2012: 1). As became clear by the end of section 3.1, trust is considered to be of great importance for human relations and for societies to function well, and Groningen is no different. Its exact meaning is nevertheless not easy to capture in words – although everyone has some perception of what trust is. So first, we should take notice of the conceptual vagueness of the term and consider it from a scientific point of view.

Trust has been studied in a wide range of disciplines, from psychology, sociology and organization studies, to philosophy, political science, risk management and economics. What researchers from these different disciplines have in common is that they agree on the difficulty of defining what trust exactly means (e.g. Mayer et al., 1995; Nannestad, 2008; Van der Meer, 2010; Siegrist et al., 2012; PytlikZillig & Kimbrough, 2016; Tyler, 2016; Grimmelikhuijsen & Knies, 2017). Political scientist Russell Hardin even questions the feasibility to find one overarching definition:

> 'The term "trust" is used in manifold ways in ordinary language as it is in both philosophy and the social sciences. There is little point in quibbling over the essential meaning of trust: It has no essential meaning.' (1999: 24)

One reason that it is difficult to agree on a common definition of the concept of trust, is that it is pervasive in human life and society, and thus relevant in many disciplines. Another reason why formulating a broad-based definition of trust is challenging, is the status of trust as a multi-faceted phenomenon: it can be approached as a judgment (e.g. Levi & Stoker, 2000), as an emotional experience or reaction (Engdahl & Lidskog, 2014), as a disposition that is more or less stable (Uslaner, 2008; 2018), or as a 'moral good' (Van 't Klooster, 2020), to name but a few facets.

As a consequence of the terminological opacity, the need to specify the term for research purposes is clear, otherwise the opacity spills over to the results. Dozens of definitions haven been offered in academic writing. PytlikZillig & Kimbrough, who both have psychological and behavioural scientific backgrounds, present a 'review of reviews' of issues surrounding the conceptualization and definition of trust (2016). So, the core issue might not be to achieve the one and only definition, but to fill in the concept in such a way that it can enjoy a broad consensus. Some of the trust definitions achieved the status of a 'consensus definition' and became frequently cited, also outside the original discipline; the three definitions below are quoted throughout the trust literature and provide tools for our research project:

- Mayer et al. define trust as: 'the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party' (1995: 712).
- According to Möllering[46] 'trust is an ongoing process of building on reason, routine and reflexivity, suspending irreducible social vulnerability and uncertainty as if they were

[46] From: Möllering, G. (2006), Trust Beyond Risk: The Leap of Faith. In: Möllering, G. (2006), *Trust: Reason, Routine, Reflexivity*. Chapter 5. Oxford: Elsevier.

favourably resolved, and maintaining thereby a state of favourable expectation towards the actions and intentions of more or less specific others'.
The suspension of uncertainty, also known as the 'leap of faith', is what Möllering considers as the essence of trust (2006: 110-111).

- Rousseau et al., in their overview of scholarship on trust: 'trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another' (1998: 395).

To recapitulate and interpret the relevant elements in these definitions: *willingness* and *intention* imply a choice of the one who trusts; the notion *psychological state* however, seems to go beyond a conscious choice. *Reason* and *reflexivity* point to conscious cognitive processes in the human mind, whereas *routine* indicates a more unconscious process. What all three definitions have in common, is the *vulnerability* (as a consequence of the *inability to control*) of the one who trusts and his or her (positive) *expectation* of the other party's actions. In sum, all three definitions implicitly treat trust as a relational quality: all three mention actions, intentions or behaviour of other(s) with regard to the one who trusts.

Trust as a relational good

The words 'another party', 'the other' and 'more or less specific others' refer to trust as something that exists between a subject who trusts (the *truster*) and an object that is being trusted (the *trustee*). We will use the designations *truster* and *trustee* in the remainder of this book. Both truster and trustee can be human individuals or groups of individuals; based on the above definitions, the term trustee may also relate to a more abstract referent ('a party', see Mayer et al., 1995).

That trust always occurs between a subject and an object, underlines its intrinsically *relational* nature. That trust is a modality or quality of relations is recognized in many studies, such as Lewicki & Bunker (1996), Levi & Stoker (2000), Lenard (2008), Noordegraaf-Eelens and colleagues (2010), Van der Meer (2010), Morgner (2013), Schoorman and colleagues (2015), Bachmann and colleagues (2015), Bertsou (2019), Schnaudt (2019), Peeters and colleagues (2021).

Rather than offering a new definition, we identify what to us are the most salient features of the three definitions that we consider important to our study. The first is that, as mentioned, trust is *relational.* The implication of this is that trust is not a static property but something that develops as the relationship develops, for example because the truster and trustee interact; trust can also develop because the context within which truster and trustee find themselves changes (this points to trust as *situational*, see e.g. Newton, 2001; Tyler, 2016). The second is that the experience of trust entails that trusters have positive *expectations* about the trustee's intentions and/or actions. The third element is that trusters are (somewhat) *vulnerable* since they are *not able to control* or monitor these intentions, actions and behaviour; therefore a truster relegates a certain amount of control to the trustee in the relationship.

3.2.2 Difficulties in measuring

The pervasive vagueness of *trust* has another important implication as it also affects the exactness of measuring trust (e.g. Levi & Stoker, 2000). It can be studied from a variety of directions. Siegrist and colleagues conclude that there is 'no agreement among researchers about how to define trust and how it should be measured' (2012: 1401). Hardin points to the undesirable consequences that 'loose usage […] allows authors to make inconsistent claims without awareness and sometimes to make very grand claims whose content is, at best, vague. Such usage forces readers to interpret [those claims] in their own way' (1999: 29). Luhmann observes that empirical research has confused, for example, trust in politics with attitudes toward leaders or institutions, with alienation, with hope, worries, and with confidence (2000: 94). Furthermore, Nannestad concludes that most surveys and experiments on trust 'do not seem to proceed from any clear account of what is meant by trust in the first place' (2008: 415-416). In addition, there has been little consistency in the *trust*-questions being asked by different surveys (Lyon et al., 2012).

A central issue in trust research remains thus: how to measure it? Many studies refer to, and also criticize, what is called the 'standard trust question' which says: "Generally [or: Broadly] speaking, do you think that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?"[47] This very broad question might reveal more about a respondent's general state of mind than about trust relations. Newton (2001) argues that responses to this standard question reveal more about how respondents evaluate the trustworthiness of the world they live in, than about their disposition as a truster or distruster. Another form of ambiguity arises when asking this question, as Eric Uslaner argues that a scale from 0–10 (zero trust – ultimate trust) 'leads people to choose the middle options (4, 5, and 6 on the 0–10 scale) even if they are really trusters or mistrusters' (2018: 8). A further problem that makes survey research complicated, is that it is not clear what respondents mean by 'I (do not) trust x' when the survey question does not outline the intended meaning of trust. Respondents might not even be aware of what they mean by trust, or they might not know whether they trust, as Eliasoph (1997) demonstrated with a concrete example[48]; what this shows is that one and the same score on a survey item may mean different things to different respondents. To counter these problems, researchers designed surveys in which they unraveled *trust* into several comprising elements (e.g. Grimmelikhuijsen & Knies, 2017; Devine et al., 2020). For a more detailed discussion of these elements, see section 3.4.

Another challenge in trust research is the *dynamic process* of trust: it is built up, used, maintained, broken, and repaired as relationships evolve and situations change (Lyon et al., 2012). This calls for longitudinal studies; an example of which was mentioned in 3.1.1, the series of research projects by

[47] See e.g. Newton, 2001; Uslaner, 2015; Bauer & Freitag, 2018.

[48] Eliasoph's ethnographic study consists of listening to how people actually talk politics instead of focusing on inner beliefs and knowledge. She examined the politics of everyday sense-making in interaction. In her interviews with volunteers she asked the forced-choice survey question: "How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right?" One of the respondents reacted: 'Most of the time. Well, at least I'd like to think it's most of the time. Of course, I'm not so sure it really is. But I hope it is. So, I'd say "most of the time." Yes, put "most of the time." Similarly, typical volunteers responded to the question, "Can a person like you make a difference?" by saying "Yes," with an "at least I hope so" tagged on" (Eliasoph, 1997: 616).

Gronings Perspectief (Stroebe et al., 2019; 2020; 2021). A longitudinal quantitative study can show fluctuations in trust, it is however not capable of indicating or specifying the complex nature of trust.

So far, we have implicitly discussed different *forms* of trust which are outlined more explicitly in the next sections. In everyday language – and sometimes also in scientific studies – this one term, trust or the Dutch *vertrouwen*, is used in many different contexts. However, closer observation reveals that different forms of *vertrouwen*, that play a role in different contexts, are not well covered by one term. To back this observation, section 3.3 takes up different forms of *vertrouwen* (trust and confidence) that will appear to be relevant for our study.

3.3 Forms of trust

A first global distinction can be made between trust that plays a role in the interpersonal sphere, and trust that transcends that domain. *Interpersonal trust* is a form of trust that one human being places in another human being[49]. Beyond interpersonal relations, trust becomes more abstract as the referent is something bigger than a concrete individual human. In other words, these are *impersonal* forms of trust. This form has labels such as *institutional trust*, *political trust* or *system trust*. The difference between personal and institutional trust is an important one, according to Tyler (2016: 209). It is an important question whether we can still speak of relationships between truster and trustee here.

These two distinct forms are discussed in 3.3.1 (*interpersonal trust*) and 3.3.2 (*impersonal trust*). Because trust in its most abstract form is assumed to be relevant in the Groningen gas case, we dedicate a sole section to the concept of *system trust* (3.3.3).

3.3.1 Interpersonal trust

When an individual A (the *truster*) trusts an individual B (the *trustee*), we are talking about the realm of human relations. Trust is considered a quality or feature of human relations, and in this sense specified as *interpersonal trust*. Within the sphere of interpersonal trust, the literature primarily distinguishes between two kinds of trust with respect to their social scope: *generalized* trust and *particularized* trust (see e.g. Freitag & Traunmüller, 2009).

Generalized trust, or ***general trust***, is considered a relatively stable human value. It is also called a propensity to trust (Green, 2013). General trusters have 'a positive view of human nature and believe that contact with different groups can be both personally and socially fruitful' (Uslaner & Conley, 2003: 335). A truster's 'temperament, personality characteristics, and possibly even genotype[50] may predispose her or him to be more trusting or suspicious of others generally' (Borum, 2010: 10).

Particularized trust, also known as ***strategic trust***, is often limited to people like oneself, the in-group. Particularized trusters tend to stick to their own group and 'avoid strangers and base their

[49] Or a couple/group of identifiable humans.
[50] Trust from the perspective of brain functioning (neuroscience) is not included here. See Borum (2010) for an overview, e.g. of the polyvagal theory by Stephen Porges.

social circles upon family, close friends, and members of their own groups' (Uslaner & Conley, 2003: 335).

In short, people differ in their propensity to trust, and whether they are inclined to restrict trust to their in-group or extend it to humans in general. This predisposition might influence other forms of trust, which are discussed below.

3.3.2 Forms of impersonal trust

Impersonal trust extends beyond the realm of concrete human relations, and targets to more abstract or imperceptible referents. We first address *institutional trust* and then move on to a more abstract form of institutional trust: *political trust*.

Trust in institutions

In addition to interpersonal relations, life brings us into all kinds of *situations* beyond the realm of human relations, where trust also matters. When collaborating in damage settlement and fortification procedures, personal contacts usually take place between individual residents and professionals of institutions. In these contacts, varying degrees of interpersonal trust may develop, or break down. However, the ambition to restore trust in Groningen goes beyond these personal contacts, as residents are assumed to trust 'something bigger' than just the individual professional they have some kind of relation with (see section 3.1.1, Relevant institutions).

The question is whether we can speak of a *relation* in the context of something beyond the interpersonal sphere? Ullmann-Margalit argues that because institutions cannot have intentions in anything like the way humans have intentions, trust in institutions should be understood as confident predictions that the institution will pursue its goals: 'When we trust an individual, we expect his or her attitude toward us to be entirely personal. When we say we trust an institution, we expect its attitude to us to be impersonal' (2004: 77).

Although there is no agreement among researchers whether and how individuals relate to institutions (e.g. Lauret, 2018 versus Mosch & Prast, 2010), trust in institutions is widely studied and several terms have been developed. The most important to our research are *institutional trust*, *political trust* and *system trust*. There are no strict boundaries between these concepts, however. *Institutional trust* can be described as a form of trust between individuals and professional(s) of concrete organizations (McMurphy, 2013). Institutional trust is also called 'vertical trust' and defined as 'the trust of the citizens in the institutions, particularly the public institutions, of society' (Lindström & Janzon, 2007). *Political trust* is a form of trust between individuals and systems of governance (McMurphy, 2013) or a political system (Bertsou, 2019) or as confidence in institutions such as the executive, the legislature, the judiciary, the bureaucracy, and the police (Uslaner, 2018). This, unfortunately, already shows how little concrete a term like 'political trust' is. Because of the anticipated importance of the concept *system trust,* it is discussed separately in section 3.3.3.

The status of political trust or trust in government

The above overview shows that political trust refers to a more amorphous phenomenon than institutional trust. Nowadays an enormous stream of trust research has focused specifically on

political trust, trust in government, or trust in public institutions in general. To mention a few: Bovens & Wille (2008; 2013), Denters (2002), Newton & Norris (1999), Levi & Stoker (2000), Van den Bos (2011), Grönlund & Setälä (2012), Grimmelikhuijsen & Knies (2017), Raaphorst & Van de Walle (2018), Schnaudt (2019), Devine and colleagues (2020).

However, the distinction between these three forms of trust is far from clear-cut and might just be a matter of choosing terms. Moreover, in a research context it is relevant to recognize that the term 'government' is also diffuse and difficult to understand for many citizens (see Bovens & Wille, 2008; Bröring, 2014; Herian & Neal, 2016). Van der Meer & Zmerli assert that one could even argue that 'survey measures of political trust may be *too* specific; many citizens do not draw clear lines between […] various objects of political trust' (2017: 5). It is clear that this provides a challenge when studying trust in abstract or amorphous entities.

From the perspective of Van der Meer & Zmerli (2017), political trust is fundamentally relational (and situational), but others, like Hardin, deny the possibility of a trust relationship between citizens and government. Instead, following Hardin (1999) we should consider political trust as a relationship of inductive expectations, because he deems it impossible for citizens to trust governments:

> 'the idea that one could trust or distrust a large-scale institution is meaningless, since one condition of trust – that the truster could know the interests and motivations of the trusted – cannot possibly be fulfilled, given the sheer numbers of government officials and the distance between citizens and even the closest of governments.'[51]

In other words, the impossibility of knowing government's *interests* and *motivations*, due to the *distance* between truster and trustee, makes trust an irrelevant characteristic. Hardin's perspective connects to Denters' (2002) conception of political trust as citizens' satisfaction with actual policies and services. And Uslaner formulates it straight out: 'political trust is all about evaluations of performance' (2018: 4). According to Levi & Stoker, what is necessary for trust to be relevant to some political object is 'that the object be a political actor' (2000: 497). Such an actor could be an individual person (e.g. a minister, a mayor), a group of individuals (e.g. politicians in general), or even an institution (e.g. politics, government or the court).

So, just talking about trust in government or in politics does not make much sense until it is clear what people (or: respondents participating in a study) consider as its referent: is the trust aimed at an individual politician, a group of politicians, an institution, the workings of democracy in a specific country? As trust is intrinsically relational, abstract entities make it harder to experience a relation, and thus more difficult to place trust and having a clear idea of what trust means. The difficulty of placing trust in abstract entities is even more true for 'systems' – abstract, amorphous entities that are only to some extent visible or accessible via representatives, regulations or institutional communication.

Because the statements on restoring Groningen residents' trust are not concretized, as we have seen in 3.1, we will dwell on the term *system trust* below, because this concept may help to reveal the reason why these statements have not been made more concrete.

[51] In: Warren, M. (1999). *Democracy and Trust*, chapter *Conclusion*.

3.3.3 System trust or confidence

To better understand *system trust*, the frequently made distinction between the terms *trust* and *confidence* is a relevant one. Because confidence is introduced here as a new term, we provide some background first. In everyday language the two terms tend to be used synonymously, and many languages do not even have more than one word for 'trust' or 'confidence' (Noordegraaf-Eelens et al., 2010; Schnaudt, 2019: 51)[52]. The English distinction was drawn by Niklas Luhmann (1988; 2000) and built on by many scholars, explicitly in Morgner (2018)[53], and more generally in studies such as Newton & Norris (1999), Offe (1999), Abts (2005), Grönlund & Setälä (2012), and Schnaudt (2019).

In Luhmann's earlier definition of *system trust*, it is stated that the truster 'basically assumes that a system is functioning and places his trust in that function, not in people. […] system trust builds upon the fact that others also trust' (1979: 55-77[54]). To have trust in the system is considered by Kroeger as a sort of 'herd mentality' (2015: 434), or to frame it in a more human and positive way, it is perceived to be a *shared reality*: a belief held in common with other people (Echterhoff et al., 2009).

In later publications, Luhmann refers to interpersonal relations with *trust* and to 'participation in functional systems like the economy or politics' with *confidence*. He continues to argue that people cannot avoid participation because 'such is life'; in other words, participation is not prior to any decision or choice, and 'one can only feel unhappy and complain about it' (2000: 102-103). However, Luhmann argues that many empirical studies have shown that negative stereotypes of systems (e.g. enterprises, the state, et cetera) can co-exist with positive experiences with individuals who are part of such systems. And so it may be possible 'to build up trust on the micro-level and protect systems against loss of confidence on the macro-level' (Luhmann, 2000: 105; see also Kroeger (2017) about creating trust in systems and institutions via facework). Here, Luhmann's perspective on trust and confidence as distinct concepts becomes explicit.

Despite the conceptual distinction between *trust* and *confidence*, measurements in the context of these concepts do not suggest they can easily be distinguished empirically as separate constructs. Although international surveys contain measures of 'trust' (e.g. European Social Survey) and 'confidence' (e.g. World Values Survey), empirically the two are hardly separable as is indicated by strong correlates and the high similarities of trends (Zmerli & Van der Meer, 2017). So, the distinction remains a scientific one that we nevertheless consider as relevant to clarify the working of different forms of trust in everyday life. This relevance is recognized by scholars like Schnaudt (2019), who proposes to rely on an analytical distinction between trust and confidence, because citizens' interpersonal relationships have 'distinct characteristics from citizens' relationships with political institutions and authorities.' Following this analytical distinction, Schnaudt proposes that 'the notion of confidence should be employed to denote the "relationship" between citizens and political institutions and authorities, whereas the notion of trust should be employed to depict relationships between individuals.' (2019: 22)

[52] such as Dutch (*vertrouwen*) and German (*Vertrauen*).
[53] In this contribution, Christian Morgner elaborates on Luhmann's distinction between 'personal trust' and 'system trust' or 'confidence' (see p. 235 onwards).
[54] In: Kroeger (2015).

For our study we follow Schnaudt's conceptual distinction, because our research on *vertrouwen* comprises both relations between individual humans and between individuals and institutions (mainly political ones, as will become clear in chapter 7). We will also draw upon the distinction by Noordegraaf-Eelens and colleagues (2010) who state that trust and confidence take place on different levels. Mainly based on these two studies, and complemented with Luhmann (2000), Morgner (2018) and Abts (2005), we have listed the distinct characteristics of *trust* and *confidence* in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Trust vs. Confidence characteristics

Trust	**Confidence (as in 'system trust')**
Truster places trust in a person or a group of persons (= trustee). ⬇ Trust is *personal, specific* and *addressable.*	Truster has confidence in an entity, phenomenon or abstract referent. ⬇ Confidence is *impersonal, diffuse* and *non-addressable.*
The truster is able to make a conscious choice to get involved in a trust relation.	A relation of confidence is unconscious or imposed.
Trust refers to *horizontal relationships*.	Confidence refers to *vertical relations* with regard to someone with authority or a phenomenon the truster cannot influence.
The truster takes a risk in placing trust, thereby accepting vulnerability.	The truster has no choice as there is no alternative. The truster is subject to (actions of) the trustee.
In case of violation, a truster may feel anger and may withdraw from activities or the relation (= exit option) ➡ violations are to some extent attributed *internally,* resulting in feelings of regret.	In case of violation, a truster may experience alienation or apathy, but has no exit-option ➡ violation tends to be attributed *externally,* resulting in feelings of alienation.
Less immune to violations, so it can easily be destroyed[55].	More immune to violations, because violation is rather seen as an exception[56].

Notwithstanding the clear distinction that such a table presents, we explicitly remark that not all researchers have made such a distinction between trust and confidence. Our impression is that the ways in which scientific studies treat these concepts (or just one of them) fall apart in four global groups:

[55] Abts, 2005.
[56] Abts, 2005.

- Studies we relied on for Table 3.1 above (already discussed).
- Studies that refrain from the term *confidence* and only use *system trust* or *trust in government* (e.g. Hardin, 1999; Van der Meer, 2010; Hawley, 2012; Grimmelikhuijsen & Knies, 2017; Van 't Klooster, 2018; Lauret, 2018).
- Studies that switch between *trust* and *confidence* without making any distinction at all (e.g. Kasperson, 1986; Engdahl & Lidskog, 2014; PytlikZillig et al., 2017; Bertsou, 2019; Devine et al., 2020).
- Studies that propose a different distinction between *trust* and *confidence*, which was found in some studies about risk management (Siegrist et al., 2005; 2012) and about the financial sector (Mosch & Prast, 2010; Earle, 2009).

We choose to mainly follow Luhmann's distinction, as it is built on by many others. In the situation of our research, *confidence* might be the appropriate term when describing residents' experiences with (the construct of) institutions in the gas case. This is especially true when the institutional construct is unclear and abstract to participants in a study, or to a population in general. Although interpersonal trust is considered to be damaged more easily than confidence, the literature offers us no clues regarding the possible difference between the restoration of trust on the one hand, and of confidence on the other.

Like trust, confidence can be further specified. The description below is limited to two forms that are considered as relevant for the present study: *general confidence* and *political confidence*. ***General confidence*** is the conviction that everything is under control, and involves a positive expectation regarding future events, or 'towards systems in general' (Siegrist et al., 2005: 151). Where general trust refers to trust in people in general, general confidence is targeted at something less specific, and according to Siegrist and colleagues, confidence 'can be had in just about anything' (2005: 147).

Political confidence is defined by Schnaudt as 'citizens' confidence in the fulfilment of their expectations about legitimate and effective governance by political institutions and authorities' (2019: 33). Schnaudt emphatically distinguishes between *representative* (political parties, parliament, government, politicians) versus *regulative* institutions (courts, police, public administrations, civil servants). Representative institutions form a political context where diverging interests and identities play a role and often conflict. Regulative institutions operate from principles as fairness, neutrality and objectivity. In a nutshell, representative institutions have a clear and noticeable *political* character whereas regulative institutions have an *apolitical* character. Furthermore, representative institutions and authorities are more distant to citizens' everyday lives and many people get in contact with representatives from the government, the national parliament, or political parties. Whereas citizens may experience the workings of regulative institutions by means of direct observation and encounters, they have to rely on second-hand sources and mediated information, in particular the mass media, when it comes to representative institutions. And so, Schnaudt concludes, 'whereas confidence in regulative institutions and authorities operates in a more direct way, confidence in representative institutions and authorities operates in a rather "mediated" or "mediatized" way' (2019: 42).

Because this distinction between regulative and representative ('public services' and 'politics') is not that easy for many citizens, and tasks of government are very complex, it might be relevant to note

that several authors consider it difficult or inappropriate for individuals to experience 'system trust' or 'confidence' (e.g. Hardin, 1999; Hawley, 2012). It might not even be possible for ordinary citizens to gather enough information and knowledge about political authorities and role-holders within political institutions. Furthermore, citizens are 'not in a position to reliably assess the concrete motives and interests of each of them', as Schnaudt notes (2019: 24), thereby implicitly stating that motives and interests of the trusted party are *preconditions* for establishing citizens' confidence. Like Schnaudt (2019), also Hardin (1999), and Schoorman and colleagues (2015) recognize the abstract or distal nature of government and institutions that citizens have very little connection with at a personal level. It follows that it is difficult for citizens to assess abstract institutions' intentions, motivations and interests. These references to preconditions for trust relate to what is paramount in the literature on trust: factors that determine ***trustworthiness***. Trustworthiness and its preconditions are discussed in section 3.4, as well as the *disposition* of a truster with regard to trust.

3.4 Preconditions for trust

What leads people to trust, or have confidence in, another party – whether this be a concrete person, an institution, or some abstract entity? All forms of trust – except for unconditional or blind trust – must be based on something, which will be elaborated below as *preconditions* or *antecedents* for trust.

Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) have specified several preconditions for trust. This has been an influential piece of work that has inspired a broad range of research by scholars such as Colquitt and colleagues (2007), Borum (2010), Schoorman and colleagues (2015), Grimmelikhuijsen & Knies (2017), PytlikZillig and colleagues (2017), Devine and colleagues (2020), to name but a few. In short, Mayer and colleagues propose that trust can be predicted by a combination of:
1) the truster's *propensity to trust*. A propensity or disposition to trust is assumed to be a property of the truster, almost like an individual attribute. This is also described as generalized trust.
2) *dimensions of trustworthiness* of the trustee, as perceived by the truster. Trustworthiness comprises the characteristics of the individual(s) or phenomenon being trusted with regard to the environment in which trust must occur (Borum, 2010). In the studies mentioned above, these characteristics are formulated in terms of three dimensions: competence, benevolence, and integrity.

Earlier research in the field of risk communication by Kasperson (1986) mentions these dimensions in different wordings, but comparable to the explicit distinction proposed by Mayer and colleagues (1995). These three dimensions of trustworthiness are also called 'Big 3' predictors in trustworthiness research (Borum, 2010)[57]. Trusters are assumed to assess, more or less consciously, three dimensions of trustworthiness that are detailed in Table 3.2. Hence, they are called dimensions of *perceived* trustworthiness.

[57] Other researchers use variations on these dimensions, such as Levi & Stoker (2000), Denters (2002), Van der Meer (2010), Hawley (2012), Siegrist et al. (2012), Schnaudt (2019).

Table 3.2: Dimensions of perceived trustworthiness (based on Mayer et al. (1995) and others).

Dimension	Nature	Behaviour of trustee (as perceived by truster)
Competence (other labels: ability, performance, capability)	Instrumental (cf Tyler, 2016)	Delivering results or achievements. Demonstrating (communicative) skills and (technical) expertise.
Benevolence (other labels: care, commitment, intention)	Social affective	Having a concern for interests *above* their own. Trustee visibly acts in the truster's interest, shows care and good intentions towards the truster.
Integrity	Social ethical	Acting from moral values, such as promise keeping, telling the truth, acting objectively and fair, applying procedural justice and impartiality.

Throughout publications, the distinction between the *benevolence* and *integrity* dimensions is not always clear-cut; these are sometimes considered together (e.g. Levi & Stoker, 2000; Denters, 2002; Di Battista et al., 2020). Di Battista and colleagues (2020) and PytlikZillig & Kimbrough (2016) suggest that these conceptually distinct dimensions of trustworthiness might not be empirically distinguishable in practice.

A slightly different four-part subdivision is proposed by Van der Meer, who conceptualizes trust in parliament as 'depending on four aspects: competence, care, accountability, and reliability' (2010: 519). The extensive study of Peeters and colleagues (2021) on distrust in government starts from these four aspects. With reference to the three dimensions of trustworthiness, we can consider *competence* and *care* as consistent with the meaning of 'competence' and 'benevolence' in Table 3.2, but *accountability* and *reliability* do not clearly align with 'integrity' in Mayer and colleagues' division (1995). *Reliability* is a rather multifaceted concept and can even be considered as an alternative term for trustworthiness. *Accountability* appears to relate to transparency, which is touched upon by Mayer and colleagues (1995) as 'openness', but only with reference to a few other publications. We discuss the aspect of transparency in a separate segment below.

Now what about abstract entities such as political or government systems? These have no concrete address, no observable motives or identifiable intentions (Morgner, 2018). Following Hawley, the more abstract or diffuse a system is, the more difficult it is 'to apply the language of trustworthiness or untrustworthiness' (2012: 101). And Schoorman and colleagues conclude that 'when the referent is an institution it is hard to gather data on the benevolence in the relationship' (2015: 22). However, this does not prevent people from attributing motives and intentions to such abstract entities. Tyler asks whether people can make 'person-like inferences about institutions, and if not, how do people make institutional trust judgments' (2016: 213). Note for example the statement 'I believe government is (not) acting out of concern for people in their community'[58], where '(not) acting out of concern' refers to (a lack of) benevolent intentions. Similarly, people are quite ready to pass

[58] Tyler (2016: 213)

judgments of competence about institutions, as well as judgments of integrity (or conversely, corruption). It therefore appears that people can express and experience confidence in institutions such as 'the government' or 'the bank(ing system)' on the basis of the same three dimensions of trustworthiness as identified by Mayer and colleagues (1995).

When one or more of these trustworthiness dimensions are assessed negatively, this affects the perceived trustworthiness, thereby reducing a truster's experience of trust. With respect to a loss of trust and trust restoration, Schoorman and colleagues argue that when a trustee shows a lack of ability, this has a lower impact on their perceived trustworthiness than when a trustee appears to fall short on care or commitment (aspects of benevolence). In this latter situation, 'the probability of rebuilding trust is very low' (2015: 22). A loss or breakdown of trust could even result in *distrust*. A lack of trust and distrust cannot simply be equated, as we will be discussing in section 3.5. But before focusing on distrust, we shortly turn to commonly heard calls for *transparency* and the reason why we chose not to include it in Table 3.2.

The ambiguous role of transparency

At first sight, an element might seem missing with regard to the integrity dimension in Table 3.2: practicing or showing *transparency*. As a synonym for transparency, *openness* is often mentioned. And as noted above, these terms are related to accountability.

An antonym of transparency is *opacity*, the meaning of which is associated with impenetrability and misdirection. Opacity implies that (organizational) activity and decision making are hidden from view and cannot be seen or assessed by third parties. Opacity is also assumed to thwart knowledge acquisition and undermine rational discourse. A last aspect is that opacity can occur by accident or on purpose: inadvertent or strategic opacity (Stohl, Stohl & Leonardi, 2016: 133-134).

Reference to transparency or openness in the context of trust and trustworthiness was only found in just a few studies: in Devine and colleagues (2020), as a characteristic of the integrity dimension in the context of trustworthiness of parliaments; in Colquitt and colleagues (2007) who treat 'openness' as an element of the benevolence dimension; in Grimmelikhuijsen and colleagues (2013), and Raaphorst & Van de Walle (2018), both of which are explained further below.

Then what does transparency refer to in the context of institutional trust? To our knowledge, the studies by Grimmelikhuijsen (and colleagues) provide the clearest insights into the role of transparency in the context of trust relations and trustworthiness in institutional settings. Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer (2014) note that transparency includes the availability of information about the internal workings or performance of an organization. Grimmelikhuijsen formulated transparency as 'the availability of information about an organization or actor allowing external actors to monitor the internal workings or performance of that organization.'[59]

Our impression is that a call for more transparency is frequently made on the basis of common sense assumptions that it should do good. But research is more ambiguous about effects of transparency on trustworthiness. Raaphorst & Van de Walle signal that even though transparency figures

[59] Dissertation of Stephan Grimmelikhuijsen (2012*), Transparency and trust. An experimental study of online disclosure and trust in government.* Referred to by Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer (2014: 139).

prominently on the agenda of many political movements, transparency's contribution to trust is not entirely convincing (2018). In any case, transparency is not a magic or universal cure for trust in government, according to Grimmelikhuijsen and colleagues: 'For transparency to work, it needs users who are capable of processing it, which is a fundamental problem of government transparency […] the information disclosed by governments is mostly too complex to digest, even for experts' (2013: 577-578). So, although transparency is often referred to as a panacea for building trust, researchers point to the danger of a too narrow focus on transparency (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2014). It might, for example, bring to light not only technical failure, but also diverging interests and hidden agendas, thereby contributing to decreased levels of trust, as a result of negative assessments of the benevolence dimension.

So far we have considered the concept of our study in a positive sense, namely the presence and degree of trust and confidence. We used 'lack of trust' for situations where trust (or confidence) is not present. We did not explicitly take its antonym into account: *distrust* (Dutch *wantrouwen*), so to complete this literature overview, we pick this up in the last section.

3.5 Distrust as a separate concept

Although *trust* and *distrust* are frequently used as opposites in everyday language, a lot of scholarly work considers these terms as independent constructs that can even co-occur in the same relationship (e.g. Lewicki et al. 1998). For instance, a lack of trust might point to a lack of knowledge or experience with a trustee's degree of competence or benevolence. As a consequence, the truster is simply unable to assess these dimensions and therefore refrains from placing trust in the other party. Distrust, on the other hand, points to active, *negative* assessments of a trustee's competence, benevolence and/or integrity. That distrust is an attitude in itself, and not just the absence of trust, is further advocated by Lenard (2008), Noordegraaf-Eelens and colleagues (2010), Van de Walle & Six (2013), Bertsou (2019), Devine and colleagues (2020) and Peeters and colleagues (2021).

Distrust and mistrust

In the literature we also encounter the closely related concept of *mistrust*[60] (Lenard, 2008; Van der Meer & Zmerli, 2017; Devine et al., 2020). From Lenard's point of view, *mistrust* refers to a cautious attitude towards others: a mistrustful person is unsure whether to trust or not in a given situation. In comparison, *distrust* refers to a firmer attitude and is best interpreted as 'an attitude that reflects suspicion or cynicism about the actions of others' (Lenard, 2018: 316). Van der Meer & Zmerli's distinction is more subtle: they differentiate between political mistrust (the absence of trust), political distrust (the opposite of trust) and political scepticism (withholding one's judgement).

This section further concentrates on the concept of *distrust*. According to Van de Walle & Six (2013) distrust is an actual expectation that another actor cannot be relied upon and will engage in harmful behaviour. In the studies of Lewicki and colleagues (1998), Ullmann-Margalit (2004) and Van de

[60] In English dictionaries, 'mistrust' and 'distrust' are mentioned as synonyms; in English-Dutch dictionaries both terms are translated as *wantrouwen* (a.o. Van Dale).

Walle & Six (2013), distrusters are described as not only lacking positive expectations, but instead as having overt *negative expectations* towards the trustworthiness of the other party.

Preconditions for distrust

When we consider the preconditions for trust, can we say that they also apply to distrust? With regard to the first precondition, a *propensity* to trust, such a disposition may also exist with regard to distrust. A propensity to distrust might eventually result in generalized distrust when people tend to be distrustful towards other people, institutions, or life in general.

The second precondition comprises the three dimensions of perceived trustworthiness. To gain more insight for the purpose of this study, it seems helpful to relate distrust and untrustworthiness to these dimensions as described in section 3.4 and listed in Table 3.2. In her study on political distrust, Bertsou (2019) made a transfer of the dimensions of perceived trustworthiness to perceptions of *un*trustworthiness regarding political distrust. The perception of the trustworthiness dimensions would then be reversed into (1) a lack of competence, (2) a lack of benevolence, and (3) a lack of integrity. The corresponding untrustworthy behaviour is then perceived as technical or communicative incompetence, incongruence between interests of (political) actors and citizens, and conduct that violates shared notions of right and fair (e.g. unfair, unethical processes, breaking promises).

Bertsou notes that earlier scholarly discussions of what constitutes a trustworthy government and a 'good type' of politician have identified qualities regarding strong ethical dimensions: honesty, fairness, integrity, and impartiality (the integrity dimension of trustworthiness). Finding solutions for distrust is harder than finding solutions for low trust. In a case of low trust, the basic disposition towards government is still one of trust. In the case of distrust, this basic trusting disposition is no longer present: all government actions are interpreted from a basic disposition of distrust and suspicion, which influences attitudes and perceptions (Van de Walle & Six, 2014: 169; see also Bachmann et al., 2015; Bertsou, 2019; Peeters et al., 2021).

Ullmann-Margalit (2004) argues that *distrusting* an institution is different from not trusting it: the question of distrust in an institution boils down to one's belief in the unfairness of the institution – and to the ancillary belief that the unfairness works against one's interests. In contrast to the case of a lack of institutional trust, institutional distrust explicitly involves the imputing of intentions. It involves a shared belief among groups of citizens about the personal intentions of the officeholders of the institution. In this statement, a personification of institutions is echoed.

Central to distrust and untrustworthiness therefore, are the dimensions of benevolence and integrity. Competence is less of an issue in active distrust, according to Ullmann-Margalit (2004). Central to distrust is an assessment of the trustee's intentions towards the truster, and/or their pursuit of interests that are incongruent with those of the truster.

Then what about distrust and untrustworthiness in relation to transparency? In the section on transparency above, we touched upon the issue that enhancing transparency might contribute to distrust. Openness with regard to the workings of institutions may reveal not only failing competence, but also a lack of benevolence which can be visible via diverging or conflicting interests, and hidden motives. When distrust results from a perceived lack of honest or benevolent behaviour,

repair of trust is all the more problematic: violations of integrity and benevolence are not only more difficult to repair, they might even lead to perceptions of *malicious* intentions (Van de Walle & Six, 2014; Lenard, 2008).

To conclude this section, we would like to shortly consider the antonym of benevolence: *malevolence*. Di Battista and colleagues (2020) define malevolence as behaviour that is 'ill-intentioned'. This definitely surpasses the mere absence of perceived benevolence and we assume that trust relates to distrust, as benevolence relates to malevolence. A *lack* of benevolence might simply point to diverging interests, where each party is pursuing their own interests at the expense of the other party[61]. However, when a trustee is perceived as malevolent, then this is essentially defined as a conflict situation.

In sum, when it comes to restoring trust or confidence, it has become clear that violations of *benevolence* and *integrity* are the preconditions of trust that, when violated, are most difficult to repair. In the case of distrust, benevolence and integrity are in doubt. If there is certainty that another party is malevolent, there is de facto conflict.

So far we have mainly focused on individuals' trust in institutions, professionals and systems; to conclude this chapter, a brief reference is made to the other side of *mutual trust*: institutions' trust in residents.

3.6 Trust relations as a two-way concept

In section 3.1.1 we noted that the Meijer-Committee (2013) mentioned the phrase 'mutual trust', which indicates the ambition to strive for trust *between* all stakeholders involved in dealing with the consequences of gas extraction: these stakeholders are defined as residents, entrepreneurs, administrators, national government, and NAM[62]. This relates to the distinction that Raaphorst & Van de Walle make between two trust relationships: that of citizens in the public sector, and that of the public sector in citizens. They observe that studies on trust in the public sector mainly focus on citizens' trust in the public sector. The other side of the trust relationship generally receives less attention: the public sector's trust in citizens' (2018: 472)[63].

It may seem somewhat illogical to assign institutions or 'the public sector' the role of trusters, since it is a *human* ability to trust. However, these institutions and their procedures and policies are created by people, and therefore it is likely that these procedures harbour assumptions of the people (citizens, clients, residents) to whom the procedures are directed. In such assumptions, trust issues could play a role whether consciously or not.

[61] In a vertical relation of trust (confidence), the party in charge is pursuing their interests at the expense of the truster, who has no choice of leaving the relation.
[62] This is one of the aims of the multi-annual programmes that the Meijer-Committee proposes on page 6 of their report. Original Dutch text: *Herstel van vertrouwen tussen enerzijds bewoners, ondernemers en bestuurders en anderzijds de Rijksoverheid en NAM*.
[63] Raaphorst & Van de Walle's study is about perceptions and actions of public officials (who have face-to-face contacts with citizens), i.e. not actions of the institutions, systems and procedures.

With regard to the gas case, a concern about institutions' trust in residents is found in a *Sociaal Handvest* (Social Charter) published in February 2021 by the *Vereniging Eigen Huis* (Association of House Owners) together with the *Groninger Bodem Beweging* and *Groninger Gasberaad*. From the perspective of our research, this Social Charter formulates a set of human-centered principles, of which the first one is particularly interesting:

> "The goal: 'Restoring Trust' must return on the agenda, and at the top. To gain trust, trust must first be given. Instead of approaching residents as potential free riders, the government must primarily trust that residents themselves perfectly understand what is going on with their property and what needs to be done."
>
> *Original Dutch text*:
> "Het doel: 'Herstel van Vertrouwen' moet terug op de agenda en wel bovenaan. Om vertrouwen te winnen moet eerst vertrouwen worden gegeven. In plaats van bewoners tegemoet te treden als potentiële profiteurs moet de overheid er primair op vertrouwen dat de bewoners zelf heel goed weten wat er met hun eigendom aan de hand is en wat er moet gebeuren."

In this statement, we see a call for institutional (here: government's) trust in two senses: first, *giving trust* to the residents by trusting them in their understanding, and second, stop seeing residents as free riders, i.e. *stop distrusting* their motivations. These statements are not further explained in the Social Charter, but they provide us with some more context when investigating such comprehensive phenomena as trust and confidence. The phrase about 'approaching residents as potential free riders' is reflected in Raaphorst & Van de Walle, who point out the importance of decisions by (the people working in) the public sector about the trustworthiness of citizens when interacting with them: 'making an incorrect judgement may mean that disproportionate burdens are inflicted on citizens to prove their case[64], or that citizens get away with benefits they are not entitled to' (2018: 472).

Whereas Raaphorst & Van de Walle's article is about interpersonal encounters between public officials and citizens, contacts between institutions and residents in the Groningen gas case are not always interpersonal encounters. Via face-to-face encounters, professionals/public officials inform their decisions about citizens' trustworthiness (Raaphorst & Van de Walle, 2018). In the gas case, however – as will become clear in chapter 6 and 7 of this dissertation – decisions on procedures and policies are made at a more abstract level. The discourse presented in chapter 7 will also shine some light on the issue of mutual trust (see section 7.3.1 about institutionalized distrust).

Before continuing with the methodological design of our study in the next chapter, we summarize the main points from this chapter.

[64] See also the Childcare Allowance Affair (Dutch: *Toeslagenaffaire*), in which apparently not street-level bureaucracy, but system-level bureaucracy played a leading role. In system-level bureaucracy ' "the system" is responsive to certain social groupings with specific characteristics that are believed to deserve a different treatment'. (see also Raaphorst & Van de Walle 2018: 477).

Summary and focal points

In the first section we discussed what policy documents say about trust in the context of dealing with the societal consequences of gas extraction in Groningen. We also discussed a few studies that have been conducted on the subject. We noted that both in the policy documents and in research in the Groningen area, trust has been mentioned and investigated without further specification of the concept.

We noted that initially, trust was central to the public response to the gas extraction problems. But since 2018, institutions have slowly shifted their focus away from trust and trust restoration: these terms have gradually disappeared from the official policy documents of many institutions (e.g. NCG, Administrative Agreements regarding the fortification operation in Groningen). The restoration of trust is still on the policy agenda of some other institutions including the IMG (damage claims processing) and civil society organizations that represent the interests of parties other than government and NAM: the Groningen Gas Council, Groningen Ground Movement and the Independent Counsel.

It would appear, in conclusion of the first part of this chapter, that trust is considered a key issue by many, but that it remains poorly specified. That was, for us, a key reason to conduct a more detailed and grounded analysis of the role of trust for residents and institutions in this dissertation.

When turning to the scientific literature on the broad subject of trust, we found that it too remains quite diffuse about the nature of trust: this is a fundamental but broad concept. For our study, we believe there are three properties of trust we derive from the most frequently cited **definitions** that are most relevant to the present research:
- trust is a *quality of relations* between a truster and trustee, in a specific *situation*;
- the truster has *positive expectations* with regard to a trustee's intentions, actions and behaviour;
- the truster is (somewhat) *vulnerable* since s/he is *not able to control* or *monitor* these intentions, actions and behaviour.

Based on the scientific literature it is clear that there are different ***forms* of trust**. Distinctions have been made between *interpersonal* trust (general and strategic trust) and *impersonal* trust (institutional, political and system trust). System trust is intrinsically quite a vague concept and can also be expressed as *confidence*. The distinction between **trust** and **confidence** is that trust is *personal, specific* and *addressable,* whereas confidence is *impersonal, diffuse* and *non-addressable.* Trust refers to situations in which the truster has a *choice* to get involved in a trust relation; a relation of confidence is imposed or unconscious, i.e. the truster has *no choice* since there is no alternative. Violations of trust tend to be attributed *internally,* resulting in feelings of regret; violations of confidence tend to be attributed *externally,* resulting in feelings of alienation. Finally, where trust is *less immune to violations*, confidence is considered *more immune*, because a violation tends to be seen as an exception.

On the basis of this review of the literature, we suggest that the general use of the Dutch word *vertrouwen* in the gas case might be better translated by the term confidence than by trust. The two terms are obviously closely related but there is conceptual clarity to be gained if we make explicit that trust is primarily a characteristic of human relations, whereas confidence is an attitude towards

more abstract institutions or structures. And in our view, such institutions, institutional constructs, procedures and regulations play a central role in dealing with the consequences of gas extraction. Those responsible are not directly visible to residents and there is not even one clear actor who can be held accountable. Thus, residents cannot enter into a relationship of trust.

Above, we touched different elements of trust, which are sometimes also described as *preconditions* or *antecedents*. The literature distinguishes the truster's own individual propensity to trust (which we shall not elaborate on here), from three dimensions of *perceived* ***trustworthiness*** of the trustee: **competence, benevolence** and **integrity**. *Competence* (also referred to as ability or performance) is the trustee's perceived ability to achieve outcomes that are relevant to the truster. *Benevolence* is described as the trustee's good intentions towards the truster, as well as clearly paying attention to the interests of the truster. *Integrity* refers to moral conduct: keeping promises, being honest, acting objectively and fairly.

In everyday language, the alleged opposite of trust is *distrust*. However, many scholars consider it an independent construct, as do we. **Distrust** is the truster's expectation that the trustee will engage in harmful behaviour towards the truster. When connecting this to untrustworthiness, and the dimensions of perceived trustworthiness, distrust appears to be especially related to the dimension of benevolence: distrusters are convinced that the trustee does not have good intentions towards them, and/or that the trustee primarily pursue their own interests.

Finally, we discussed the situation of *mutual* (lack of) *trust*, or mutual distrust. In the gas case the issue of lack of trust may not be reserved to residents with damaged or unsafe homes. There may also be a situation of a lack of trust the other way round, in other words: to what extent do institutions and professionals trust residents?

Based on this digest and integration of the literature, we conclude that when studying trust among residents and institutions in Groningen it is necessary to take account of the following considerations:

(1) 'trust' in the broad sense is a quality or characteristic of *relations between various actors*. As such it is a process that becomes embedded in social relations. These relations develop through repeated interactions or confrontations via mediated reports.
(2) trust, confidence, trustworthiness and distrust are considered to play a role at *different levels that can be very concrete or highly abstract*: from the interpersonal to the institutional and system level.
(3) since trust is a broad and vague term, people's experiences, interpretations and opinions most probably vary. It is therefore sensible to stay close to what respondents *themselves* bring up concerning trust and distrust, and concerning elements of trustworthiness.

From these focal points we start the methodological approach in chapter 4. We have taken all these observations on trust, confidence, trustworthiness and distrust into account when analyzing our interviews. This digest has guided the analytic process, and therefore forms the starting point of the methodology outlined in chapter 4.

4. Methodological approach

This chapter is about the 'how' of our research project. When starting to collect data, we were aware of the strengths and weaknesses of our approach. In this chapter we describe our journey and considerations regarding the design and conduct of the study, and the analysis and interpretation of the data.

4.1 A qualitative research approach on trust and trustworthiness

At the end of the literature review in the previous chapter, we noted three key concerns: 'trust' as a quality of different kinds of relations; concrete and more abstract (institutional) levels where trust plays a role; and the varying perspectives and interpretations people may have regarding trust issues.

The way we chose to investigate trust issues is via the experiences and perceptions of parties involved in dealing with the consequences of gas extraction. More precisely formulated: what do our respondents tell about their experiences and perceptions, which entails a rather interpretive approach to answering our main research question as formulated in chapter 1: **How does the complex institutional context regarding the consequences of gas extraction in Groningen affect processes and relations of trust, and what possible guidelines could contribute to restoring trust?**

With regard to dealing with the consequences of gas extraction, there are relations between residents and professionals, between residents, professionals and institutions, and between professionals among each other, both interpersonal and institutional. Relations develop via repeated interactions or experiences with other parties. In addition, there are the perceptions and images that people have of the more abstract institutions or systems of procedures. To stay close to people's perceptions and experiences, it is important to consider the aspects and dimensions of trust and trustworthiness that respondents *themselves* mention and discuss in the interviews.

A qualitative research approach is best suited to the main research question and the considerations mentioned above. In this chapter we outline the research design; in the subsequent result chapters (5, 6 and 7), the perspectives of three groups of stakeholders are studied regarding experiences with and perceptions of trust issues within the gas case. Chapter 5 takes the perspective of *residents,* chapter 6 considers the perspective of frontline professionals (*case managers* of CVW and NCG), and chapter 7 regards the perspective of *professionals holding positions at the policy, administrative and management levels* of institutions.

The remainder of this chapter describes the data collection and processing, and how the data were analyzed and interpreted using the qualitative method of thematic analysis (TA).

4.2 Considerations on collecting data

For investigating the main question 'How does the complex institutional context regarding the consequences of gas extraction in Groningen affect processes and relations of trust, and what possible guidelines could contribute to restoring trust?' a qualitative research approach was adopted. As we did not want to test hypotheses or build theories, but rather, to better understand (aspects of)

trust in a highly complex and layered institutional context, we chose an inductive and interpretive approach. Instead of aiming to build a generalized theory of trust based on the gas case, we were interested in what (different forms of) trust and lack of trust mean in the context of this situation. As we have outlined in chapter 3, trust in itself is a complex and multifaceted concept. The main reason to choose an open, inductive approach using a qualitative research strategy, is twofold. We seek to understand how trust works in relations and in perceptions, and how trust development is influenced by experiences and opinions.

Participants and data collection

Originally, we had hoped to receive permission to witness conversations between residents and case managers, or between residents and technical experts. In that way we hoped to assemble a corpus of client-institution interactions, in which issues of (dis)trust might emerge spontaneously during a naturally occurring conversation about, for example, repairs to homes or fortification work. Another reason for this approach is that retrospectively gathered information about the past is problematic when a researcher seeks to determine what really happened at the time and why (Neusar, 2014). Unfortunately, it turned out to be impossible to get permission from institutions to attend and record these conversations. Accordingly, we changed our plan.

An alternative strategy was to interview residents and ask them about their experiences with contact persons working at institutions, and about their experiences with the institutions themselves (CVW, NCG). In those interviews, we asked open questions about peoples' interactions with those institutions and their representatives. Issues of trust, we anticipated, could emerge spontaneously over the course of that interaction (see below for details). Because we are mainly interested in how people interpret experiences from their today's perspective (and not to determine what actually happened in the past) we assume this is an appropriate approach (cf Neusar 2014).

On the basis of the results of those initial interviews with residents, we then interviewed a specific group of professionals who frequently had contact with residents: the case managers. In those interviews, we made the contact with their clients focal. Again, issues of trust were treated as emergent.

In the interviews with both residents and case managers it became clear that trust issues for the most part did not originate in these contacts, but that 'a system of institutions' was held accountable for many of the problems related to concerns about trust. Building on that observation, we decided to dive deeper into the institutions and interview professionals working in policy, administrative and management positions within the various organizations involved in the gas case.

Trust as interview topic?

When designing research questions and interview protocols we decided not to ask direct questions about trust. The reason we usually avoided very direct or blunt questions on trust comprises three main considerations:

1. Concepts such as trust and confidence are potentially difficult to define and assess, due to their multifacetedness, as we discussed in chapter 3. In everyday life, people are generally not fully aware of various dimensions that play a part in processes of trust (or lack of trust, or distrust).

2. As researchers, we run the risk of evoking socially desirable accounts of trust if we ask about it directly[65]. Professionals might feel they need to respond to company policy regarding the restoration of residents' trust. Closely related to this potential risk is the earlier noted phenomenon that people may want to appear trusting persons, i.e. appearing to be trusting of others[66]. These aspects of social desirability can be partly attributed to the fact that trust is not a neutral term in the gas case, but has become emotionally charged.

3. Bluntly asking 'Do you trust x or y?' or 'Who do you trust or not?' might automatically evoke stereotypes such as 'Of course I do not trust x or y', because a lack of trust in the gas case has figured so prominently in the media. Stereotypes usually become automatically in action, and thus do not provide insight in the issue itself. There is also a link to the second consideration: for their part, residents might feel compelled to respond to social expectations regarding the somewhat stereotypical untrustworthiness of oil companies, the government and/or politicians in general.

So in our attempt to learn more about trust, we decided to interview people about social interactions and social relations. We reasoned that if issues of trust played a role, they would be mentioned spontaneously. When (elements of) the concept 'trust' came up in the interview, of course we grasped the opportunity and kept on asking questions.

Semi-structured interviews

We decided to conduct semi-structured in-depth interviews, as this form of interviewing enabled us to build an open dialogue with the participant(s) and to easily integrate follow-up questions, instead of being directed by a list of fixed questions. In general, the advantages of semi-structured interviews can be summarized as follows: they facilitate connection and alignment with respondents, allow a greater flexibility and allow the interviews to move into novel directions. Drawbacks of semi-structured interviews are that the interviewer's control over the situation is reduced, that interviews take longer to carry out, and are more complex to analyse. Further, analysis is also more time consuming as it takes several rounds of reading transcripts, coding and re-coding, in order to catch themes (Smith & Osborn 2015: 29-31). We tackled these disadvantages by regularly checking the interview protocol to ensure that every topic was covered in the interview, and by simply accepting that interviews sometimes took several hours and even a multiple of that for transcribing them in their entirety.

[65] Already observed decades ago by Crowne & Marlowe. Crowne, D.P. & Marlowe, D. (1964). *The Approved Motive: Studies in Evaluative Dependence*. New York: Wiley. Cited by Lyon, Möllering & Saunders (2015: 17).
[66] Mentioned by Christine Goodall. Goodall, C. (2015). Working with difficult to reach groups: A 'building blocks' approach to researching trust in communities. In: Lyon, Möllering & Saunders (2015).

4.3 Investigating trust from different perspectives

As mentioned above, this dissertation includes three in-depth studies into experiences of social relations, (lack of) trust, confidence and dimensions of trustworthiness. For all three studies, a protocol was used (see Appendices 5a, 6a and 7a[67]) containing a list of topics and open-ended main questions. Our focus was on digging deeper into specific topics concerning relations and trust that respondents raised themselves.

4.3.1 Data from multiple perspectives

The consideration of multiple perspectives affords insights into potentially divergent perceptions of (reasons for) problems in de the gas case, institutions, relations, and trust issues (cf Stevenson et al., 2014). Building on that, conducting multiperspective interviews enables researchers to understand relationships and dynamics among different social groups, and to explore similarities and differences in the perceptions of these groups (Kendall et al., 2009). The perspectives of three groups of respondents were subsequently taken into account: Groningen residents, front line professionals (case managers), professionals behind the scenes (policy makers[68], managers and administrators). Table 4.1 provides a short summary of respondents that participated in each study. Characteristics of respondents are outlined in more detail, though anonymously, in the respective chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Table 4.1: Number of respondents participating in the three studies

Research project	Respondents included in study	Year of interviews	Eventually excluded from study
Study 1 (Results in chapter 5)	22 residents living in seven villages in the earthquake region of Groningen	2018	None.
Study 2 (Results in chapter 6)	13 frontline professionals, working as case managers for Centre for Safe Living (CVW) and National Coordinator Groningen (NCG)	2018-2019	5 case managers of the Temporary Commission Mining damage Groningen (TCMG) Reason for exclusion: damage settlement had undergone a major transformation with the establishment of TCMG.
Study 3 (Results in chapter 7)	24 professionals behind the scenes, working at policy, administrative and management positions within institutions[69]	2020	9 professionals (of Safety Region Groningen, Municipal Health Department, National Programme Groningen, Temporary Commission Mining damage Groningen and State Supervisor of Mines). These professionals were included in the Gronings

[67] Appendices are available online.
[68] Also project/programme managers, strategic and senior advisors, board advisors.
[69] In preparation for this study, two professionals working for the Ministry of Economic Affairs were interviewed in March 2019. These interviews were not analysed for study 3 (chapter 7), but we refer to them briefly in chapter 8.

Research project	Respondents included in study	Year of interviews	Eventually excluded from study
	(local, regional and national government; National Coordinator Groningen).		Perspectief study (Bovenhoff et al., 2021). Reason for exclusion in this PhD-project: we chose to only include respondents who had a direct role in carrying out the fortification operation.

Interviewing three separate groups of respondents can be considered as a form of *data triangulation*: with regard to the same research topic, data is collected from different sources, or social groups (Vogl et. al, 2019), thus providing different perspectives on our research subject. Vogl and colleagues also argue that multiple perspective interviews provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the functioning of interactional systems or groups, or of life circumstances of individuals.

The case selection outlined above was not selected beforehand; the second and third study stemmed from the results of study 1 and study 2 respectively. The first study was exploratory in that multiple topics were discussed[70]. Eventually, the coded interview excerpts about experiences with institutions and contact persons, and residents' views on the macro institutions such as oil companies, national government and politics, were analyzed. Residents involved in fortification trajectories not only talked about the institutions themselves, but also about their experiences with contact persons, mainly *case managers*. We became interested in the experiences of these case managers and that inspired us to start up study 2. To put it in a nut shell, both residents (study 1) and case managers (study 2) sought explanations for the difficult situation in the functioning of a 'bigger system' of institutions. That made us curious about experiences of professionals who work more behind the scenes. This resulted in the third study, which was also part of a bigger qualitative research project of Gronings Perspectief, carried out on behalf of Nationaal Coördinator Groningen (NCG)[71]. In this study we aimed to shed light on the problematic situation from the perspective of professionals working in policy, management and administrative positions.

In sum, at the beginning this research project was not set out to conduct multiple perspective interviews, but developed as such based on intermediate findings, which is characteristic of inductive research.

In this dissertation, the perspectives of these three groups provide insights into the feasibility and possibility of restoring trust, but more essentially, these perspectives also contain reflections on what trust means and what is involved in the specific situation of dealing with the consequences of gas extraction.

[70] Also place attachment, resilience, social cohesion in general.

[71] Bovenhoff, M., Schoutens, L., Stroebe, K. & Postmes, T. (2021). *Voortgang en voetangels in het gaswinningdossier. Professionals over een complex systeem.* Groningen: Heymans instituut, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. https://www.groningsperspectief.nl/

4.3.2 Conducting the interviews and transcribing audio files

The semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with residents at their homes or at work, and with case managers in their workplaces. Professionals in management, administrative and policy positions were interviewed face to face in their workplaces until March 2020 and – due to COVID-restrictions – also online via video calls or phone calls.

Data collection and elaboration

All interviews were audio recorded, for which respondents gave permission via a signed informed consent form. The audio files were transcribed verbatim, mostly by the author of this dissertation. Although time consuming, transcription also facilitates understanding and analysis of the research data. Braun & Clarke (2006) consider the process of transcription an excellent way to start familiarizing with the data. Additional to getting familiarized, the act of multiple re-listening to the audio recordings contributed to a thorough initial understanding.

During transcription, the primary focus lay on verbal utterances (words). Non-verbal aspects (prosodic features as volume and intonation) were given attention but to a lesser extent: only longer pauses and longer 'uhms' were included in transcription; details such as the duration of pauses were not. Non-verbal utterances such as laughing, sighing and strong emphasis were included; details such as intonation and tempo were not. The reason for this choice is the methodological approach of thematic analysis, which focuses on the verbal content of participants' utterances. Longer pauses and 'uhms' can be meaningful in the context of words as they might indicate uncertainty, difficulty or reserve when answering a question. Laughing can be used to express a variety of attitudes towards the talk immediately before, during and after the laughter, such as irony or embarrassment. Strong emphasis (expressed through high pitch and increased volume) were transcribed, as they can be used to 'suggest the interpretation of […] modalities, attitudes and emotive involvement' (Barth-Weingarten, Rebel & Selting, 2010).

4.4 Thematic analysis (TA)

To analyze the interviews, we used the approach of reflexive thematic analysis as a form of qualitative research that is flexible (as described by Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015). With 'flexible' Clarke and colleagues mean that thematic analysis can be considered as an organic approach to coding and theme development. This form of TA suits questions related to peoples' experiences, or peoples' views and perceptions, such as 'What are men's experiences of body hair removal?' or 'What do people think of women who play traditionally male sports?' It suits questions related to understanding and representation, such as 'How do lay people understand therapy?' or 'How are food and eating represented in popular magazines targeted at teenage girls?' It also suits questions relating to the construction of meaning, such as 'How is race constructed in workplace diversity training?'[72]

Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke's famous article from 2006, titled 'Using thematic analysis in psychology' has become starting point for many researchers applying thematic analysis. Although

[72] From Braun and Clarke's website https://www.psych.auckland.ac.nz/en/about/thematic-analysis.html.

Braun & Clarke emphasize the advantages of the flexibility of TA, they also point at the importance of clarity regarding the process and practice of the method. In line with their advice, we will pay considerable attention to illustrating our approach to conducting thematic analysis in section 4.4.2. In that section we describe a concrete practical example in some more depth. But first, in section 4.4.1, we describe our approach more abstractly, as a step-by-step process which serves as guidance for our analytic approach.

4.4.1 Analytic approach: four steps

In thematic analysis, coding is a main activity at the beginning of the analytic process. However, coding and analysing data do not form a strict linear process; they are more or less succeeding activities in a recursive process. For purposes of clarity, we present our approach as a series of four 'steps'. In step 1, researchers try to get familiarised with the data, in step 2, they start coding the relevant transcript passages. Step 3 contains the actual analysis: theme formulation and interpretation activities. Step 4 is about writing up results and check them against the whole interviews. We now elaborate all four steps in more detail.

Step 1: ***getting familiarised*** with the interview data by reading and re-reading all transcripts, while also simultaneously listening to the original audio recordings. In this stage, for each case study, three or four different transcripts were selected by the researcher to discuss the overall impression and striking features in a small team of researchers[73].

Step 2: ***initial coding*** on the basis of three or four transcripts. Codes were formulated as descriptive labels to characterize what the respondent is conveying in the passage at hand. An initial codebook was developed with main codes. After that, all transcripts were uploaded in ATLAS.ti and via open and list coding, all relevant passages were highlighted as *quotations* and tagged with one or more labels (= *codes*). During this process, new codes were developed, and some existing codes were renamed, combined, refined, or discarded, and the initial codebook evolved into a more sophisticated one[74]. This way of coding is inherent to an inductive, qualitative research approach. With regard to study 3, a selection of 21 interviews were coded again from a slightly different perspective than the focus of the original Gronings Perspectief study (see further chapter 7).

Step 3: via ATLAS.ti, code reports were generated on the basis of the most common codes. That is, codes that were attributed frequently to quotations of distinguished respondents. These ATLAS.ti-code reports contain, per code, all quotations (extracts) labelled with the appropriate codes, thus generating several pages of interview extracts. At that point, ***in-depth analysis*** started: via close reading, patterns of similar utterances and deviating utterances were sought in order to find an overall answer to the pending research question. This slightly differs from the Vogl and colleagues' appeal that when researchers aim to reconstruct the subjective meaning (which we too are interested in), they have to go beyond the descriptive level and reconstruct interpretations (2019: 615). In our approach, we suspended reconstructing interpretations to a later phase, after the

[73] For study 1 and 2: the supervisory committee of this PhD-project; for study 3: four members of the *Gronings Perspectief* team.

[74] A helpful guide for using ATLAS.ti is the work of Susanne Friese, of which some is available via the website atlasti.com. E.g. Friese, S. (2014), *How to Make the Best of Codes in ATLAS.ti.*

formulation of themes. So first, on the basis of ***formulation of themes*** we answered the research questions. An example of a codebook is included in Appendix 4a. An example of an ATLAS.ti-code report is included in Appendix 4b, which also contains an account of the theme formulations. In section 4.4.2 we demonstrate more in detail how this in-depth analysis, resulting in theme formulation, took place. The last phase of step 3 contains the ***interpretation*** of themes in the light of the research questions, and writing the result chapters.

Indicative extracts for each theme were chosen and presented anonymously in chapters 5, 6 and 7; omitted text in the extracts is presented with ellipsis […] for reasons of brevity (cf Këllezi et al., 2021). The extracts presented in the result chapters 5, 6 and 7 serve as illustrative examples of patterns we discovered throughout the corpus of each study. After careful consideration on which extracts represent these patterns best, we selected extracts from as much different interviews as possible. We also took care we did not select too many extracts from just a minority of interviews, with three quotations per interview being the maximum.

Step 4: because analyzing, theme formulation and interpretation is done on the basis of separated interview extracts, the context of the talk might get lost a little. After ***writing*** an initial version of the results, all transcripts were read again from the perspective of these results. Main goal in this final stage was to ***verify*** whether the results fit in the context of the interviews as a whole. After all, coding and analyzing in support of a thematic analysis is a matter of progressive insights.

We considered variation and contradiction in our data sets, and paid attention to *deviant cases* or exceptions (cf Neusar, 2014). We define 'deviant cases' as coded extracts of which the content does not fit in the overall theme that was formulated on the basis of the majority of extracts with that code. So, data that did not fit the main findings are accounted for in the written results in chapter 5, 6 and 7.

The analysis conducted on the interview transcripts was *textual*, in consonance with a theoretical commitment to the importance of language as a fundamental property of human communication, interpretation and understanding. It is our task as researchers, however, to try to understand and interpret respondents' utterances in the context of the research questions. In the next section we will demonstrate for one code how we conducted the analysis and interpretation process (step 3 in the above mentioned step by step guidance).

4.4.2 Applying the analytic approach: An illustration of coding interviews and interpreting respondents' talk

To illustrate our processes of analysis and interpretation, we wrote out a complete description, analysis and interpretation report for one code with regard to study 2, of which the results are presented in chapter 6. This extended code report is included in Appendix 4b. Via comments on all the labelled quotations, we have tried to clarify the description, analysis and interpretation process, i.e. the road we travelled to theme construction and eventually, interpretation, which is described in section 4.4.1 as step 3. The results from this demonstration are also written up in the corresponding chapter, section 6.4.

The start of the coding process can be best described as an undertaking of trial-and-error. Characteristic for an inductive analysis approach is that researchers initially do not know exactly what they are looking for. Of course the research questions and topics on the protocol offer some guidelines; the semi-structured character of the interviews, however, can give platform to unexpected topics and perspectives. When we started coding, in the first few transcripts many passages were highlighted as quotations in ATLAS.ti and labelled with rather 'narrow' codes that remained close to the words of respondents. For example, when a case manager characterized residents with the words 'they are so modest and friendly', the initial codes were: "modest residents" and "friendly residents". After having coded many of such characterizations, a very extensive code list had grown. We then chose to bring several coherent codes into 'broader', more overarching codes. Two examples of such broader codes are "Residents: constructive and positive experiences"[75] (which includes "modest residents" and "friendly residents") and "Residents: less constructive experiences"[76]. These two broader codes we used in study 2, regarding the experiences of case managers (see chapter 6, sections 6.2.2 and 6.2.3).

In fact, what we described above is also mentioned, in a slightly different way, by Kathryn Roulston, who suggests using a lot of preliminary codes around a single larger issue and then reorganizing them into categories (2010). But although presenting 'coding and categorization' as two separate steps, Roulston also admits 'they are more likely to be undertaken concurrently, as these processes inform each other.' (idem, 6). In step 2 of the analytic process, we chose to work with broad, overarching codes (in Roulston's terms: 'categories') in order to be able to scrutinize every interview quotation labelled with a specific code.

To explain the next stage, the in-depth analysis (step 3), we turn to Wolcott (2008) who proposes a sensible distinction between analysis and interpretation. His distinction gives analysis a more limited, more precise, and more clearly defined role than is suggested by its broader use (as a 'cover term for anything we do with data', p. 29). What Wolcott calls analysis, is an examination of the data using systematic and standardized measures and procedures. In our analysis, we started from the broad code and examined all coded extracts on different aspects (views, experiences, opinions as expressed by the respondent) with regard to that code. In doing so, we tried to formulate themes. A theme 'represents some level of patterned meaning within the data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 82). Note that in our approach of working with broad codes, these codes usually already relate to a specific research question. In fact, this corresponds to Braun & Clarke's perspective on themes and patterns: 'a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question.' Extracts that deviate from such a 'patterned meaning' are also considered and taken into account. As suggested by Yardley (2015) and Neusar (2014), we paid careful attention to such disconfirming cases and reported them in the result sections of this dissertation.

The last part of step 3 is to determine what a theme means in relation to the research question. This is where the interpretative analysis of the data occurs (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In our view, the

[75] In the Dutch codebook: *Bewoners: positieve constructieve ervaringen.*
[76] In the Dutch codebook: *Bewoners: minder constructieve ervaringen.*

contrast made by Wolcott between analysis and interpretation is helpful; where analysis follows from more or less rigorous procedures, interpretation is derived from the researcher's effort at 'sense-making, a human activity that includes intuition, past experience, emotion – personal attributes of human researchers that can be argued endlessly but neither proved nor disproved to the satisfaction of all' (Wolcott, 2008: 30). In Appendix 4b we show our analysis and interpretation efforts as good as it gets while at the same time being aware that sense-making is a process that cannot be fully written out in every aspect.

4.5 Assessing reliability and validity

We start from the observation that there are 'no *absolute* criteria for judging whether a piece of qualitative research is any good' (Braun & Clarke, 2014: 278). Related to this observation is the suggestion by Lewis and colleagues (2014) to take the central concepts reliability and validity in a broad sense as the stability of findings and how authentic and credible they are. Another, more pragmatic view is that 'good practice in relation to reliability and replication can be achieved through showing the audience […] as much as is possible of the procedures that have led to a particular set of conclusions' (Seale, 1999, in Lewis et al., 2014: 355).

To our understanding we have to be as transparent as possible in showing what we did in the different stages of the research to produce reliable, stable, authentic and credible results. We will not separate all these 'quality terms' everywhere here, but take into account how we attended to reliability and validity when conducting our studies.

- *Data collection*: a first question is how to interview the appropriate respondents? For all three studies we used different ways to approach respondents. In short, we describe these ways here, while more details for each data collection can be found in chapters 5, 6 and 7. For study 1 residents were contacted via personal and professional networks of the main researcher and supervisors. We set our goal to reach residents of different background (age, place of residence, education, employability and so on). The problem we faced here was our confrontation with 'research exhaustion' because in the previous years, many researchers had found their way to Groningen residents with regard to gas extraction problems. For study 2, a different approach was needed, because these respondents form a specific and limited group of professionals; we aimed for case managers who had been working long enough to have built sufficient experience with Groningen residents. Study 3, conducted by Gronings Perspectief, was focused on the many institutions that play a formal role in damage settlement and fortification procedures. We tried to include as many different professionals working behind the scenes in various positions. For some institutions it took great effort to reach the appropriate respondents and one of the institutions (NAM) unfortunately could not be included.

- Gathering data from different groups of people resulted in *data triangulation* as described in section 4.3.1. This can be considered as a means to enhance the validity of the research findings (Yardley, 2015).

- We follow Yardley's perspective on *generalizability* (or: external validity) of research findings from a qualitative study. That means that we do not expect our findings to be exactly replicated in any other

context, but we hope that the insights from studying the specific context of relations between citizens and professionals in a complex institutional context will prove useful in other contexts that have similarities. This conception of validity points to the notion of ecological validity[77]. As Yardley concludes, 'since contexts can share some features even if others are quite dissimilar, generalizability in qualitative research is potentially wide-ranging and flexible.' (2015: 260)

- The *interviewing itself*: interview protocols were designed, containing topics and open questions; for study 1, some pilot interviews were conducted. *Recording* the interviews and completely *transcribing* was done in order to prevent ourselves from interpreting interviews in a too early stage (by only making notes). Transcription was completed as soon as possible after each interview, so as to reflect and to learn lessons how to improve the interview skills.

- *Reliability of the respondents' answers*. To our experience, especially residents and frontline professionals spoke freely and spontaneously. We had the same experience with many professionals in policy, administrative and management positions, but we noticed that some of these respondents showed more awareness that they had a professional role and an institutional commitment which might prevent them from speaking freely. We emphasized their anonymity, however, in some interviews this continued to be an issue and these respondents were reluctant in being audio recorded. Eventually they gave their permission on the promise of receiving the full transcript after completion. This reluctance shows the sensitivity of the research topic and might have led these respondents to be diligent and careful while speaking to us. It is possible that we did not get the whole story in every aspect, which is to be expected in a sensitive context.

- During the coding process we *compared coding* of two researchers in study 3, because the original study was carried out in a team. The purpose was to triangulate our perspectives (cf Yardley, 2015). In study 1 and 2, coding was done by the main researcher, but after coding some initial transcripts the concept codebook was discussed with the project supervisors.

- During *analysis*, as we described in section 4.4.1 and Appendix 4b, we interpreted and made sense of our data, took care that analysis and interpretation matched the data, and tried to tell a convincing and well-organized story about the data in the light of our research questions; these activities correspond to criteria no. 7-10 from Braun & Clarke's checklist on good thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Demonstrating *how* analysis and interpretation took place was done in order to enhance internal validity: the extent to which our statements are supported by the full dataset of our study (cf Lewis et al., 2014). Extracts from the interviews were selected as exemplary (except where explicitly exceptional), as examples of similar statements in other interviews.

After demonstrating the 'how' of our research project, it is now time to dive into the discourse of our respondents, and begin the actual analysis and interpretation. This covers the next three chapters.

[77] Ecological validity is originally a term from laboratory research and experimental studies, and in this context points to the requirement that research findings should be generalizable to 'the real world'. Source: Schmuckler, M.A. (2001), What Is Ecological Validity? A Dimensional Analysis. *Infancy*, *2* (4), 419-436.

Part III Results

5. Residents' perspectives

In order to gain insight into the (possible) relations between residents and institutions, in this first study we conducted in-depth interviews with residents. In these interviews residents talked about their experiences with contact persons of institutions, but also about the institutions and their supposed workings.

For reasons of clarity, we briefly introduce the terminology used in this chapter and the next two chapters. The interviewed residents living in North-east Groningen are referred to as **residents**. The contact persons of organizations dealing with the consequences of induced earthquakes are referred to as **case managers**[78]. The institutions residents are in direct contact with and which are specifically set up to deal with the negative consequences of gas extraction are referred to as **proximate institutions** or **organizations**. These are *Centrum Veilig Wonen* (CVW, 'Centre for Safe Living', active until December 31, 2019) and *Nationaal Coördinator Groningen* (NCG, 'National Coordinator Groningen'). More abstract institutions that, from the perspective of residents, are more out of reach, pulling the strings but not having a hands-on task in the region, are referred to as **distal institutions** or **organizations**. These are the Ministry of Economic Affairs[79] and oil and gas company NAM, which is a joint venture of the multinationals Shell and ExxonMobil.

Our main goal in this chapter is to gain insight into how residents' concrete experiences and their more abstract or mediated perceptions and images influence each other with regard to their perspectives on damage settlement and the fortification operation. Therefore, in this chapter the following three research questions will be answered:

1. What experiences with professionals of proximate institutions do residents report?
2. How do residents portray the procedures of proximate institutions involved in dealing with the negative consequences of gas extraction?
3. How are residents' experiences related to the way they depict and/or judge the damage settlement and fortification procedures by distal institutions?

5.1 Residents, interviews and analysis

Residents

The interviewed residents in this study were recruited via personal and professional networks, and after two pilot-interviews also via snowballing. All residents live(d) in the earthquake region in North-east Groningen. A total of 16 interviews were conducted with 22 residents: 10 interviews with individual residents and 6 interviews with (married) couples. All interviewed residents had damage to their housing and/or gone through an inspection of their home to assess the safety of its

[78] Dutch: *bewonersbegeleiders.*

[79] Dutch: *Ministerie van Economische Zaken & Klimaat* (EZK). From September 2019 until December 2021, The Ministry of Interior Affairs and Kingdom Relations (Dutch: *Binnenlandse Zaken & Koninkrijksrelaties*, BZK) was formally also one of the distal organizations, however, at the time of the interviews with residents, this was not yet a factor.

construction in case of a severe earthquake. None of the homes had been fortified; only one couple had received commitment from NCG that their home would be fortified.

Residents were between 33 and 78 years old, their highest level of education ranged from intermediate vocational education to academic. Most residents had lived in their homes for more than ten years, while most of the houses were privately owned. Five interviewees were in retirement, eleven in paid employment, and six were self-employed entrepreneurs.

Interviews

The first two interviews served as pilot-interviews in order to test the interview protocol (see Appendix 5a). Since both pilot interviews provided useful information and the protocol didn't need adjustment, these results also became part of the study. The interviews were held with residents at their homes or workplaces.

The interviews were held between April and June 2018. It is important to realize that at this time, damage claims processing was at a standstill. In March 2018, the institution TCMG[80] took over the private damage settlement previously processed by NAM and CVW. For this reason, only one of the interviewed residents mentioned an experience with this new institution. So when residents talked about damage claims and damage settlement, they refer to the previous private damage settlement by NAM and CVW.

Analysis

The three research questions formulated at the beginning of this chapter were starting point for the selection of interview sections that were to be included in the coding process. Regarding research question 1 'What experiences with regard to professionals of proximate institutions do residents report?' we highlighted all interview excerpts in which residents describe experiences with and views of contact persons. After reading these extracts (*quotations* in ATLAS.ti) , the contact persons turned out to be mainly case managers, and sometimes damage experts, engineers, or constructors. In addition, residents frequently talked about the communication between proximate institutions CVW and NCG, and themselves.

We created the following initial codes to label the quotations in which experiences with contact persons were discussed:
- *bewonersbegeleider* ('case manager')
- *communicatie* ('communication')
- *deskundigheid experts* ('expertise experts')
- *empathie/perspectief bewoner* ('empathy/resident's perspective')
- *luisteren naar bewoner* ('listening to residents')

The codes 'case manager', 'communication', 'empathy/resident's perspective' were applied most frequently, therefore, only these quotations were analysed in the way we described in chapter 4. Because the formulation of these codes is not of the same order, some extracts were assigned both codes.

[80] *Tijdelijke Commissie Mijnbouwschade Groningen*, see chapter 2.

Regarding the second research question 'How do residents portray the procedures of proximate institutions involved in dealing with the negative consequences of gas extraction?' we found that the discourse contains many statements concerning procedures of CVW, NCG and, in a few cases, NAM. However, it was noticed that residents primarily report experiences with CVW. We used the following codes to label these quotations:
- *handelwijze CVW/NCG* ('procedures CVW/NCG')
- *handelwijze NAM*[81] ('procedures NAM')
- *geen vertrouwen in CVW* ('no trust in Centre for Safe Living')
- *geen vertrouwen in instanties algemeen* ('no confidence in institutions in general')

For the third research question 'How are residents' experiences related to the way they depict and/or judge the damage settlement and fortification procedures by distal institutions?' the approach was slightly different. After highlighting all excerpts in which residents talked about distal institutions (national government, NAM, Shell and Exxon Mobil), we constructed and applied the following codes:

- *geen vertrouwen in overheid, politiek* ('no confidence in government, politics')
- *geen vertrouwen in NAM*[82] ('no confidence in NAM')
- *geen vertrouwen in goed nieuws vs. bedrog* ('no confidence in good news vs. deception'). This code deals with media coverage, because images of distal institutions often reach citizens through the media.

Besides, we again scrutinized all interview excerpts labelled with over twenty subcodes concerning '(geen) vertrouwen' (*(no) trust / confidence*) again. During this scrutiny an interesting, additional theme concerning *diverging interests* came to our knowledge that is discussed in subsection 5.4.3.

After analysis, the findings were written in a Dutch report which was sent to all interviewed residents in October 2018, as well as to *Groninger Bodem Beweging, Groninger Gasberaad*, CVW and NCG. A few residents gave a reaction in which they expressed recognition with the tenor of the findings.

In the next three sections, the main findings for each research question are described and illustrated with citations from the interviews. The original Dutch texts of the citations are included in Appendix 5b. We start with the most concrete level of experiences: contacts between residents and their case managers.

5.2 Residents' experiences with case managers

Our first research question ***What experiences with professionals of proximate institutions do residents report?*** focuses on the experiences with professionals employed in institutions that deal

[81] Here, NAM is part of the proximate institutions. This applies to a few parts of the discourse in which residents reflected on their contact with NAM in the past, when NAM was responsible for damage claims processing (until 2015, when CVW was established).
[82] This code also applies to discourse about Shell and ExxonMobil, as NAM is owned half by British Shell and half by American ExxonMobil.

directly with damage claims or fortification procedures: CVW and NCG. Direct contact with these institutions generally takes place via face-to-face conversations at residents' homes with professionals assigned as *case managers*.

5.2.1 The added value of case managers

When experiences with case managers are discussed, residents talk about these professionals mostly in sympathetic terms: they are portrayed as friendly persons, in positive terms (such as 'nice' or 'fine'). But even though most residents report positive relations, case managers are also described as being unable to meet the needs of residents because the institutions they work for do not provide them with the resources necessary to meet the needs of residents. To illustrate this finding, consider the following two extracts in which the added value of case managers is quite clearly questioned:

Extract 1

I: How was that (*referring to the presence of the case manager during the pre-inspection meeting*)?
R: Yes, fine. I mean ehm... I don't think we really needed her, we could have done it without her.

Extract 2

R: And then you have a case manager, that's what they are called, from NCG I believe.
I: Yes, and CVW, both employ them.
R: And I really think, why were these people ever hired? I really think it's too sad for words, because it costs an awful lot of money, and they can't do ánything. They can listen to your story. And that's it. [...] And that's the end of it, they can't do anything more than that. So, they can listen to your story. That's it.
[...]
I: No. No. And what would you consider to be an improvement, when it comes to a case manager, the role he or she plays?
R: Well, he can actually do very little, for that matter. He has no influence at all, so I think, it's too much to ask.

The resident in extract 1 portrays the contact person in a positive way ('Yes, fine') immediately followed by an evaluation of case managers' added value: 'I don't think we really needed her, we could have done it without her.' The resident in extract 2 adds to this and gives a damning assessment of the function of case managers: '[…] why were these people ever hired? […] it costs an awful lot of money, and they can't do ánything.' Later, this assessment is repeated by saying that in fact all they can do is 'listen to your story'. After being asked about possible improvements, the resident points at the powerlessness of case managers: 'Well, he can actually do very little, for that matter. He has no influence at all.'

In both extracts 1 and 2, residents describe case managers as redundant: people who cannot make a difference. But despite these negative assessments of case managers' power to change things for the

better, the actual relationship with case managers is described in neutral or positive terms by most respondents[83]. And nearly all residents express sympathy for their case manager. Consider extract 3:

Extract 3

R talks about conversations which take place during the inspection/fortification trajectory, of which minutes are also taken.
I: Because who takes those minutes?
R: Our- uh is doing a good job, right, the ... case manager. So (we have) also said: "Well so far, in the past few years, we have always followed the pace of CVW, NAM and so on. Whenever you were ready to take the next step, we were available on call; that's over now. You are in the process of façades, walls and so on. In the meantime we ask you for information about the foundation as you address it. That's best done at the same time, doesn't have to happen sequently." Well right, some other... and ... panicking of course over there. That poor guy!

After praising the case manager '[he] is doing a good job, right', the couple in extract 3 describe the frustratingly slow procedure they had been going through in the past years. The residents describe themselves as the ones taking the initiative, for example 'ask [...] for information about the foundation.' They also portray themselves as advisors of the case manager: 'That's best done at the same time, doesn't have to happen sequently.' They then describe the panic this caused with the case manager and, somewhat condescendingly express compassion: 'That poor guy!' Overall, this conveys the impression that residents are happy with their case manager as a human being, but at the same time they realize case managers are powerless employees who cannot control the course of events.

5.2.2 Case managers as representatives or victims of institutions?

Where lie the origins of this helplessness or powerlessness of case managers, according to the interviewed residents? In interview sections where this powerlessness is discussed, residents speculate about the influence of the organization and how it operates. The inner workings of CVW and NCG seem to be a mystery to residents. In the opinion of residents, the case managers are left out on a limb by these organizations, whose interests are not aligned with residents' interests. This becomes evident in extracts 4 – 6:

Extract 4

Respondent talks about the desire for change with regard to damage repair/inspection, particularly expressing the need for more clarity and for someone to trust.
R: Someone who can be trusted and not such a 'home councelor[84] who is excessively nice [*laughs*].

[83] Only one of the residents tells explicitly negative about an experience with the case manager.
[84] With '*woonbegeleider'* the resident means the *bewonersbegeleider* (case manager).

I: You don't have trust in them?
R: Well then I think: well, I- I just notice that a guy like that is trained to be nice. [*laughs*] So to speak. He has simply been taught how to deal with it.

Extract 5

R: When I sometimes see how they tréat people, well not all of them of course, I mean there will certainly be plenty of case managers at CVW who would líke to act differently, but they also have to follow certain rules.
I: Yes, yes.
R: So I don't think it's a nice job, to work there as a case manager.

Extract 6

R: We were approached by the CVW, that was done neatly, uhm in itself, so the hostesses or how to call them, basically they handle things properly.
I: So do you mean the case managers?
R: Yes, them. I mean them. Uhm … But they don't tell you éverything. That is very annoying.

From the resident's description in extract 4, the case manager is seen as an actor who has been taught a trick, presumably on behalf of his organization: he is acting 'excessively nice'. Yet such a performance can backfire, according to the resident in question, who indicates that she does not have trust in 'such a "home councelor" who is excessively nice […] I just notice that a guy like that is trained to be nice.' Note that after these two statements, the resident laughs aloud. Both the assessments 'excessively nice' and 'trained to be nice' can be considered as indirect complaints, as criticism about a specific part of the case manager's behaviour: he is not authentic, but performs a role. Had the resident not laughed out loud, then the verbal utterances could be interpreted as overt complaining or even bitterness. This is what Edwards argues in his analysis of laughter in talk: through ironic or jocular delivery of complaints, a speaker 'may avoid some such category as moaner of whinger, or a general avoidance of being seen as a complainer'. Laughing something off can even be part of getting a complaint taken seriously, 'precisely by signalling that the complainer is not disposed to make too much of it' (Edwards 2005: 24). And so, because case managers are seen as a kind of puppets of the institution they belong to, bound by strict rules and not able to be fully authentic, it becomes difficult to build a relationship of trust with residents.

In extract 5 the resident reflects on the treatment of people and the tone of voice suggests this is scandalous: 'how they tréat people', with strong emphasis on 'treat'. The term 'they' here is used in a dual way: it refers both to the institution and to the case manager. But in the next sentence, the case managers are absolved from personal responsibility for this 'treatment': many case managers would personally like (strong emphasis on 'like') to act differently, but are forced to abide by organizational rules: 'there will of course be plenty of case managers at CVW who would líke to act differently, but they also have to follow certain rules.' This exchange with the interviewer concludes with compassion, by pointing out that being a case manager is not considered as a nice job. This

compassionate statement also conveys that case managers are seen as a kind of victims of the institutions and their procedures.

The resident in extract 6 starts by presenting the case managers' conduct as proper: 'that was done neatly […] basically they handle things properly', but immediately adds an explicit reservation: 'But they don't tell you éverything.' Later in the interview, this statement is underpinned by an elaborate illustration of a concrete experience: the resident was persuaded to sign a document from CVW. Afterwards, a fellow villager who had been presented the same document, drew the resident's attention to the fine print. After rereading the document, the resident realized the meaning of this fine print and felt worried that having signed it would eventually work against her. Returning to extract 6, in saying 'But they don't tell you éverything. That is very annoying', the resident assumes that it is the institution's policy to communicate in a strategic way, undermining residents' position by leaving things out; a form of strategic opacity as described by Stohl and colleagues (2016: 134). This is a clear example of referring to the *integrity* dimension of the institution's perceived trustworthiness: leaving things out is in contradiction to clear and honest communication.

The above extracts 4 – 6 illustrate that residents do not blame case managers for the somewhat bizarre treatment that befalls them ('excessively nice', 'they don't tell you everything'). Residents realize the position of these professionals is a difficult one: their job is to be the human face and they more or less succeed in striking up good interpersonal relations. However, because they have to act on behalf of the institution, they cannot give full information or meet residents' needs. This powerlessness invokes compassion in some residents, as is shown in extract 5.

In sum, the majority of interviewed residents depict case managers as friendly people who certainly go to great efforts to help residents, but face barriers in doing so: they are bound by their institution's policy and have little freedom to act. This causes frustration, firstly among residents, but possibly even to case managers. The anecdote described in extract 7 illustrates the barriers that a case manager reported in trying to assist residents; note that this is a case manager's experience described *through the eyes of a resident*:

Extract 7

R: At that time the fortification desk [= *local office of NCG*] had just opened, I went there, I said: "Guys, I have a problem with the CVW, please help me with this, because I can't get anywhere." Well, that lady she handled all things correctly- she also showed empathy, a listening ear, she also had a social background, she understood it all. Well, and she came back to me: "Yes," she said, "you need to give me some time," well and she came back, she said: "I went to see them, at the CVW, I checked things internally, […] I bumped my head everywhere, I'm not getting through."
I: No no.
R: Yes okay. Well, thanks for your effort then.
I: So there is someone with good intentions on a personal level, who runs into the system.
R: Yes, exactly!

I: Yes Yes.
R: Well, that's very sad. But this is what is happening.

This resident describes an experience in which she explicitly portrays the case manager as a social, empathetic lady who understands the problems and perspective of residents. The case manager had tried her utmost to help the resident, but all attempts failed when trying to break through the system. The resident concludes this as being 'very sad. But this is what is happening.'

In the discourse analyzed and presented thus far, we see elements that might be sufficient at the level of *interpersonal trust* (people doing their best, being nice and empathetic) but that are clearly not enough when these people represent institutions. They are not considered competent ('they can't do ánything', extract 2). Whereas they may be benevolent in the sense of caring people, they are also seen as hindered by underlying motives of their institutions. According to the interviewees, these institutional motives cause the integrity of case managers to be compromised, for what reason they apparently cannot communicate sufficiently clearly and honestly.

Based on the above, we may conclude that in the interpersonal contacts with case managers no causes can be found for residents' dissatisfaction with damage settlement and fortification procedures. Case managers are seen as representatives of an institution that sets the boundaries, and to some extent even as victims of 'a system' of institutions they belong to (elaborated in more detail in section 5.4). For all these reasons, case managers seem unable to alter residents' lack of trust in the proximate institutions, their rules and regulations. In the eyes of residents, both case managers and the residents themselves are pawns in an overpowering system, that seem to thwart any attempts to resolve residents' problems.

Besides their experiences with case managers, residents also talked about the institutions CVW and NCG and their procedures, which builds a bridge to the second research question.

5.3 Residents' experiences with procedures of proximate institutions

The second research question ***How do residents portray the procedures of proximate institutions involved in dealing with the negative consequences of gas extraction?*** focuses on (the workings of) the institutions CVW and NCG from the perspective of residents.

As was demonstrated in the previous section, in extracts 2 – 7, when residents are describing experiences with case managers, they interpret the actions of the case manager against the background of their understanding of the organizations that case managers represent. With respect to residents' experiences of procedures, the portrayed lack of information is most salient. Residents feel being left in the dark regarding the status of their home: Will damage be reimbursed? Is it necessary to fortify my house? Such lack of information also means that residents can be uncertain about whether their home is actually safe to live in (cf Stroebe et al., 2021a).

5.3.1 Concerns about institutional competence

The corpus contains many extracts concerning procedures of CVW, NCG and in a few cases, NAM, Shell and ExxonMobil. When analyzing all quotations with the code *Handelwijze CVW/NCG* ('Procedures CVW/NCG'), it was found that references to these proximate organizations usually were coupled with actual doubts regarding the ***competence*** of these organizations, or the feeling that perhaps organizations do not know how to proceed with residents. Illustrative of this theme is the discourse in extract 8:

Extract 8

I: You told there was a change in contact person at CVW, and... can you tell something about the way you experience these contacts? CVW, or the consultancy/inspection agency that was here.
R: Uhm... well I believe that all those people in what they do, doing their job, do their job well in that respect, but the relationship with them is simply very bad, because you just don't know where you're going, and how or what, and then you call them the day after, [*sound of a truck squealing*]. Then there was this company, and how to continue, and then they are at a complete loss how to proceed. So they act at that moment, but they don't link back from how or what, how to proceed, so to speak.
[*Later on in the interview, after talking about different experiences with CVW and NCG*]
I: But how do you look at institutions for example?
R: ... ... [*interruption by playing child*] ... No, how do I look at those institutions? Well, actually I don't have any, any trust in any of the institutions involved anymore.

This resident explains how they themselves had to get in touch with the organization CVW to find out what had been decided about their case, while they feel that it is actually the organization that should be calling them, providing them with information about the next step. Although this is expressed as frustrating, the CVW-employees themselves are described in a positive way: 'I believe that all those people in what they do, doing their job, do their job well in that respect, but …'. The resident then suggests a reason for the poor communication: the organization CVW is 'at a complete loss how to proceed'. Another resident put it as follows: 'they are just muddling around.'

The next resident introduces another institutional level that makes clear the importance of considering both proximate and distal organizations. Specifically it shows how power structures between proximate and distal organizations can shape residents' experiences with proximate organizations.

Extract 9

I: And when you look at institutions, like the National Coordinator, how do you look at them? [...]
P: Well
R: Well [*laughs*] tsk. It's eh...
P: Slightly um slightly, slíghtly more positive than before.

I: Hmhm
R: But also
P: They are now a little more distant from the Ministry of Economic Affairs than before.
R: But it was a toothless body, it's still a toothless body.
P: Yes slightly um, yes
R: You know, a coordinator without authority.
P: Yes
R: And they are being overtaken by events. And that cán't be changed!
P: No
I: No
R: So yeah. Tsk. No, yes, it's a fine group of people, and I believe they do good things, but because of their– because of the way it is organized, … it cán't function properly.

One resident in extract 9 observes that proximate organization NCG has developed in a slightly positive way: 'They are now a little more distant from the Ministry of Economic Affairs than before'. His partner adds: 'But it was a toothless body, it's still a toothless body […] You know, a coordinator without authority'. The expression 'toothless' (Dutch: *tandeloos*) can be interpreted as a revealing metaphor for the *powerlessness* of the institution NCG. Extended to wildlife, animals without teeth would quickly become preys themselves.

What these two extracts illustrate, is that residents form an impression of proximate institutions that are incapable of performing, because of the lack of progress, clarity and communication residents experience themselves. Statements about no longer having any trust were found in many interviews with residents who had contact with these institutions.

5.3.2 Perceptions of violating the integrity dimension

Residents not only share their experiences concerning the failure of proximate institutions to meet residents' needs and their doubts concerning the institutions' competence, they also express concerns about the *integrity* with respect to institutions' workings. One recurrent theme is that these procedures cost a lot of money which could – and according to some: should – be used for actual damage repair or fortification of their homes. This theme, that *procedures seem unfair* for local companies and the residents, becomes clear in extract 10.

Extract 10

R: All those construction companies … who all work for NAM, are áll such big companies, … from Friesland and from, well even from Twente, and
I: But not from this area?
R: Well, thát's what they promised.
I: Because there are also many construction companies here, aren't there?
R: Yes. Yes, that's… and that's… yes, I think that's absolutely scandalous, because my husband of course he has a [*mentions kind of company*], he had to take áll kinds of courses you know, that cost a lot of money, to be put on that list with the Centre for Safe Living. So that he would be allowed to carry out work for the NAM. Well, uh [*laughs*] he never gets a call, and there are several others like him.

I: How is that possible?
R: Because they have arrángements with those big companies. With [*mentions three national building corporations*], ... um yes.
I: But they offered ... those courses to these smaller companies, which are relatively expensive courses, for a small company.
R: Yes! Yes! Yes, my husband called a while back. "Gosh," he said... "well, I think I'm on the list with you guys, but ... well actually I never get any assignment from you." "No, but there is no work at the moment." [*laughs disparagingly*] Well! There is no wórk!? You can see them around éverywhere! But well, those are- those big companies, and they are all in cahoots.

The resident expresses frustration and indignation in describing the situation of her husband, who has a small regional construction company and was qualified to perform damage repair by order of NAM/CVW when they were responsible for the private damage settlement. Where CVW reported 'there is no work', as an explanation why the husband had not been contacted thus far, she did not believe this explanation as the (buses of) big construction companies can be spotted everywhere: 'You can see them around everywhere! But well, those are- those big companies, and they are all in cahoots.' The last part of this utterance can be considered as a negative conclusion about the workings of institutions dealing with the consequences of gas extraction. The expression 'they are all in cahoots' (Dutch: *onder één hoedje*) suggests the existence of underhand dealings in which large companies do business with each other rather than involving local builders. It is not just an issue of small versus large businesses, however, in this way expressed it shows clearly a feeling of 'our companies' versus 'them'. What becomes very clear in excerpt 10 is that these *concerns about integrity* give rise to distrust: the explanation that there are no commissions for the husband is met with disbelief, which is preceded by a jeering laughter. Similar concerns about integrity are voiced with respect to CVW. We move on to another interview of which the following passage is taken.

Extract 11

R: Well there is the Centre for Safe Living. That's supposed to work for the community. And they make a two million profit!
P: Yes, how can they make a profit, we don't understand that at all.
R: Then I think: you guys can't do that! Well, then we know that [CVW] building in Appingedam, where they had two hundred parking spaces, they have - I believe within two months - already built four hundred parking spaces. That is how many people they brought in there.
P: It all costs an awful lot of money!

For this couple, it is completely inexplicable – 'you guys can't do that!' – that CVW, which is supposed 'to work for the community' can make a profit. They also disapprove of CVW's organizational development from a medium scale into a large scale organization in only a couple of months: 'It all costs an awful lot of money!'

So far we have seen residents' experiences with a number of elements concerning procedures that relate to trust with regard to institutions: concerns about competence and a lack of integrity. Especially concerns about a lack of integrity in the form of behaviour that is not congruent with previous promises, give rise to incredulity with regard to these institutions: they surely 'can't do that!'

So, on the one hand residents experience that the proximate institutions 'are muddling around' without delivering much result; on the other hand, they incur many costs, or even, monetary gain. In sum, putting these different strands together, the descriptions and evaluations of the proximate institutions CVW and NCG suggest that residents consider the fortification operation, and, to a lesser degree, the damage settlement[85] as a process in which these institutions are ineffective and cannot function well, because they lack authority and power to effect positive change; furthermore, they operate at huge costs, with profits going mainly to large corporations.

As we mentioned in chapter 3, trust is relational – but according to our interviewees interpersonal relations do not seem to cause trust problems. Rather, negative perceptions of relations between employees and the institutions they work for (which are powerless), a lack of actions of these institutions in relation to residents (insufficient communication and information) and power relations between proximate and distal organizations form the problematic situation in the background. To understand more about this system of proximate and distal institutions involved, it is relevant to know how residents look at distal organizations, even though, to them, they operate at a more abstract level. We refer to institutions as Shell and ExxonMobil (of which NAM is a joint venture), the Ministry of Economic Affairs[86], as well as 'government' or 'politics', noting that the latter two are comprehensive concepts which can refer to many things (cf Bovens & Wille, 2008). We aim to better capture residents' understandings of this 'system' of institutions in the next section, because it frustrates progress. We do so by examining how residents speak about these abstract actors. In doing so, we draw upon residents' views and comments on distal institutions and media coverage.

5.4 Views of distal institutions

Our third research question ***How are residents' experiences related to the way they depict and/or judge the damage settlement and fortification procedures by distal institutions?*** focuses on how residents portray institutions as government and oil companies involved in (the consequences of) gas extraction in Groningen.

[85] At the time of the interviews, damage claims processing was at a standstill. The TCMG (see chapter 2) had been set up a few months earlier. Respondents had no experience with it at the time, except for a single telephone contact.

[86] Since September 2019, a responsibility shift in the fortification process had taken place from the Ministry of Economic Affairs to the Ministry of Interior Affairs. On December 31, 2019, the CVW stopped and NCG took over its activities. Mid-2020, the TCMG merged into the IMG. For a more detailed description, see chapter 2.

In general, residents do not have interpersonal contacts with representatives of distal institutions (such as ministers and CEO's), although the Ministers of Economic Affairs and Interior Affairs[87] occasionally visit the region and talk with individual residents. For most residents however, there are no personal contacts and no concrete face-to-face experiences with these representatives.

In the discourse we analyzed, residents express images they have formed of these institutions and their representatives. Because of the distance between residents and these abstract institutions, it should be kept in mind that portrayals of large corporations and government in traditional media and on social media are well-used sources of information that citizens draw on. This is of course not specific for institutions dealing with gas problems. In the interviews residents indeed talk about media coverage of distal institutions' statements, and they relate this to their own concrete experiences with proximate institutions. They also comment on the government's and oil companies' approach of dealing with the consequences of gas extraction.

After analysis of residents' discourse relating to distal institutions, three themes have been formulated. The concept of trust (or: confidence)[88] occurs frequently – which is not the case in the discourse concerning case managers and proximate institutions. First, residents have low confidence in distal institutions; second, they demonstrate vigilance when the media report good news regarding solutions for gas problems; third, they assume that damage settlement and fortification are driven by financial interests – not the interests of residents. In the upcoming subsections we elaborate on these themes in more detail.

5.4.1 Low confidence in distal institutions

Many residents report that they lost confidence in the government, the Ministry of Economic Affairs or in politics in general; some of them claim that confidence in these institutions is impossible. We start with an extract where the local government (which can be considered a proximate institution, besides CVW and NCG) is contrasted with the national government in terms of trust and confidence.

Extract 12

R: Yes, no, I have more trust in the– in that respect, in the local government than in the … national government. Yeah. We shouldn't count on them.
I: No.
R: Nooo, otherwise there would have been taken action much sooner though.

[87] Since 2020, the Ministry of Interior Affairs became responsible for the execution of the fortification operation. However, in the new cabinet (installed January 10th 2022), this decision was reversed and responsibility moved back to the Ministry of Economic Affairs, more precisely to the new junior minister for Mining. See Miskovic, M. & Braakman, T. (2021). Versterking verandert in nieuw kabinet opnieuw van ministerie; vrees voor vertraging. (*Fortification operation changes ministries again in new cabinet; fears for delay*). *RTV Noord*, December 24th 2021.
[88] In the Dutch interviews: *vertrouwen* and related words such as *betrouwbaar*, *onbetrouwbaar*.

The resident in extract 12 clarifies why he considers national government as less trustworthy than local government: 'We shouldn't count on them', in other words: national government is not going to solve our problems, 'otherwise there would have been taken action much sooner though'. Taking more rapid action is presented as *a choice that was not made*, thereby implicitly touching the benevolence dimension of trustworthiness. Thus, the government's procrastination is a reason not to trust it. Where the resident in excerpt 12 formulates lack of confidence in the national government in an indirect way, the residents in extract 13 speak frankly about their negative evaluation of politics.

Extract 13

Conversation about high costs of the fortification operation, while results for residents are not forthcoming.
R: Yes.
I: Yes, because what does that tell you about, yeah politics, it's maybe a bit of a catch-all term that I'm mentioning now, but, where the decisions are made?
P: Completely unreliable.
R: Yes. Yes, it is absolutely not possible to trust that kind of people. But also not our own [...] politicians (*describes two concrete examples of statements by mayors after which R again notes that politics is unreliable.*)

The interviewer is hesitant about how to define the decision-making body ('politics is maybe a bit of a catch-all term') and then clarifies that she refers to those who make the decisions. This vague description, however, does not hinder residents from giving a clear answer. One resident responds in absolute terms, 'completely unreliable', which is reinforced by the other who says that 'it is absolutely not possible to trust that kind of people'.

The couple in excerpt 13 use superlatives in their descriptions. Pomerantz refers to this kind of phrasing as *extreme-case formulations* (1986). She showed that speakers use extreme-case formulations, amongst others, to argue that a phenomenon is in the object itself, rather than a product of interaction or circumstances. In extract 13, the phenomenon 'the impossibility of trust' is thus presented as an intrinsic feature of the object 'politicians'. In other words, untrustworthiness is simply a characteristic of politicians. Furthermore, the denotation 'that kind' is a derogatory formulation of politicians. This contempt once again highlights the claim of the interviewees that people who make political decisions are *by definition* unreliable.

In extracts such as 13, it may be the case that more generic stereotypes such as 'politicians are untrustworthy people' are being echoed. But while activation of stereotypes undoubtedly might play a role, other excerpts express the same views and suggest that some residents have thought about it in great detail. A related example of using extreme-case formulations to express a lack of confidence in national government is presented in extract 14. Here, residents talk about the Minister of Economic Affairs. Shortly after the big earthquake in Huizinge in 2012, the regulator[89] concluded gas extraction from the Groningen gas field as no longer safe and advised the Minister to reduce

[89] State Supervisor of Mines (*Staatstoezicht op de Mijnen*, SodM).

extraction as soon as possible. But by the end of the year 2013, production turned out to be 54 billion cubic metres: up 9 billion from the original production schedule. In the next extract, the resident expresses being scandalized by this course of events.

Extract 14

P: But safety was said to come first, and we should not worry, everything was going to be all right, … well, in that year [*2013*] it [*gas production*] went to 54, behind our backs, which was of course outrágeous, then don't say that you are concerned with safety, and áfter that the gas production went down in stages, but each time it was enforced by the residents through the courts.
R: Yes, through the Council of State.
P: They have néver initiated anything by themselves.
R: [*Minister*] Kamp was always congratulating himself: "I've turned down the gas production."
P: That makes me fúrious.
[…]
I: How do you actually look at the government? The government-
P: I've lost áll my confidence in them. […] And I honestly think that is the very worst, I think that's the véry worst in this whole process.

Resident P says it was 'outrageous' to increase gas extraction 'behind our backs' and explains why: 'don't say you are concerned with safety' and 'they have néver initiated anything by themselves' because every time reduction of gas extraction was 'enforced by residents through the courts'. So it would seem that the central grievance is the Minister's insincerity, and what makes these residents 'fúrious' is that Minister Kamp was congratulating himself with the Council of State's decision. The Minister comes off as misleading and dishonest.

Then the interviewer asks the residents' view on the government. This question is answered by using an extreme-case formulation: 'I've lost áll my confidence in them.' The resident also evaluates her total loss of confidence with another superlative: 'I honestly think that is the very worst, that's the véry worst in this whole process.' With these extreme-case formulations, she emphasizes that losing confidence in government, to her, is even worse than the other subjects discussed in the conversation, which include their overwhelmingly negative experiences during the inspection trajectory. What is thus implicitly conveyed in the discourse, is the vital importance of having a trustworthy national government. It may, however, also be the case that she presents herself as someone who is naturally confident, but due to external objectionable actions, has lost her confidence.

To integrate the above, we observe that low confidence in distal institutions refers to the national government, and/or the (former) Minister of Economic Affairs[90]. In the discourse, this lack or loss of confidence is subsequently attributed to three things. First, the absence of timely governmental

[90] Some respondents refer to former Minister Kamp (in post until 2017), others refer to then Minister Wiebes (until 2021).

action (low performance). Second, to the perceived untrustworthiness of politicians in general, due to a lack of integrity. And third, the insincere statements of the government Minister, which is also a violation of the integrity dimension.

Previously, we noted that distal institutions' statements are usually reported via the media. In some parts of the discourse, references to media coverage are made explicitly. In the next section, three examples are presented to illustrate the second theme with regard to confidence in distal institutions.

5.4.2 Good news via the media calls for vigilance

Communication about decisions and statements by distal organizations generally occur via the media. Related to the lack of confidence in distal institutions, we see that any such communication regarding actions by these institutions that could be considered positive, are met with extreme scepticism. Scepticism can be considered a form of mistrust, and extreme scepticism can point to distrust (see e.g. Lenard, 2008; Devine et al., 2020). Residents, during our interviews, discuss good news reports about the gas extraction, such as the government's policy-reversing decision in early 2018 to reduce gas extraction to zero by 2030[91], in this context. Consider extract 15, where the resident presents himself as sceptic regarding 'everything he hears':

Extract 15

P: No but with everything I hear I have, … then I think: yeah. For example, when it was said: "The gas production, will go to zero", yes then uh … I am not jumping jubilantly here in my home or something. That's– I feel that's just what a few people mention for window-dressing.

The resident in the extract above does not react to the government's announcement with 'jumping jubilantly here in my home', but thinks the government says this 'for window-dressing', meaning that actual performance does not matter. What stands out is that he formulates his reaction as scripted: 'With everything I hear, … I think: yeah…'. *Script formulations* take the form 'if *a* is the case, then *b* will automatically happen'. As such, a script formulation enables a speaker to present something as having a known and predictable pattern: that in a given situation the speaker has no choice but do or believe 'the logical thing' (Edwards, 2003). In extract 15, a sceptical reaction to good news is scripted, and thereby presented as the logical response to good news. In extract 16, another resident also uses a script formulation when describing her reaction to good news:

Extract 16

Conversation about the political decision to stop gas production by 2030, after which Minister Wiebes temporarily paused much of the planned fortification operation in April 2018.
I: Yes. Yes. And how can– when you then hear that decision [= *terminating gas extraction*], such a political decision, what do you think about that?

[91] https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2018/03/29/kabinet-einde-aan-gaswinning-in-groningen.

R: Yes, I think, we are just being– you know, we are just being offered a carrot, in January, and then I think: oh, well, they'll be sweetened again for a while, you know, they are… Yes, and then… … Yes, now we are just being … yes a bit– it feels a bit like being cheated I think.

The resident formulates the Minister's decision to stop gas production as 'a carrot to sweeten people'. By adding the discourse marker 'again', she indicates that sweetening peoples' minds is not an incidental action but has been done previously, thereby warranting that her reaction to consider the good news as a carrot is the logical reaction. She says she feels cheated by the Minister's subsequent decision to pause the fortification operation. In expressing her feelings of being cheated, she also uses the discourse marker 'again', thereby creating another script formulation, which takes the form: if good news is reported, then we will be deceived. As such, 'good news' is not actually 'good' news but is understood as a governmental strategy to sweeten peoples' minds.

A final example of scripting good news is presented in extract 17 below. In this extract, the two scripted events are media performances of the director of NAM and 'the Shell lady'[92]. After such performances (and statements), the exact opposite of the statement is about to happen:

Extract 17

R: And also Wiebes's way of framing things you know, there are lots of communication experts involved […] at NAM and Wiebes and you name it, there are many communication experts and lawyers involved, who prepare it all well and this way of fráming things has become só vicious by now, I mean… that is
I: Yes?
R: Yes, that is, that is betting heavily on: "Look what I am doing: it's done, now it's settled." Then what people think, what is being reported in the press; then we are flabbergasted for a while as well, even in the Province House they were applauding and raising the Groningen anthem. And then we say to each other: "Hey? What is happening here? Let's take a closer look."
P: What could be his interest here?
R: Yes, what is the interest?
P: That's your first question then.
[…]
R: And that happens every time with Shell, and NAM idem dito; the director of NAM, Schotman, appears with a statement in the newspaper, then we say to each other: "What will happen tomorrow?" And then you already know what is coming.
I: Yes, because that is–
R: The Shell lady is going to issue a large press release, or is going to be on TV, with with
P: Jinek [*a popular Dutch talk show*]
R: With Jinek or whatsoever, what will happen tomorrow? Exactly the opposite of what is being said.

[92] Respondents refer to the Dutch CEO of the Shell.

I: Yeah right?
R: Really, agáin and again.
I: Then for a while, a positive atmosphere is created?
R: Yes, and then suddenly, they strike.

This extract is not only about government's decisions (as was presumably the case in extract 15 and explicitly in 16) but also about oil companies' declarations in the media. These are scripted by the residents: 'that happens *every* time with Shell, and NAM', 'Really, *agáin and again*.' Although the exact contents of Shell's and NAM's reports remain unclear, the residents indicate that good news immediately precedes a consequence that works out negatively for residents. A very clear example of uncovering violations of the *integrity* dimension: positive words are debunked as empty statements, and even worse: as a *malevolent* strategy of the oil companies, whose strategy is framed as a predatory action: 'And then suddenly, they strike.'

In this extract, the residents explicitly provide their perspective on how the construct of distal institutions functions. In their view, positive framing is used to cover up sinister decisions with far-reaching negative consequences. What these consequence are, is not made explicit here, but what *is* clear from the excerpt is that this way of framing throws sand in the eyes of local institutions, such as the provincial government who are 'applauding and raising the Groningen anthem'. With the use of the extreme-case formulation 'every time', the residents also claim that the national government's and oil companies' performances are general and widespread and therefore, something that residents cannot ignore anymore when perceiving media coverage on their performances (cf Pomerantz, 1986). Besides being formulated in superlatives, the performances are also scripted, as if based on many examples that form a regular pattern.

In sum, the script formulation 'if good news is reported, then something negative is upcoming' is used by residents to suggest an intentional strategy of distal institutions: first, the resident in extract 15 limits himself to characterizing good news as a form of window-dressing. In extract 16, the resident supposes that good news serves as a carrot to sweeten residents' minds. And in the last extract (17), residents depict good news as stemming from a strategy. Indirectly, they suggest that the reason why distal organizations do the opposite of what they promise, may lie in the fact that they have a hidden agenda – as opposed to acting in a transparent way. This urges them to window-dressing and keeping the Groningen people sweet instead of actually solving their problems.

In this assumed hidden agenda, financial interests, according to the residents might play an important role, as will become visible when discussing the third theme in the next subsection.

5.4.3 Portrayals of distal institutions as part of a non-transparent, money-driven system

Although it was not a topic in our interview protocol, when transcribing and analyzing the discourse we noticed that about half of our respondents spoke unsolicited on the financial aspects of dealing with the consequences of gas extraction. And the way they discuss this topic shows significant similarities. Consider extract 18 about the costs of the fortification operation:

Extract 18

Conversation about the costs of the fortification operation.
R: Because don't forget, áll those people who are working on it, already have drawn down almost two billion in salaries.
I: Yes
R: and hére, nothing has been paid out yet, you know?
P: We are a business model. […] The business model that provided us with a one-time compensation of four thousand euros. That's all.

Here, the residents contrast the huge amount of money that has been spent to professionals' salaries to the minimal amount residents have received thus far: 'And hére, nothing has been paid out yet.' This brings them to the conclusion that the Groningen people are a business model: 'We are the business model that provided us with a one-time compensation of four thousand euros[93]. That's all.' In being a business model, earning money is put first, not residents' problems and interests. A business model serves the interests of the party that developed the model. Whoever that party is, remains unclear in this extract; what becomes clear is that these residents experience that they are not put first, but that *financial interests* of the institutions pull the strings of the business model. Translated into the dimensions of trustworthiness, the experience of 'being a business model' violates the *benevolence* dimension of the institutions' trustworthiness. In other words, these residents do not perceive that their interests matter to these institutions.

In extract 19, the emphasis on financial interests of the oil companies is offered as an explanation for the lack of a solution for Groningen:

Extract 19

I: How do you look at, well a solution for this area. Who should take a leading role in this? Or who cóuld do that?
R: Yeah! Well, I think the government shóuld. Yes. …
I: Hm. Yes. Yes.
R: But anyway, it's the Shell. And and and Exxon I believe. Yes, we forget about them from time to time. But uhm… Yes that that, it's all about money. … Yes.

The resident takes the view that it is government who shóuld take a leading role in solving the consequences of gas extraction, however, in her opinion it is the money driven policies of Shell and ExxonMobil that prevent government from holding a leading position: 'But anyway, it's the Shell. And Exxon I think'. In sum, she states that government should – but cannot – solve the problems, because the oil companies are ultimately in control; for them 'it's all about money', thereby suggesting that other concerns, such as residents' interests and needs, are not taken into account. Again, a violation

[93] Reference is made here to the 'sustainability arrangement' (Dutch: *verduurzaamheidsregeling*) during the time NAM was in charge of damage settlement. When the extent of damage was budgeted above 1000 euros, residents would receive 4000 euros for sustainability measures.

of the benevolence dimension is mentioned, but also note that an implicit power position[94] is assumed to prevent appropriate and timely performance: it is the oil companies ('it's the Shell […] and Exxon') that pull the strings, not the government.

In extract 20, residents suggest that these financial interests also are the reason for not being transparent about the process. Organizations in general will not admit that it's all about money, because their own (financial) interests might then be at stake:

Extract 20

About organizations in general, from NCG to Groningen Villages, which according to P operate in a very official manner.
P: They also have to be careful what they say, they keep their cards close to their chest, I can feel that, … yes, as long as it comes to organizations, then they, théy [*laughs*] are afraid to tell it like it is. No one will say: yes indeed, uhm… it's all about money, or whatever, or– […] Because imágine that they get into trouble as a result, or that they receive less money,
R: The bíg interests
P: I believe this unconsciously plays a major role.
[…]
R: This is saying more about the greater level about how trapped this whole world is in the whole… in the economic business model.
I: Yes, yes.
R: In which there is enormous dependence … on gigantic corporations and … well, large companies, in which só much money is involved, you really can't get your head around that at all.
I: No, no.
R: And our government they, they are also trapped in that… you know, they are also bound hand and foot [*laughs*].

After presuming organizations' unstated financial interests, the residents move to a more general stance: they portray the global state of the world and use many superlatives ('this whole world', 'the whole … economic business model', 'enormous dependence', 'gigantic corporations'). These extreme-case formulations are used to depict the world as an overarching construct of interests and dependencies. And the government cannot evade this omnipresent construct: it is also caught up in this big economic business model and 'bound hand and foot'. The conclusion that can be implicitly drawn from their argument is that government is actually a rather *powerless* institution. Compare this to extract 21, where the government's presumed lack of power is illustrated in a somewhat different way:

Extract 21

P: Well, and we have now also seen, let's be honest, that one point four billion for the companies, that tax eh
I: Yes that divi–

[94] The theme of power and power positions is further elaborated in chapter 7, section 7.4.

R: Dividend tax.
P: You can see from this, that the government is not formed by politicians, but that simply those big players also have a finger in the pie, and not such a small one,
R: EBN is the most powerful organization in the Netherlands.
P: Yes!
[…]
I: But then what is- because I'm not into that subject enough, what I understood, the government is in there [= *EBN*], but it's also a company?
R: Exxon and Shell
I: Oh yes.
R: join them there, in the EBN. So it is a huge construction.

The one resident introduces the dividend tax plans, where shareholders in (larger) companies would have received a substantial tax reduction. According to her this shows that 'those big players also have a finger in the pie'. Then her partner introduces the state-owned company EBN[95] as the most powerful institution in the Netherlands. After a question of the interviewer, he mentions that Shell and Exxon 'join them (= the government) there, in the EBN. So, it is a huge construction.' With this, the resident portrays a huge construction of oil companies and the Dutch government, that he considers extremely powerful.

Extracts 18 – 21 illustrate that in the discourse on the financial aspects, residents assume that a cost-benefit motive is guiding the damage settlement and fortification operation. This assumption is fed both by residents' experiences with proximate institutions and by media coverage.

As said before, a question triggering the assumption of a cost-benefit motive was not included in the interview protocol. However, the theme emerged during the coding and analysis process in about half of the interviews. The other half of the residents do *not* elaborate on this theme. In those interviews, findings are twofold: either residents do not mention a cost-benefit motive at all, or they confine themselves to expressing amazement about the huge amount of money going on in the damage claims processing and fortification operation.

Closer examination of the discourse on financial aspects of dealing with the consequences of gas extraction has also revealed the existence of power structures and power systems[96]. Money and power are distinguished by Jürgen Habermas as two subsystems in the 'system world' (as opposed to peoples' lifeworld)[97]. These two systems are referred to in the discourse (of which extracts 19, 20 and 21 are typical examples) in a way as determining the course of events in the damage settlement and fortification operation.

The three themes relating to distal institutions can be summarized as follows: first of all, residents communicate that confidence in the national government is absent or has completely disappeared**.** Second, when the media report good news regarding solutions for the gas problems, residents

[95] *Energie Beheer Nederland*, which can be translated approximately as follows: 'Energy Management of the Netherlands'.
[96] More about power and power structures is detailed in chapter 7, section 7.4.
[97] See e.g. Finlayson, J.G. (2005). *Habermas: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

express scepticism or distrust. Some of them observe that good news precedes negative consequences for residents in general. Third, half of the interviewed residents assume that the damage settlement and fortification operation are driven by the financial interests of big oil companies, national government, or both. Building on this assumption, dealing with the consequences of gas extraction is considered a business model (where companies and experts aim to maximize their profits) and where the one who pays (NAM and/or government) tries to minimize costs[98]. This assumed 'maximizing profits and minimizing costs' motive, however, is not at all in line with the interests of residents. Another consequence is that proximate institutions cannot act in a benevolent and competent way, because the more distal institutions have organized things in such a way that costs for damage repair and fortification should be minimized, and the benefits do not flow to the Groningen region (i.e. regional companies), but to big business.

From here we return to the theme of interpersonal trust in relations between residents and case managers. Reasoning from the assumed financial interests described above, it becomes clear that no matter how much these relations are characterized by interpersonal trust, this type of trust is not transferable to a form of confidence in distal institutions, or 'the system'. In fact, this form of system trust (*confidence*) is so absent, that from the perspective of the interviewed residents, case managers as *human beings* appear to be detached from their institutions. However, as *employees* they have to dance to the tune of the institutions' interests – interests that are perceived to conflict with residents' needs, but well protected by those in power. These powerful parties are portrayed as driven by financial motives which seep through to the procedures and workings of proximate institutions that are dependent on these distal institutions. As an ultimate consequence, whatever proximate institutions and their representatives (case managers) do, becomes fairly irrelevant as they are seen as rather powerless puppets of powerful distal parties.

Deviant case

One couple of residents run a livestock farming. Their perspective seems to deviate somewhat from the other residents, in that they show a more business-oriented attitude, and less emotion. In their own words: their home is not just their home, but a part of their company. They also declare that some part of their barn was not damaged by gas extraction, but suffered from overdue maintenance. A lack of trust in NAM is not expressed in this interview. However, they do express a lack of trust in institutions such as CVW.

5.5 Concluding remarks

In all kinds of relations, trust can develop when preconditions are fulfilled. We focused on the three dimensions of trustworthiness: performance, benevolence and integrity.

From the perspective of residents, individual case managers of proximate institutions, though acting in a benevolent way, cannot succeed in restoring residents' confidence in 'the bigger picture'. These professionals lack the competence because their institutions' procedures fail. Institutions do not

[98] A finding that is also reported in Bakema and colleagues (2018: 16).

provide sufficient communication; in addition, they operate at huge costs with profits going to large companies only. And to make matters worse they cannot function well because they lack authority and power to effect positive change. Distal institutions (national government and oil companies), who make the decisions on policy and budgets, are considered as operating from an entangled relationship where financial motives rule. This situation gives rise to the idea that the interests of residents are overlooked. Although a small minority of the residents do not express a clear view on government and oil companies, not one of them expresses a positive view or a trusting attitude.

While individual experiences with damage settlement and the fortification operation may vary, we see consensus across the discourse: despite all good intentions of case managers, their friendly, human approach cannot effect a positive change and thereby, does not contribute to restoring residents' trust in proximate institutions. Distal organizations, which are considered to set the rules in dealing with the consequences of gas extraction, are not trusted; they are portrayed as entangled constructs of government and oil companies which protect their own financial-economic interests. How residents talk about the position and motives of these distal institutions – in extremes and as scripted behaviour – gives us an insight into how seriously this situation affects their lives.

Building trust or confidence is hard when doubts persist over the trustworthiness of the institution or the construct of institutions. These doubts not only concern institutions' performance, but particularly institutions' interests that are seen not to be in line with those of residents. And so, it appears to be a major challenge to restore Groningen residents' trust in institutions dealing with the consequences of gas extraction. It appears to be an even greater challenge to restore confidence in (the construct of) distal institutions who pull the strings.

In the next two chapters we focus on the trusted party, or trustee, in the gas case. In the first we examine the perspectives of professionals working at the frontline of proximate institutions (CVW and NCG). In the second, the perspectives of professionals working more behind the scenes of both proximate and distal institutions are discussed.

6. Frontline professionals' perspectives

To understand residents' trust in professionals and institutions, a broader perspective on experiences with damage settlement and fortification should be taken. In the previous chapter we showed that residents mainly portray case managers as friendly and willing to help, but unable to make a difference in the fortification operation. Their lack of competence was consistently attributed to the 'inner workings' of the organizations these professionals work for, and to a system of distal, more abstract institutions that overarches the proximate organizations.

We now focus on those professionals who sit at the other side of the 'kitchen table' – the setting that NCG refers to as the location where the institution meets with the residents to discuss their case[99]. The present chapter takes the perspective of *case managers*, who act on behalf of the proximate institutions *Centrum Veilig Wonen* and *Nationaal Coördinator Groningen* (CVW and NCG, see chapter 2) and assist residents during the inspection and fortification trajectory[100]. It is their job to assist residents and other property owners in various inspection and fortification trajectories: PRBE's (Potential Risk Building Elements, such as chimneys), regular house inspections, performance of fortification measures and demolition/new building projects, inspections of agricultural objects and commercial property. Case managers are the primary contact persons of CVW and NCG for both residents and commercial property owners.

Our central concern is to describe case managers' experiences in dealing with residents on behalf of their institutions. As professionals who have direct, face-to-face interactions with citizens, they may be considered as *frontline professionals* or, in terms of Lipsky (2010), as 'street-level bureaucrats'. To elaborate on trust in institutions, it is essential to take both interpersonal relations with representatives and workings of the institutions into view.

In this chapter, the following research questions will be answered:

1. What concrete experiences do case managers describe regarding contacts with residents?
2. Case managers about the performance of their duties:
   a. How do case managers describe the degree of autonomy in their job?
   b. How do case managers talk about their organization? What obstacles and stimulating factors do they experience in performing their jobs?
   c. What experiences do case managers report with colleagues (in their own organization) and professionals of the organization they collaborate with (whether NCG or CVW)?
3. How do case managers portray distal organizations such as government, politics, oil companies?
4. What changes do case managers consider as essential changes to improve both their own performance and the fortification operation?

[99] See: Nationaal Coördinator Groningen (2015), *Meerjarenprogramma Aardbevingsbestendig en Kansrijk Groningen 2016-2020*. December 18, 2015.
[100] The term 'fortification' refers both to fortification measures such as steel beams (*versterkingsmaatregelen*), and to demolition and new development (*sloop/nieuwbouw*).

6.1 Frontline professionals, interviews and analysis

There was a seven to nine months gap between the interviews with residents and interviews with their contact persons (professionals working 'at the frontline' of CVW and NCG). During this period, the fortification operation was subject to developments and policy changes. The main development was the suspension of the ongoing fortification projects in April 2018, followed by the introduction of the Hazard & Risk Assessment model (HRA) in November 2018 (see chapter 2). This computer model changed the fortification approach from an *area*-oriented to an *object*-oriented approach. As a consequence, individual buildings that emerged from the HRA-model as high risk, would be inspected first, not areas or streets as a whole.

Case managers

We conducted interviews with six respectively seven case managers from the Centre for Safe Living (*Centrum Veilig Wonen*, CVW) and National Coordinator Groningen (*Nationaal Coördinator Groningen*, NCG). They were recruited via contact persons of the two organizations, who set out an internal message in their organization requesting case managers if they were prepared to take part in this research project. We are aware that this entails a high level of self-selection.

Interviews

Nine case managers were interviewed individually, whereas four case managers participated in duo-interviews. All of them had held their current position for at least one year. The interviews took place between December 2018 and February 2019, at the workplaces of case managers. CVW-case managers were interviewed at the former head office in Appingedam; NCG-case managers were interviewed at the main office in Groningen or at fortification desks in the region.

As explained in chapter 4, in-depth interviews were conducted; a protocol was used to guide the interviews and to ensure the interviews could be compared on key topics (see Appendix 6a). The most important advantage of in-depth interviews proved itself on the way, because two important, additional topics emerged in most interviews: first, the close collaboration between employees of CVW and NCG; and second, case managers' views on distal organizations that form 'the system'. These topics were formulated into two additional research questions (2c and 3).

Analysis

The interviews were coded using ATLAS.ti. In Table 6.1 main codes and subcodes are described per research question.

Table 6.1: Main codes and subcodes used for analysis

Research question	Main code	Subcodes
1	Residents *Bewoners*	Positive experiences, Less positive experiences, Attitude toward case manager, General view of residents' attitude, Comparison to people elsewhere in the Netherlands *Positieve constructieve ervaringen, Minder constructieve ervaringen, Houding naar bewonersbegeleider, Algemeen beeld van houding bewoners, Vergelijking met Nederlanders elders*
2a	Job (of the case manager) *Functie (van bewonersbegeleider)*	Main task, Role/Significance, Customization, Leeway, Drive, Coping, Setting limits. *Hoofdtaak, Rol/Betekenis, Maatwerk, Speelruimte, Drive, Coping, Grenzen stellen*
2b, 2c	Organization *Organisatie*	Functioning of own organization, Other organization *Functioneren eigen organisatie, Gespiegelde organisatie*
3	System *Systeem*	Perspective and view of case managers, Residents' view of system (according to case managers) *Visie en beeld bewonersbegeleiders* *Beeld van systeem bij bewoners*
4	Desired change *Gewenste verandering*	-

In the next four sections, the main findings for each research question are described and illustrated with quotations from the interviews. The original Dutch texts of the quotations are included in Appendix 6b. Section 6.2 describes the quality of contacts between case managers and residents from the perspective of case managers. Section 6.3 focuses on case managers' role and main task, and the autonomy they experience in their job. Experiences with proximate institutions (NCG, CVW) are the theme of section 6.4, and in 6.5 views on the greater system of institutions (NAM, Ministry) are discussed. The chapter concludes with desired changes to improve the quality of case managers' work and to ensure a more diligent approach of the fortification operation (6.6).

6.2 Case managers' experiences with residents

Interestingly, as we will see, case managers' experiences with institutions and with residents mirror the experiences of residents as described in chapter 5. First, we describe case managers' roles and tasks in the fortification operation, then move to a description and analysis of their experiences with residents and finally zoom in on the organizational side of their job and their views of the system of distal institutions.

6.2.1 Case managers' position, roles and tasks

The job of case managers in the fortification operation is a new profession in a new situation within a specific area. To our knowledge neither such a situation nor profession exists worldwide. This means

that case managers' roles and tasks are not crystallized in advance. In this subsection we describe their position, roles and tasks.

Case managers of CVW and NCG can be seen as a *linking pin* between residents and the organization. In this connecting role case managers are responsible for guiding residents through the inspection and possible fortification trajectories. Case managers take care of the 'human side' of these technical processes when necessary, whereas project leaders and construction supervisors take care of the technical side. Paying attention to residents' situation is an important aspect of their job, although most case managers emphasize that they are not social workers or counsellors. In situations they notice or feel that a resident might need more help, they have a signalling function to welfare organizations.

The case manager's task is to accompany residents in trajectories of inspection and fortification. This requires amongst others providing information from the organization to the resident. They translate technical and procedural information into a comprehensible story. In general, case managers stress the importance of providing honest information, which frequently forces them to tell residents they don't know what's going to happen next. Furthermore, case managers also have to check whether residents understand the trajectory they will be going through.

To assist residents well, interpersonal skills such as listening are mentioned as being paramount. Allowing room for emotions and being able to cash in negative emotions are other important qualities. This is a complex process that must be completed step by step, and should not be rushed. Furthermore, resilience is mentioned as a necessary characteristic, because case managers frequently have to deal with frustrated and angry residents. They also need to be able to set boundaries, both to protect themselves (in case of very negative or aggressive residents) as to temper some residents' desires and expectations.

Even though case managers are the prime contact persons for residents, they also act on behalf of an institution and therefore have an assignment[101]. It is their assignment to ensure that residents put their signature, so that the aimed inspection or fortification can take place. Only two case managers explicitly talk about their organization's interests; the others mainly stress the human aspects of their job.

Case managers were asked to describe a few positive and negative experiences with residents. All case managers state at some point in the interview that in general, their experiences with most residents are positive and pleasant. Many of them mentioned an 80 – 20 division: with 80 percent of the residents, relations are experienced as very positive, and with 20 percent this is not the case. In section 6.2.2 and 6.2.3 we discuss positive respectively negative experiences in relations with residents. Main factors underlying these positive or negative experiences are also identified. The analysis in these two sections will answer our first research question: ***What concrete experiences do case managers describe regarding contacts with residents?***

[101] Professionals from other organizations (such as municipalities) sometimes called case managers' assignment a 'stone assignment': their focus is primarily on fortification of homes, not on individual well-being or social cohesion.

6.2.2 Positive experiences with residents

According to the interviewed case managers, many residents have a sense of perspective, they are forward-looking and friendly towards case managers. They also show a remarkable willingness to cooperate in inspection and fortification trajectories. This is remarkable, according to case managers, because these trajectories can be very demanding, frustrating and discouraging:

Extract 1

> What surprises me is that they are all so incredibly friendly. […] It surprises me, because it's súch a constantly changing case of course, which takes súch a long time, which is só incredibly delayed, and residents don't know where they stand, and they still let you in, and they still want to cooperate. […] It is só complicated, but I think it's admirable how residents cope with it! Sometimes I think: they could be a bit more angry. Yes, they could.

This case manager marvels at the 'incredible friendliness' of all residents. She expresses her surprise through *extreme-case formulations*[102] (Pomerantz 1986): it is 'súch a constantly changing case, which takes súch a long time, which is só incredibly delayed […]'. But miraculously, their doors are still open to case managers, and they are still willing to cooperate. Her implicit statement is that it is not residents who are responsible for the frustration and hassle in the fortification operation. The case manager also explains: 'It is só complicated, […] it's admirable how residents cope with it!' thereby contrasting residents' unbelievable friendliness to the treatment that befalls them: the procedures, the delays, the uncertainty and the complexity of the whole case. In her opinion, more anger would be appropriate.

In analyzing the positive experiences that case managers describe in the interviews, we identified three themes that contribute to positive contacts between residents and case managers. First, the human, personal approach: case managers visit residents and thereby put a face to the institution NCG or CVW. Second, character and/or attitude of residents are considered as an important contributing factor for gaining positive interactions. Interestingly, this was often attributed to the 'regional characteristics' of Groningen people. Third, relations appear to improve along the way as residents get further into the fortification trajectory. When after a long period of waiting and uncertainty, fortification finally takes place, this gives rise to a lot of positive energy both for residents and case managers. We illustrate these themes in the following extracts.

Extract 2

> Sometimes people hear: oh the CVW. You often hear that: oh the CVW comes along, that will probably not mean much good. And that is, of course, the legacy of damage settlement. […] But then fortunately it is not that bad, because there is just a human being sitting across from you, whom you can have a conversation with.

[102] See chapter 5, section 5.4.1.

Extract 3

It really surprises me that they remain so patient and really just remain decent, despite… Sometimes you can feel the frustration, you can feel it, but the way the complete Groninger, who I meet everywhere, how decent they always remain… yes, I think that is really admirable, that really amazes me.

Extract 4

If you build a project team, and the CVW project leader is present, the case manager, the contractor is also involved at a very early stage, so he [= *resident*] experiences the process right from the start. In the background, a structural engineer is constantly making calculations. And residents are given the opportunity to include their own wishes in the implementation. And then you can achieve very nice results, and people are often very happy and satisfied with how things went.

In extract 2, the institution CVW is described as having a bad reputation amongst residents: 'Oh the CVW […] that will probably not mean much good.' However, by putting a human face to the organization, a case manager can mitigate this poor reputation somewhat: 'but then fortunately it's not that bad, because there is a human being sitting across from you.' Here, the buffering value of face-to-face contact between people is underlined. The case manager succeeds in retaining positive relations despite all the previous wrongdoings of the institution (e.g. troubles in settling damages, extensive procedures). Whether that also translates back to a more positive view of the institution as a whole remains unsaid here. However, based on residents' experiences as outlined in chapter 5, this seems very unlikely. What this excerpt does illustrate is that despite the bad reputation of organizations, and the long and frustrating procedures, this need not cloud *interpersonal relations* – the majority of residents remain polite and friendly towards the case managers.

This point is also reflected in extract 3, which is related to extract 1: the case manager expresses surprise about residents' patience and correct behaviour – although she can feel residents' frustration. The case manager tries to understand how it can be that despite everything residents have gone through, they still remain so polite and correct. She attributes this *explicitly* to group characteristics: the Groningen citizen. Note the addendum 'complete': 'the way the complete Groninger who I meet everywhere, how decent they always remain'. Patience and proper behaviour are presented here as collective characteristics. In some other interviews this patient, proper and modest attitude was contrasted to the supposed character of those who live in the urban west of the Netherlands (called *Randstad*), who are portrayed as bold people who 'scream' or 'climb the barricades' if they do not like something. The presented contrast may be about more than the Groninger friendliness: it could be a conversational strategy to present them as either morally upstanding, or as too modest to achieve a change.

The third theme regarding positive contacts relates to the actual building projects. When the project team is assembled, and the work of fortifying homes finally starts, relations between residents and case managers get a positive impulse. This is illustrated in extract 4. Here the case manager describes

how plans are made with technical experts on the one side, and residents on the other side of the table. At this stage there is the potential to really achieve something positive together 'and then people are often very happy and satisfied with how things went.' Being actively engaged in the fortification of one's home contributes positively to the cooperation between case manager and resident. It also shows that when good performance is visible, there is much less room for negative experiences.

In sum, case managers provide a coherent and clear picture: contacts and relations with residents are experienced mainly as positive. What they make very clear is that it is almost never up to residents if inspection and fortification trajectories are laborious and slow. Case managers also show that residents are severely affected by slow and complex processes; they express surprise that their interpersonal contacts remain so positive and seek explanations why this might be the case. This surprise is partly based on the realization that one's institution has a negative reputation (extract 2) and procedures residents have to go through are slow, complicated and frustrating (extract 1, see also section 6.4). To complete this picture, we focus on the twenty percent of relations that are described as less positive or negative, in short: difficult relations between case manager and resident.

6.2.3 Difficult experiences with residents

As frontline professionals, case managers also have to face residents' negative emotions such as frustration, anger, despair, and sometimes aggression. Although negative experiences are limited to a minority of residents, these encounters cost a lot of energy:

Extract 5

> […] we will call them the 20% group, but that's a group that takes a lot of energy, you know. It demands a lot of your energy, so to speak.

When analyzing descriptions of case managers' difficult interactions in contacts with residents, two general themes can be identified. First of all external causes that can be attributed to mistakes by the case manager or to the organization's own functioning and communication. In such cases, the importance of offering apologies is mentioned, to restore good working relations with residents.

Extract 6

> Then I say: I'm sorry it came across that way, that I wasn't clear about that. Then I blame myself. That doesn't bother me at all, you know, because that may well be the case. And then you're already halfway there, very often.

The case manager notices that apologies and taking responsibility help in resolving difficult relations. The way she talks makes clear it is a strategy: 'Then I blame myself. […] that doesn't bother me at all, because that may well be the case.' This strategy of taking the blame, even when the blame may not lie with herself, is portrayed as an effective method to salvage relations with the resident.

A second reason for difficult relations, according to case managers, lies with the combination of the pressure residents are being put under and the frailty of residents themselves: they are less able to cope due to their character, personal circumstances and/or mental health problems.

Extract 7

> What you see is, when people go through such a trajectory, you actually witness a reflection of society. There are people from all walks of life among them. So there are also people who are emotionally not stable. And this hits people hard. This is really, I mean, their hómes are being demolished!

This case manager makes clear that the fortification is a lot to cope with and that it can happen to everyone. In an inspection or fortification trajectory, 'people from all walks of life [are] among them', including people who are emotionally not stable. She emphasizes how hard the fortification operation can hit, because people are touched in an essential part of their life: their homes.

In sum, where relations with residents are difficult, this is often seen as an understandable consequence of the stress the fortification operation places residents under. Not all residents can withstand this pressure. Thus, case managers express a lot of understanding for those cases in which relations with residents sour. Both in the negative and in the positive relations with residents, therefore, we hear that case managers are *concerned* about how they are treating residents, which can be considered a manifestation of their *motivation* and *good intentions* to help residents. The reasons why this strong motivation does not necessarily produce good results, are reflected upon in the next section.

6.3 Case managers' position within their organization

This section describes the extent of customization and leeway that case managers experience (6.3.1), case managers' views on their organization (6.3.2) and obstacles that influence them doing their job. Focusing on these subjects enables us to answer the question to which extent case managers are capable to perform, and thus in restoring confidence in 'the bigger picture'.

6.3.1 Customization, leeway and autonomy

Research question 2a is answered in this section: ***How do case managers describe the degree of autonomy in their job?*** This is relevant to know, as the answer can shine a light on the role of linking pin that case managers perform between residents and their needs on the one side, and their institutions' interests on the other.

Case managers report that every situation is different: houses vary in typology, just like residents vary in character, attitude, desires, circumstances and history. This makes every situation unique. To assist residents as well as possible in their specific situation, case managers should be able to provide tailored solutions. And that requires sufficient *autonomy*, or leeway to perform their job according to own insights rather than having to adhere to top-down established rules and regulations. Some case

managers report they have enough autonomy, but most say they do not. An example of the latter is expressed in extract 8:

Extract 8

> Of course we always proclaim customisation and exceptions, saying: "This is a very specific case, so in this case we should grant it." But then you are often told: "Well, but if we grant that in this case and other people hear that, then they want it too."

This case manager describes herself as belonging to a group ('we') of professionals who see the need for customizing and adapting to individual needs. She then voices the reaction of other professionals[103] that making exceptions sets precedents: then other residents 'want it too'.

In this context the question arises whether case managers can indeed be classified as street-level bureaucrats in the sense of Michael Lipsky, as we announced in the introduction to this chapter (Lipsky, 1980; 2010). Lipksy introduced the term *street-level bureaucrat* to refer to all those government officials (and those from public services) who are in daily contact with citizens and have a relatively high impact on their lives. These are the people that shape citizens' experiences of government, who represent government to the people. To some extent, case managers can be considered as street-level bureaucrats: they are indeed employees who interact directly with citizens, but do they also have substantial discretion in the execution of their work? Here we arrive at Lipsky's second key concept: *discretionary power*. One of the characteristics of the work street-level bureaucrats do is that they have a high level of autonomy, that they can decide the details of their job. Tummers & Bekkers (2014) advise that when drafting policy programmes, it can be beneficial to give the implementing street-level bureaucrats some freedom to adjust the policy programmes in order to be effective and legitimate. From our discourse we tentatively conclude that most case managers experience a lack of sufficient autonomy. After complete analysis of the case managers' discourse, we will return to this point in section 6.6.

The fortification operation in North-east Groningen is unique, quite complex and procedures are constantly being adjusted. There are few set protocols and according to case managers, residents' situations often are unique so every case requires some customization. At the same time, radical decisions are taken from 'on high'[104] which leads to sudden changes in trajectories, complicating the work of case managers. Furthermore, it takes very long for case managers to gain clarity about trajectories, meaning they *cannot* inform residents in a good and timely fashion. Case managers often point to the 'inner workings' of their organization as an obstacle, sometimes causing tension between their desire to help residents and fulfill the organizational assignment. Case managers report feeling torn. A case manager illustrates her difficult position because of her contradictory job duties of helping and policing residents:

[103] She probably refers to professionals in her own organization in policy or management positions, although this cannot explicitly be concluded from the interview.
[104] Our translation for the Dutch term *hoog over*, which was frequently used by both case managers and other professionals working in the region.

Extract 9

> You also support the residents, but that is because you are the one who understands about their frustrations. But you do work for an organization, and that's where you get stuck, you know? How do you solve that? […] We keep hope alive, and what I'm saying is that you just get energy from the nice projects and for the rest, you just have to try and help yourself and the residents a bit, and have to try to balance it.

After describing being torn between understanding residents' frustrations and working for an organization, she ends with a question: 'How do you solve that?' and continues by focusing on positive projects first, after which she describes 'and for the rest, you just have to try and help yourself and the residents a bit, and have to try to balance it'. She offers no solution for being torn, probably because she has not been able to find a better one than 'balancing'.

So, what becomes clear from the interview is that case managers are in need of a certain degree of leeway to deal with their complex cases but their actual autonomy only lies in their personal style of interacting with residents. How case managers deal with residents and their situation is determined by the underlying reason they visit residents, and this is determined by their organization. In fact, what we see is case managers' powerlessness: many of them clearly communicate their inability to perform their job in a satisfactory way.

As we have seen, case managers feel torn between the needs of residents and the treatment they are giving them. This seems paradoxical, because one of the prime reasons for establishing the position of case managers was to 'unburden' residents (Dutch: *ontzorgen*[105], which literally means to relieve peoples' concerns). The paradox is that what appears to upset the case managers is that at least some of their actions (such as decisions being reconsidered and the frequent delays) are having the exact opposite effect: burdening the residents and adding to resident concerns.

6.3.2 Case managers' views on and experiences with proximate organizations

Due to their frequent contacts with residents, case managers have eyes on the impact of inspection and fortification on residents. To some extent they perceive the resident's perspective. At the same time, they are employees and perceive how things proceed within their organization. As in the interviews with residents, the proximate institutions CVW and NCG are discussed in the interviews with case managers. Interestingly enough, case managers voice questions about (the workings of) their institutions that are quite similar to the questions that residents raise. Case managers not only talk about their own organization, but also about the partner or mirrored organization, because until 2019 CVW and NCG have regularly cooperated in inspection and fortification trajectories.

In this section, based on our interviews, we want to go deeper into these images and experiences that case managers report in respect to their own organization and their partner or mirrored organization. By doing so we will attempt to answer research questions 2b and 2c:

[105] See e.g. Nationaal Coördinator Groningen (2016), *Meerjarenprogramma Aardbevingsbestendig en Kansrijk Groningen, 2017-2021*.

How do case managers talk about their organization? What obstacles and stimulating factors do they experience in performing their jobs?
and
What concrete experiences do case managers report with colleagues, and with professionals of the organization they collaborate with?

In doing so we first present a short summary of case managers' experiences in general as it appears from our interviews. We then clarify in more detail the bold printed obstacles in this summary; these were the most discussed barriers in the interviews.

First of all, the cooperation between case managers of CVW and NCG is unanimously described as positive, and the atmosphere at the local fortification desks[106] is characterized as pleasant and cooperative. A point of concern is that work floor signals are not taken up sufficiently by the NCG main office, thus giving rise to a gap between policy and practice. In connection to this, both NCG- and CVW-case managers mention the barriers of what they call **procedural thinking** or a **'process thinking mindset'**. They voice their impression that employees in higher functions (policy and decision makers) usually do not have a clear picture of residents' situations and their needs, and stick to thinking in terms of systems and procedures. In addition to this concern, case managers of both CVW and NCG mention the hierarchical design of their organization: the **many levels** are described as a main obstacle in performing their jobs. Finally, case managers express **confusion** and sometimes **contractionary ideas** about who is responsible for which part of the fortification operation: NCG or CVW?

Levels, departments and procedures
The many levels, departments and procedures within and between the two organizations are mentioned as big obstacles in almost every interview. These obstacles seem to be related and therefore are taken up simultaneously in this subsection. Case managers of both organizations talk with frustration about the many levels of decision-making within and outside their organization and the many departments, both within NCG, CVW and governmental institutions such as municipalities:

Extract 10

It has to cross far too many levels, far too many people want to make their mark, it's too bizárre! The bureaucracy behind it.

Extract 11

Too little attention is paid to the implementation level. When we say: "Now you should actually do something" …. Well, we are not listened to enough. [*About drafting a letter*] Let us do it ourselves. Because at a higher level it has to cross so many layers. Then the local council has to say something. […] And then it has to be

[106] 'Fortification desks' (Dutch: *versterkingspunten*) are small NCG-offices located in the municipalities. Residents can visit these offices and talk with employees, mostly case managers who operate from there.

reviewed again, and again, and again… Well, the ultimate result is that it takes three months to have this letter sent out!

In extract 10 and 11 the many levels are referred to as 'bizarre' and causing delays. Both case managers note that too many people, levels/layers[107] and departments are involved in the fortification operation. These professionals are described as part of a bureaucracy behind the *actual* fortification performance. Furthermore, the voice of professionals who are closely involved with residents, is hardly listened to, as is illustrated in the first part of extract 11.

Instead, processes are seen as too complicated and top-down: they do not serve residents. Some case managers declare that the 'process thinking mindset', referred to earlier, sets aside residents (extracts 12 – 15), or even reframes them into obstacles, as extract 14 shows:

Extract 12

The resident first! […] Well yeah, we'll have to see. Because as long as our procedures are this complicated … that there is no progression, the resident is still not being put first.

Extract 13

Institutions often think in terms of procedures. And that's what they have to do, in order to get things done, but then things get very easily– it becomes clear that things get very much top-down. [But it is] also very important that you actually shape the procedures from the bottom-up. So what do people need, and go and see how you can organize this.

Extract 14

But residents can sometimes be difficult people. […] Like: "Well then there are also these residents you know, those people." "Oh yes, yes." Yes, but that's what it's all about!

Extract 15

The fortification desks seem to be a bit of a 'none of my business' show for [the main office]. People who think in terms of policy and the work force, such as practical people […] are actually two small islands that are not really familiar with each other yet.

In extract 12, the case manager refers with scepticism to the slogan 'residents first': 'Well yeah, we'll have to see.' His scepticism stems from the insight in the inner workings of his organization: 'As long as our procedures are so complicated … then the resident is still not being put first.' In extract 13, the process thinking mindset is presented as an inherent activity of institutions: it is understandable,

[107] In Dutch: *lagen* (levels) and *schijven* (layers) were frequently used words.

because institutions have to make progress. But on the other side, case managers report that it is important to shape processes 'from the bottom-up'. In extract 14, the case manager starts speaking from the perspective of professionals working in policy positions, who are implicitly portrayed here as feeling bothered by residents: those 'difficult people'. In extract 15, the clash between procedures and people is explained from an organizational perspective: fortification desks in the region seem to be far away from the (NCG) main office where people 'think in terms of policy.' Policy and practice are metaphorically presented as 'two islands that are not really familiar with each other yet.'

So, case managers are aware that residents fall between the fault lines of the many levels and departments, both within and between the many institutions. The experiences of residents sharply contrast with the organizations' stated mission 'Resident first' (Dutch: *Bewoner centraal*). This leads another case manager to the observation that the statement 'resident first' might be no more than a mantra: 'If we say it often enough, we may start to believe it ourselves, but it is not visible in everyday practice.'[108]

6.4 Case managers' views on distal institutions (politics, ministries, oil companies)

As in the interviews with residents, a 'system of distal institutions and procedures' that are dealing with the consequences of gas extraction, is discussed in most interviews with case managers. This 'system' often gets blamed for rigid procedures and the lack of results. What strikes is that very few can explain what is meant by 'the system'.

As indicated in chapter 5, procedures, policies and budgets with regard to the gas extraction problems are perceived as determined by distal institutions[109]. These institutions act on a distance from citizens, therefore residents mostly do not have first-hand experiences with these institutions. They do, however, express their thoughts and opinions on these organizations (as we discussed in chapter 5). We observe a similar picture in case managers' views on this 'distal layer' of institutions. In this section, based on their observations and thoughts we will now work on answering our third research question: ***How do case managers portray distal organizations such as government, politics and oil companies?***

In the discourse, case managers show that they experience a lack of clarity with regard to (the workings of) distal institutions. They also offer explanations for this lack of clarity and for the short-falling fortification operation in general. Many case managers point at this distal level as the cause for strained processes, and for the uncertainty and lengthiness in inspection and fortification trajectories. Sometimes what they mean with this distal level is broken down to The Hague[110], the

[108] Original Dutch tekst: 'Als we dat maar vaak genoeg roepen, dan gaan we er misschien zelf in geloven, maar de uitvoer is er niet naar.'
[109] To some part, in dialogue with representatives of the Groningen region, via *bestuursoverleggen* ('administrative consultations') that culminate in administrative agreements (Dutch: *bestuursakkoorden*). The *Versnellingsteam* ('Acceleration Team', established September 2019) includes representatives from the national and regional government.
[110] The Hague (*Den Haag*) is the residence city of the Dutch government.

government, the Minister (sometimes the Minister in person, Mr Wiebes), the Ministry of Economic Affairs, NAM and/or Shell.

From case managers' accounts, it becomes clear that they cannot understand certain choices made at a distal level – a level that, nevertheless, is not further specified in extract 16 and 17. They also speculate on possible motives of the Ministry and NAM (extract 18 and 19).

Extract 16

And then on top of that, there is this HRA-model which is based on statistical… Well, completely unbelievable.

Extract 17 (duo-interview)

R1: We don't understand who invented that (= *HRA-model*) either.
R2: No, and it is also impossible to explain
R1: why that is.

The Hazard and Risk Model (HRA) these two extracts refer to, was introduced three months before the interviews took place. The accounts in extract 16 and 17 show that these case managers do not understand the introduction of this technological HRA-model, which they evaluate as 'completely unbelievable' and 'impossible to explain'. The case managers obviously have difficulty identifying with the policy of using this model, which changed the fortification approach[111].

When street-level bureaucrats cannot identify with a policy, this may have severe consequences. Tummers & Bekkers observe 'they themselves can become dissatisfied with their work. Some professionals even experience burn-out or quit their jobs entirely' (2020: 165). These identification problems can be understood using the policy alienation-model developed by Tummers, Bekkers and Steijn (2009). *Policy alienation* can be defined as a general cognitive state of psychological disconnection from the policy program to be implemented. The first dimension of policy alienation is a feeling of *powerlessness* when implementing a policy. A second dimension is formed by feelings of *meaninglessness*: these reflect 'the professionals' perceptions on the contributions their own activities make to dealing with concrete, individual cases, as manifestations of broader societal problems. For instance, are they really helping people?' (2009: 689). From extract 16 and 17 it can be argued that case managers are only *messengers*, messengers of changing policies and procedures they cannot identify with. Their word choices ('and then on top of that, there is this HRA-model' and 'we don't understand who invented that') display a mixture of bewilderment and disdain for the introduction of the HRA-method in the fortification operation, through which they distance themselves from a policy they also have to implement.

In the next extracts two other case managers share their thoughts on the 'system', this unspecified distal level where decisions are made – such as the introduction of the HRA-method in the previous extracts. The case managers refer to politics, NAM and the Ministry of Economic Affairs as not acting in a transparent way:

[111] From area oriented to object oriented; see section 6.1.

Extract 18

You know, it is all being delayed, of course. New decisions are being made, and the longer you delay… what will eventually in the end be realized? […] And that is also up to politics! […] And this goes hand in hand with the NAM, you know? I mean, you don't know exactly of course what kind of deals have been made there, and they're definitely not going to tell us, […] but it's about a very big purse of money […] it's a continuous struggle for money.

Extract 19

The case manager is asked about the reason why there are conflicting stories about who ultimately decides on the fortification operation: NAM or Ministry of Economic Affairs.
You can only speculate, you can't prove it, but it's simply because I think that EA… have a double agenda, and in the back rooms different agreements with the NAM are being made than they show at the front.

Note that case managers consider these distal institutions as, to some extent, mysterious actors who operate out of peoples' sight. At the same time, these distal actors are portrayed as being in control, as having the power (that case managers lack): they make deals and agreements that 'they're definitely not going to tell us about'. Also note that in extract 18, the case manager considers the delays as *deliberate* activities: 'It is all being delayed of course. […] and that is also up to politics! […] and this goes hand in hand with the NAM, you know?' She concludes that it is her firm belief that it is all about money, that money is in fact the most important thing: 'it's a continuous struggle for money.' This assumption that money is of prime importance also indicates that it is not really about people – an assumption that can be compared almost one-to-one with extracts 18, 19 and 20 in chapter 5.

The case managers in both extracts 18 and 19 above communicate that they lack a clear insight into distal institutions' workings and their statements on this are explicitly formulated as speculations: 'you can only speculate, you can't prove it, but I think that EA … have a double agenda'. The derogatory connotation of their speculations is expressed in the diminutive, a grammatical category that does not exist in English (Burgers et al., 2012). Diminutives can for instance mark irony (Burgers et al., 2012), but in any case, when using a diminutive there is a second, ironic or derisive meaning to a statement (Dheedene, 2014). Peter Bakema's thesis (1998) describes that one of the applications of diminutives is the depreciation meaning: something is denotated as valueless or insignificant. In the case managers' discourse in excerpts 18 and 19 we can conclude there is disapproval regarding institutions' integrity and transparency, which is conveyed by the somewhat derisive connotation of the diminutives *dealtjes* ('deals') and *achterkamertjes* ('back rooms').

Deviant cases

Two case managers express a somewhat different view on the system. From their accounts, we can infer that they do not blame the system or its financial interests; instead, from their formulations it appears that a lack of organization and communication within or between institutions is held accountable for the failure to make progress. In their view, it is therefore a matter of organizing things well and ensuring better communication. Extract 20 provides an illustration of this different position:

Extract 20

> [More money] is not the solution either. It really isn't. No. It's actually about organizing things properly.

These two case managers also deviate from the others in that they do not speculate about systemic flaws or reasons. Why do their explanations differ so much from the others? This question cannot be answered from the interviews; it could be that case managers themselves vary in their attitudes toward residents, the fortification operation, and their organization.

Altogether we can conclude that the majority of case managers attribute the lack of progress in the fortification operation to the unclear workings of distal institutions, which is considered as an opaque construct (or 'system') of levels, regulations, policies and decisions. Case managers offer a range of explanations for the lack of progress and for the lack of clarity: hidden motives, financial interests and politics are considered to play an important role within distal institutions, which are also considered as the ones in power. At the same time, case managers express their own lack of control, feelings of frustration, and sometimes bewilderment.

6.5 Points for improvement

From the descriptions of experiences and obstacles in the preceding sections, points for improvement can be inferred implicitly. But the question 'From your perspective, how could the fortification operation be improved?' was also explicitly asked in the interviews. Case managers' responses to this question were analyzed to answer our last research question: ***What changes do case managers consider as essential changes to improve both their own performance and the fortification operation?***

This section elaborates on improvement areas that are mentioned most often. However, these areas or factors are not in case managers' hands, and they are not sure whether their own organization or the system is held responsible for any improvement.

6.5.1 More mandate to local actors

In the interviews, there is a lot of discourse where case managers express a need for more *discretionary power* to local actors: the Groningen region, the fortification desks, the case managers. Extract 21 and 22 illustrate case managers' wish for more 'mandate', a term that is frequently used to refer to Lipsky's key concept of discretionary power.

Extract 21

> […] that we here in Groningen get trusted by The Hague, like: "Just arrange it. Here is the money, go and arrange it. […] You know what needs to happen, you know about the practical matters, you visit peoples' homes, and I give you the mandate to arrange it."
> I: So there is also a– should also be some trust involved?
> R: No, there ís no trust. From my perspective. But then again, I'm not sitting at the negotiating tables, so it's easy for me to say.

Extract 22

> Give those case managers a broader mandate. So that they dón't have to go back to the project manager or the organization with every question a resident has. […] It would help me a lot, and a bit more space is given now, with some teams, if case managers were also given that space to come up with other solutions than those indicated in the action plan, in consultation with the resident. […] And then it's not an action anymore like: "There you go sir, this is it, would you please sign at the cross?"

It is interesting that both case managers in extracts 21 and 22 explicitly and implicitly talk about *trust* as an important aspect of being mandated: what they mean is that case managers (or: the Groningen region) get the trust, and space, to act in order to be more successful. So, from case managers' perspective, 'giving trust' appears to go hand in hand with 'giving space' to arrange things on one's own while being more successful. What becomes clear from the extracts above, is that having more mandate (*discretionary power*) means that case managers would have leeway to make decisions which they consider as necessary to facilitate the fortification operation. These extracts again show that case managers are not street-level bureaucrats in Lipsky's sense, but mainly 'street-level messengers' of bureaucratic procedures and decisions.

6.5.2 Simpler processes and a bottom-up approach

From the interviews with case managers, we can draw suggestions to how internal processes within CVW and NCG could be improved, transparency increased and success enlarged.

Extract 23

> I would simplify procedures, I think. I mean, there are far too many levels through which things must pass. If you write a project definition, or a project proposal: both within the NCG and the CVW there are various levels which all have to make, I'll just put it straight, their mark. And this is about departments, about people who have to give an opinion about something […] but who have nó practical experience.

Extract 24

> Mainly a strong reduction of top-down. That is simply the essence. That you simply collect the information you need from the workplace, where it matters, and then actually include that in your decision-making. And far less meetings in which decisions have to be made. Because I believe there are three or four [meetings], before something is finally approved. And that takes lots of time, of course. So that is also, ah, that can be arranged far more efficiently.

In extract 23 ('far too many levels'), the same obstacles are reflected as in extracts 10 and 11, whereas the main message of extract 24 ('mainly a strong reduction of top-down' and 'far less meetings') is supported by extract 11, where the case manager expresses frustration: 'it has to be reviewed again, and again, and again'. Here, case managers also offer solutions: simplify procedures, approach things from the workplace, and reduce meetings. But they also hint that they are not in charge: it is the professionals and departments without practical experience who make the decisions.

6.5.3 Providing clarity, keeping promises and meeting expectations

Uncertainty, broken promises and unfulfilled expectations are case managers' main eyesores. Providing more clarity, keeping promises and be consistent in the approach: in all interviews these wishes were voiced:

Extract 25

> [Being able to offer] Clearness and clarity [to the resident, so that the resident knows:] what can I expect when, and from whom, and what does the whole trajectory look like? Eliminating that uncertainty that now exists.

Extract 26

> You would like to offer people a perspective, like: "We are going to do this, we are going to do it in that way, and then it is going to happen." Well, that's just not […] I would especially like to wish it on the residents, but I would also like to [*laughs*] wish it on ourselves in our work, that we can work in that way. But unfortunately, that's not the case.

Extract 25 and 26 reflect the powerlessness of case managers: they are unable to offer what they consider as necessary for residents. 'I would especially like to wish it on the residents […] but unfortunately, that's not the case.' Some case managers from NCG wish a stable organization with more calm and are convinced this would contribute to more clarity:

Extract 27

> The peace and quiet, [so] that we are no longer being tossed and have to go to the residents with something that is just not right anymore.

In extracts 25-27 case managers express frustrations caused by the constant flow of changes. This course of events results in conflicts with their professional ethos of offering people a perspective. In the desire for change, their struggles with trustworthiness can be implicitly inferred. Their motivation to make a difference for people (the 'caring' aspect of benevolence), is clearly visible in the discourse; however, it is also very clear that their motivation goes against their lack of power to actually perform. This clashes with what they deem the most important and thus creates an integrity conflict: they realize that they are not able to offer clear information and to fulfil expectations, and at the same time understand that residents are the ones who suffer from these shortcomings.

To nuance our findings a little, a small minority of case managers point at shortcomings of their own organization. They see possibilities to tackle the problems within and between the institutions involved, as was illustrated with extract 20 in the previous section.

6.6 Concluding remarks

As long as case managers have the right qualities and skills to guide residents, and as long as most residents are open and willing to cooperate, the interpersonal contacts leave hardly any room for improvements. From the interviews it becomes clear that these contacts mostly are positive; when not, case managers come up with concrete explanations. A case manager who is not empathetic, cannot take a punch, is not flexible and not able to process lots of constantly changing information, is basically not in the right place, as some of them indicate. And a resident who does not cooperate or is hard to get along with, may cause difficult situations. However, all this is not the sting in the frustrations that many case managers experience.

Frustrations do result from the way the fortification operation is organized and controlled by a system, and from the complicated institutional context: both determined outside the sphere of influence of case managers. Case managers report they feel in a split between the bureaucratic hassles within and between institutions, and the interests and needs of residents. They identify with residents and their problems, while at the same time realizing they are representatives of an institution and have a professional assignment to accomplish.

According to several case managers, the gap between institutions' policy and management level on the one hand, and the frontline on the other is deep. As long as institutions operate top-down, this distance cannot be easily bridged. Case managers experience that 'the top' does not always have a clear view of residents' situation in the region ('the bottom'), where case managers are confronted with in their work. The described distance symbolizes a gap between policy (theory) and implementation (practice). Case managers yearn for their experiences to be taken into account when procedures are drafted and decisions made. What case managers do not say in so many words, could be a request for trust: they ask for trust to make decisions on their own, based on their experiences, and to initiate the actual fortification operation from the bottom. It seems that they want to be real street-level bureaucrats instead of just street-level messengers of bureaucratic processes and decisions. From a street-level bureaucracy perspective, case managers should not only function as the lubricant in the public policy machine (Evans, 2010), but above all they need a certain degree of

autonomy to make policy work 'at the street-level', in other words: discretionary power (Lipsky, 2010).

Regarding the first point, case managers position themselves as 'linking pins' or 'connections' between institution and resident. Two case managers use the Dutch term *Haarlemmer olie*[112] (a miracle oil). They use interpersonal skills in order to convince residents to agree with inspection and eventually, fortification. The second point is more problematic: from the interviews it has become clear that most case managers feel they lack discretionary power. Having more discretionary power means that case managers would have more leeway to make decisions which they consider as necessary to advance the fortification. However, they hint that it is not included in their job description to 'tailor' the fortification operation to individual residents and their needs; it is their task to inform residents, to listen to them, and to put a face to the institution – a view that is shared by residents in chapter 5. Reasoning from the street-level bureaucracy literature, due to this lack of discretionary power there is a risk that case managers experience far-reaching negative consequences, such as policy alienation, burn-out, or they quit their jobs. In fact, a number of them already faced a burn-out or actually quit their job.

The conclusion of all of this is that case managers are in fact nothing more than frontline or street-level messengers guiding residents through processes they cannot influence; they have no discretionary power regarding processes and policies. So residents' trust in case managers can only relate to the *benevolence* dimension of trustworthiness: they are well-meaning individuals who try very hard to assist residents; they are good listeners and information translators, and so, at the interpersonal level, they are able to build trust relations with residents. However, this form of trust is marginal as it only comprises case managers' *benevolent* attitude and behaviour. At the *competence* level they are bound to fail, because they lack the power to act beyond being a good listener and a good process coach. The third dimension of trustworthiness, *integrity*, is the most complex one, as case managers' statements suggest that they experience a moral conflict: they have to communicate delays and violated expectations to residents – delays and expectations they are not responsible for.

Saddled with a dirty job and with no authority or power, is how many see their role. Occasionally, professionals[113] other than case managers refer to their class as the 'floor drains' of the system (Dutch: *het afvoerputje*, a very demeaning term which signifies the place where the filth accumulates and is drained through). Those who maintain contact with residents on behalf of the organization, those whose role it is to support and 'unburden'[114] the residents, are therefore perceived as the lowest in their organizations. On the other hand: they are the ones who come closest to the sometimes-poignant situations of residents and have the best idea of what the consequences of gas extraction are for people ánd what people need. In that sense, they are the most important professionals because they work at the intersection of the system and peoples' lifeworld. For philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas, whom we have already briefly mentioned in section

[112] An untranslatable term. *Haarlemmer olie* is a Dutch invention from the 17th century, with was considered as a miracle drug with secret ingredients that was recommended for all kinds of ailments and diseases.
[113] Professionals that took part in the third study, whose discourse is analyzed in chapter 7.
[114] Dutch: *ontzorgen.*

5.4.3, the *lifeworld* is the background of ordinary life and is therefore 'authentic and essential to our satisfaction as human beings' (Levine, 2017). In contrast, the *system world* is composed of formal organizations, such as governments, corporations, unions, courts and so on. In discussions of the now famous observation of 'systems colonizing lifeworlds', Habermas also emphasizes the tendency of welfare state bureaucracies to 'juridify' or 'judicialize' the lifeworld (Levine, 2017). That judicialization and bureaucratization penetrate deep into the lifeworld, will be further elaborated in the next chapter (section 7.3.1 about institutionalized distrust).

7. Perspectives of professionals in policy, administrative and management positions

This chapter examines the perspectives of professionals who do not primarily work in frontline positions with residents. A few of these professionals solely or mainly work behind the scenes; others are figureheads with public responsibilities. To distinguish this group of respondents from the case managers (respondents we interviewed in chapter 6), we refer to them as 'professionals behind the scenes', 'professionals in more senior positions' or as 'professionals in policy, administrative and management positions'. In the research questions we briefly call them 'professionals' for the sake of readability.

In this chapter we reflect on direct and indirect expressions of trust and trustworthiness. Trust issues crop up in quite direct ways, for example, when professionals describe their problems of trustworthiness in the *performance* of their tasks. But the theme of trust also enters the discourse when professionals are talking about doing what is good for residents and wanting to help them ahead. For example, they describe that they experience an *integrity struggle* due to a discrepancy between what they feel as necessary and what they are able to do that reflects (in)directly on residents. These experiences were also expressed by their frontline colleagues, the case managers, in chapter 6.

Based on interviews with the professionals in more senior positions, we outline how different dimensions of trustworthiness become visible in the discourse about the very complex system of interdependent institutions in the gas case. During our interviews, discussions concerning 'the system' also gave rise to many statements about power (Who has it? Who can act as s/he wants?) and influence (How does one achieve desired outcomes?) in relation to trust. Interestingly, the relation between these two concepts receives little explicit attention in the scientific literature, yet as we will outline at the end of the chapter, the analysis of the interview discourse suggests they are closely intertwined with trust and trustworthiness.

In this chapter, the following research questions will be answered:

1. How do these professionals describe their (organizations') ability to perform?
2. With regard to relations with other professionals and (where applicable) with residents:
   a. How do professionals reflect on these relations and what role do (aspects of) trust and trustworthiness play in their discourse?
   b. What do professionals see as main obstacles for building relations of trust and being a trustworthy actor?
3. What role does power play with regard to trustworthiness dimensions in the discourse of professionals?[115]

[115] This third research question is an additional one, since power issues were not a starting point of our research, see section 7.4.

7.1 Participants, interviews and analysis

Between the interviews with case managers and the first interviews with professionals working in policy, administrative and management positions, a period of almost a year elapsed. During this period, the fortification operation was again subject to developments and changes. First, the CVW ceased to exist by December 31, 2019. Some of their employees were transferred to the NCG, the organization that took over the fortification operation. Second, what had already happened in 2018 with damage settlement, the fortification operation was also brought under public responsibility. And third, the Ministry of Interior Affairs was assigned the responsibility for the fortification operation, formerly handled by the Ministry of Economic Affairs.

Professionals in policy, administrative and management positions

Respondents in this third study hold positions at the policy, administrative and management levels of organizations dealing with the consequences of gas extraction. The analysis is based on 21 interviews with in total 24 professionals working for local, regional and national authorities, and for the National Coordinator Groningen (NCG). The interviews were conducted between February and September 2020 as part of a larger research project by Gronings Perspectief (see Bovenhoff et al., 2021).

Professionals were recruited via e-mail requests on behalf of Gronings Perspectief of the University of Groningen (carrying out research projects on behalf of the National Coordinator Groningen). The majority of interviews were conducted by two interviewers, from the expectation that topics discussed could be rather complex and sensitive, due to the positions held by the respondents, especially political officials.

Interviews

As explained in chapter 4, in-depth interviews were conducted; a protocol was used to guide the interviews and to ensure the interviews could be compared on key topics (see Appendix 7a).

We interviewed ten professionals working for local governments (municipalities in Groningen), four working for the regional government (Province of Groningen), four working for national government (Ministries of Economic and Interior Affairs), and six professionals appointed to National Coordinator Groningen. Half of these interviews took place in a face-to-face setting, the other half were conducted via video call or phone calls due to COVID-restrictions from March 16, 2020. Four of these interviews were duo-interviews with colleagues who were familiar to each other.

Analysis

As with the previous two studies, the interviews were coded using ATLAS.ti. For the brief summary of the Gronings Perspectief study which is provided in section 7.2, a different codebook was used than for the purpose of the present study (that seeks to answer research questions 2 and 3). Regarding research questions 2 and 3, the new codes are described in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1: Main codes and subcodes used for analysis

Research question	Main code	Subcodes (if any)
1	*(= brief summary of findings report Gronings Perspectief)*	
2a-b	Verantwoording afleggen, Mensen versus systemen, Wantrouwen *Being accountable, People versus systems, Distrust*	
	Benevolence: *Benevolence:*	belangen, individuen *interests, individuals*
	Integer: *Integrity:* Worsteling: *Struggles:*	afspraken nakomen, boodschap van ander overbrengen, belang van eerlijkheid en duidelijkheid *keeping agreements, communicating another's message, importance of honesty and clarity|* algemeen, worsteling m.b.t. gelijke behandeling *general struggles, struggles with equal treatment*
3	Macht *Power* Verantwoording afleggen *Being accountable* Worsteling: *Struggles*: Verschil in beeldvorming *Difference in perceptions* Afhankelijkheid van andere partij *Dependence on other party*	 op één lijn komen *aligning*
	Macht, Afhankelijkheid van andere partij, Verantwoording afleggen *Power, Dependence on other party, Being accountable*	
	Macht *Power* Integer: *Integrity*: Afhankelijkheid van andere partij, Worsteling, Mensen versus systemen *Dependence on other party, Struggles, People versus systems*	 afspraken nakomen, belang van eerlijkheid en duidelijkheid *keeping agreements, importance of honesty and clarity,*

In the next three sections, key findings for each research question are described and illustrated with citations from the interviews. The original Dutch texts of the citations are included in Appendix 7b. In section 7.2 we set out the context for the actual analysis in this chapter. Therefore, we highlight relevant findings of previous chapters and summarize the results of earlier research by Gronings Perspectief. In the subsequent sections we analyze how professionals describe and reflect on relations and on dimensions of trustworthiness (7.3). We then reflect on the theoretical concepts of power and influence, and examine references to these concepts in the discourse. Finally, we analyze the ways in which power, powerlessness and influence are discussed in relation to trust and being a trustworthy party (7.4).

7.2 The situation of professionals

In this section we summarize what we already know about the situation on the work floor, and about the situation regarding the construct of institutions that professionals find themselves in. With this we answer research question 1: ***How do these professionals describe their (organizations') ability to perform?*** On the basis of that we outline the context for the discourse we analyze in sections 7.3 and 7.4.

7.2.1 The situation on the work floor

The issues that crop up for residents and case managers[116] are described in chapters 5 and 6. As we have demonstrated, both residents and case managers observe that performance is lacking even though case managers do their utmost to achieve results. In the discourse, the tension between commitment and results becomes clear. Case managers are perceived, both by residents and to an extent by themselves, as *benevolent* though *incompetent* regarding residents' needs. Institutions are perceived as ineffective, and their workings – mainly of distal institutions – as driven by other interests than those of the residents.

So, in this discourse a tension is recognized between two dimensions of trustworthiness: *performance* and *benevolence*. In section 7.3 we add some new perspectives to this contrast, taken from the interviews with professionals working in policy, administrative and management positions. But first we give a brief overview of inhibiting factors that this group of professionals have reported as obstacles in their work, which are discussed in the Gronings Perspectief report by Bovenhoff and colleagues (2021).

7.2.2 Working within the construct of institutions

Before discussing how professionals talk about trust, trustworthiness, power and influence, it is useful to have some insight into how professionals perceive the system they work in (and to some extent create themselves). The findings in the report are partly based on the same interviews with professionals, as well as additional interviews with professionals who are working for institutions that do not play a direct role in the fortification operation (see Table 4.1 in chapter 4). We asked

[116] Case managers work in frontline positions where they have frequent and direct contact with residents.

them to report on the things that went well and then on things that went less well. There were relatively few things mentioned that went well and what was mentioned was not consistent and coherent across interviewees. By contrast, when discussing things that did not go well, a lot was mentioned and in this, obstacles were a key theme. There were many of them. The report's main contribution is to provide a structured overview of what was mentioned. A full account of these obstacles can be found in the Gronings Perspectief report (Bovenhoff et al., 2021). We summarize them briefly here.

First, professionals report that they need to *collaborate* with *many different* institutions (see figure 2.3 in chapter 2 for a brief impression). The difficulty arises because all these institutions hold different perspectives on the best approach for the fortification operation, their mutual coordination often falls short, the institutions have various and divergent interests, and it is not always clear who is actually in control within the fortification operation. This results in a strongly *fragmented institutional context*.

In addition, the gas case is in itself a complex situation that requires collaboration between many different *fields of expertise*: technical, legal, financial, economic, spatial, health and welfare. Independent of the institutions, these fields also vary in their perceptions of the problems, solutions and the ideal form of 'governance of the system'.

Third, according to local and regional professionals, the national government in The Hague and its employees have an abstract image of the problems in the region. Therefore, they burden the region with (too) many new and/or incomprehensible policies and decisions that make it very difficult for local professionals to communicate about policies (as they keep changing), let alone to design concrete plans over time that are in the interest of residents. There clearly is a *distance* in perception between national government and the Groningen region.

A fourth obstacle consists of a responsibility shift from the *private to the public domain*[117]. Since both damage claims processing and the fortification operation have been brought under public responsibility, professionals experience more bureaucratic, procedural and judicial hassles. An example is the obligatory tender procedures that public institutions have to take into account.

Lastly, *political influences and politicians' expressed desires* to address problems, which they may raise in public appearances or in parliamentary debates concerning the gas extraction, are seen by professionals mainly as an external factor that hinders the fortification operation. These political debates cost time, require organizations to respond, or may even require further policy changes.

So, globally five causes can be distinguished why performance in the fortification operation falls short in the eyes of professionals, despite great individual efforts to achieve results. All in all it is clear that

[117] See chapter 2.

professionals are operating within a very complex and interdependent system that does not seem to function well, or maybe even: a system that is so complex no one is in control anymore.

7.3 Reflections on (dis)trust, benevolence and integrity

In this section, three additional perspectives on top of the above mentioned obstacles are presented, which are more specifically related to issues of trust. First, there seems to be a relation between poor performance and a lack of trust *from* institutions; second, the benevolence dimension of trustworthiness shows an *inner discrepancy*; third, professionals name their own *moral struggles* when communicating with residents. These additional perspectives on the dimensions of trustworthiness are elaborated in the next three subsections, in which the second research question (2a-b) will be answered: **With regard to collaboration with other professionals and (where applicable) relations with residents:**

> ***a. How do professionals reflect on these relations and what role do (aspects of) trust and trustworthiness play in their discourse?***
> ***b. What do professionals see as main obstacles for building relations of trust and being a trustworthy actor?***

7.3.1 The effect of institutionalized distrust on performance

When examining the discourse in the light of residents' trust, and the wish to restore trust, we found a number of references to a phenomenon that we would call *institutionalized distrust*. It seems to be related to the bureaucratic hassles mentioned in 7.2.2. Extract 1 presents an illustration of this phenomenon where professionals talk about 'ingrained distrust' within the government culture of the Netherlands.

Extract 1

From a duo-interview with two municipal officers: R1 and R2.
R2: The institutionalization of procedures or challenges has actually … been placed above, either unconsciously or consciously, I don't know, but that what you ultimately try to achieve, falls short and that is
[…]
R1: The fear of spending a dime too much, costs a tenner.
[…]
I: What you're saying now, the fear of spending a dime too much costs a tenner, that reflects distrust?
R1: That is a distrust from the government that is ingrained within the culture of the Netherlands.

According to this professional, the *institutionalization* of procedures or challenges seems to have become more important than what you should try to achieve. As a consequence, achievements fall short – implying that a lot more could be done if not hindered by this institutionalization of procedures. The fellow officer then reflects on why this is the case, in a clear statement that also captures the government's institutionalized distrust very well: 'The fear of spending a dime too

much, costs a tenner.' Indeed, after the interviewer's interpretation, the professional confirms that governments' distrusting approach is something that is 'ingrained' or in other words: an inextricable part of the Dutch government culture[118]. Whether this distrust is directed at the fear for free riders[119] or the fear of wasting public money, is not evident here. What does become clear is that in a situation like this, institutionalized distrust costs a lot of money.

A same kind of statement is made in extract 2, with regard to how systems are designed to ensure that not too much money is spent:

Extract 2

About future perspective[120], in relation to the National Programme Groningen.
What we do, is inventing systems for everything, systems that have to be manageable for everyone in order to ensure that [*name of municipality*] gets as much money from the implementation project as, for example, [*names of two other municipalities*]. Entire teams sit around the table inventing systems for that. Then at some point, the system has been devised and you think: now we're done. Oh no, it's still taking forever. We have been working on it for a year, a year and a half to … the móney has been made available, but what we construct around it, the Netherlands excél in building systems, so we cannot can't gét to that money, because we create this system. […] It's driving you crázy, because we are all about: how do we guarantee that, so that we can explain, and so on and so forth.
I: Yes, accountability
R: Yes accountability, assuring truth, is it justified, isn't it too much, is it all correct, so the checking and assuring, being public, and so on and so forth.

In this extract, the professional explains that the construction of systematic regulations and protocols for all kinds of things, actually prevents money from being spent on solving residents' problems, even though the money is available. These control systems are built in order to control and account for the money flow, and lead to a situation that drives professionals 'crázy'. These regulations and protocols make things unnecessarily complicated and get in the way of a proper and timely implementation. They are, however, considered to be inherent to a culture that is here vaguely (and repeatedly) referred to as 'we'. But who is this professional referring to? Although the referent remains unclear, the inclusive use of 'we' indicates that she takes joint responsibility. By referring to a joint responsibility, the professional avoids presenting herself as a victim or as someone who is just blaming others.

The emphasis on accountability and control is also illustrated in extract 3. This extract discusses residents' attempts to recover damages from NAM; these residents are portrayed as very intelligent

[118] In a different case, the Childcare Allowance Affair (Dutch: *Toeslagenaffaire*, report *Ongekend onrecht*, December 2020) paints a picture of a government culture of distrust with respect to specific population groups. See also chapter 3, section 3.6.
[119] Compare the call in the Social Charter, which was briefly mentioned in section 3.6.
[120] Future perspective is the focus of the National Programme Groningen (NPG), see chapter 2.

people who have been dealing with their damage claim for many years. Below, the process of justifying everything is represented by the metaphor 'stuck in quicksand':

Extract 3

> Yesterday morning I was told another example of … that's about a damage from the time that NAM was dealing with damage claims, those residents [are] highly intelligent, and know very well how things work, but who at a certain point get stuck in the quicksand of too much accounting. Well, even the very last nail that is driven into that building must be accounted for. Please stop! Please stóp! Controlling this … takes a lot more manpower and effort, than that last nail that has to go in.

By arguing that even 'highly intelligent' residents get 'stuck in the quicksand of too much accounting', the professional portrays the system as an incomprehensible and undesirable entity. Moreover, via this metaphor the system is depicted as turning *against* the people; after all, a characteristic of quicksand is that the harder you try to get out of it, the more you get sucked in. At the end of the excerpt, the professional claims in exasperation that this having to account for every cent, has to stop. However, it remains unclear to whom or what that repeated 'Please stop!' is directed. This is a very concrete example of how judicialization and bureaucratization (which are features of the system world) have penetrated deep into peoples' lifeworld – as was already pointed out in the concluding remarks of chapter 6.
Lastly, in extract 4 this culture of justifying expenses is approached from a political point of view:

Extract 4

> In the long run, in this case you run the risk– … we are quite frequently in front of the people's representatives, that you … are only justifying [your actions] instead of concentrating on improving the operation. […] with some things we just have to give ourselves some time and just… give ourselves the opportunity to do, yes uh… because rules and agreements do not always make things better, because the individual resident often benefits from customization.

The professional links the culture of justifying to the political side of government institutions. This political side applies to all three levels of local, regional and national authorities, whose governors are accountable to representative bodies. As expressed in extract 4, the political procedures take a lot of effort and 'you run the risk [of] only justifying, instead of concentrating on improving the operation'. So, the excessive focus on accountability carries the risk of impeding implementation.

One key question in many of these extracts is *who* or *what* is building this construct of regulations, protocols and excessive accounting. Oddly enough, this does not become clear in any of the interviews. Indeed, there is an interesting duality in the extracts: these are 'our' systems (extract 2), but professionals plead for 'it' to stop (extract 3), imply that 'the culture' should change (extract 1) and one shifts within the extract talking about changes that need to be made from an active 'we just have to give …' to a passive observation that 'rules […] do not always make things better' (extract 4). All these professionals reveal that it is this construct that gets in the way of the actual performance. That it is unclear in the interviews *who* is responsible for this construct, is somewhat surprising: several of the interviewed professionals occupy positions of considerable influence and one might

think that they had considerable influence in shaping it. In other words: professionals cannot, in these interviews, entirely shirk responsibility for the system they are reflecting on because it is not entirely out of their own responsibility and span of control. The last extract provides an interesting clue: the politics of this situation signify that the need to justify one's actions to one another is a root cause why this dysfunctional system was constructed. When a culture of accountability extends too far (extract 2, 3 and 4), it can apparently result in a culture of distrust (extract 1). And here we return to the ingrained *distrust* within these government systems, or culture, that was so clearly named in the first excerpt.

Overall, our overriding impression is that this group of professionals is exasperated with 'the way we are doing things'. These people seem to be locked in a situation that each one individually is unhappy with, and they express a kind of powerlessness to change it. This theme of poor performance leading to reflections on powerlessness is one that we return to after having discussed the discourses surrounding the other two elements of trustworthiness.

7.3.2 Discrepancy within the benevolence dimension

Until now, with regard to trustworthiness, we focused on how professionals discuss a lack of *performance* in relation to the fortification operation. It has become clear that in the context of dealing with the consequences of gas extraction, many interrelated obstacles prevent professionals from contributing to a fast and smooth operation. Professionals realize all too well that residents are the victims of this. But there are also parts of the discourse where respondents discuss the *benevolence* dimension of trustworthiness. From the trust literature review in chapter 3, it becomes clear that benevolence is assumed to be high when the truster is convinced that the trusted party (trustee) acts in the truster's interest and demonstrates good intentions toward the truster. Interestingly, the discourse of many professionals suggests that benevolence is reflected on differently: as a discrepancy between intentions and interests, where intentions seem to refer to the individual human level, and interests to the impersonal institutional level.

In extracts 5 – 7 below, these two aspects of benevolence are expressed: personal motivation and willingness ('good intentions') on the one hand, and institutional aspects and interests on the other. In the first extract, personal willingness is contrasted with the inability to work effectively given the way the organization functions. In the second and third extract, (again) major financial interests are emphasized.

Extract 5

> In the personal contacts, in the administrative consultations[121], a lot of knots are cut and problems solved. So I already said: I'm all positive about that. But you also see that the working method, the way we talked about it at the beginning, still causes a

[121] See also the next footnote about BOG and VOG.

lot of problems. And that has nothing to do with the unwillingness of people, but with the organization's malfunctioning.

After the statement it 'has nothing to do with the unwillingness of people', the cause of the many problems is attributed to problematic working methods of the organization. In short, the organization lacks competence although their employees are obliging. This extract is a striking parallel to extract 9 in chapter 5, in which residents emphasize the same reason for poor performance of the NCG, saying that 'it's a fine group of people, and they do good things I believe, but because of the way it is organized, it cán't function properly.' So it is not the individual professionals, but the workings of organizations employing them that are considered as the root of the problems.

Whereas in extract 5, a lack of progress in the fortification operation is attributed to organization's malfunctioning (a matter of *lack of competence*), in extracts 6 and 7 the focus lies on organizational *interests*. The two professionals below consider financial interests to be a crucial element that hinders progress in the fortification operation.

Extract 6

R: Well, if you break it down, it's actually always a financial issue.
I: Yes. Yes. Yes. So- yes.
R: Yes!
I: Because the money has to come from…?
R: Well from the national government.
I: Yes
R: Look, and municipalities … or the region, must of course often add some [money] you know, and the same goes for issues of redevelopment or uh … … and that makes sense to me, … but in the end it is always a money issue.

Extract 7

R: [In administrative and fortification consultations[122]] we have fórmally talked to each other [*refers to Ministries*], but we still have a long way to go when it comes to the content. And that is a sluggishness… it makes me nearly explode.
I: Why is it that no progress can be made when it comes to the content?
R: Because it is about money and about lots of money. About lóts of money. About lots of money.

In both extracts 6 and 7, financial interests are identified as the ultimate reason why performance is slow. Where the professional in extract 6 mentions the national government as being in control of the money source, the professional in extract 7 does not emphasize the source of the finances, but

[122] These are references to the so-called BOG and VOG. BOG = *Bestuurlijk Overleg Groningen*, which is a decision-making process between representatives of local, regional and national government. VOG = *Versterkingsoverleg Groningen*, which is a consultation of local, regional and national representatives with regard to the fortification operation.

money itself. Financial interests are emphasized in many interviews, though not always as explicitly as in extract 7.

One conclusion that can be drawn from these illustrative quotations is that when it comes to *benevolence*, again the willingness of individuals is not at stake. Rather, institutional interests are presented as the decisive factor; where the needs and wishes of the Groningen region and residents require substantial financial investments, decisions concerning these investments are not within the span of control of individual professionals. In the interviews, most respondents consider national government as determining the financial resources; some of them also refer to agreements between the Ministry and the NAM.

Thus far, we conclude that through the lens of trustworthiness dimensions, professionals report that institutions' working methods lead to low levels of *performance* and undermine the potential output of professionals too – due to a long list of obstacles. When it comes to *benevolence*, the assessment of trustworthiness goes in two directions: individuals' efforts and willingness are high, but institutional procedures have an impeding effect, and maybe more importantly, institutions' financial-economic interests are considered to be paramount. One aspect of *benevolence* is that a truster assumes that a trustee does not primarily serve its own interests but pays serious attention to those of the truster. In the Groningen gas case, this principle is reflected in a publication title of NCG 'Safety in focus and resident first' (Dutch: *Veiligheid voorop en de bewoner centraal*[123]). However, a situation where institutions' financial-economic interests are perceived as seriously diverging from residents' interests makes it difficult for professionals (who represent these institutions or have to implement their decisions) to be trustworthy actors and build relations of trust.

In the next section we discuss the relation between the situation professionals find themselves in and their reflections on the integrity dimension.

7.3.3 Professionals' moral struggles

One last dimension of trustworthiness remains: the trustee's *integrity.* In the discourse about contacts with residents, professionals report various internal struggles in performing their jobs. Moral considerations are elements of the integrity dimension, but professionals in their role of trustees toward residents describe them purely as *inner struggles*. In this section, experiences and reflections on integrity issues are analyzed and discussed.

As specified in chapter 3, the integrity dimension of trustworthiness is about qualities such as promise keeping, telling the truth, and acting objectively and fair. This dimension can be briefly characterized as referring to behaviour that is socio-ethical in nature. Problems to act with integrity are expressed most profound in interviews with professionals working for *local* government[124]. All

[123] Nationaal Coördinator Groningen (November 13th 2018), *Veiligheid voorop en de bewoner centraal. Plan van aanpak Mijnraadadvies*.
https://www.nationaalcoordinatorgroningen.nl/documenten/beleidsnotas/2018/11/22/plan-van-aanpak-mijnraadadvies.

[124] local government officers, aldermen and mayors.

these respondents describe situations where they had to explain the consequences of policies to residents. The problems they face in their communication are attributed to two conditions. On the one hand, policies are not designed within their own organization (the local government); on the other hand, policies turn out to change fairly often, causing unequal treatments of residents. In extract 8, both problems are described as causing an integrity struggle.

Extract 8

> What we are really struggling with, are áll those different regimes that are operative. All those different approaches, which lead to … inexplicable consequences for residents. Well my board regularly struggles with this too. Because it is put on our plate [with the request]: "Municipality, please explain what it is like." Whereas we sometimes think: well, that's impossible to explain. We didn't invént this […] Someone else invented this.

The professional in the passage above refers to the impact of different regimes (variants which are due to policy changes) that lead to troublesome communication. The local government is not the one who designs these policies: 'Someone else invented this'. Municipal officers, however, often have to explain why these policies need to be implemented. So they are saddled with the awkward consequences: explaining the inexplicable to residents, a frustrating job that was also mentioned by case managers (see e.g. section 6.4). The struggle that the professional in extract 8 describes is a situation in which they are confronted with problems caused by the decisions of others. The inexplicability of these decisions is emphasized by the somewhat indignant choice of the word 'invent', which conveys a meaning of 'just doing something', as opposed to 'carefully developing a regime'.

The professional in extract 9 faces a split in her loyalty to other professionals and institutions, and to residents:

Extract 9

> Of course it's becoming more and more difficult, because you don't want to blame others or anything, but the communication is becoming very difficult, like: what's it about? […] you don't want to sling mud, but you do want to offer people clarity. […] And yes, that is extremely difficult, that time after time … you don't actually say anything.

That this professional does not want to blame other institutions and professionals, nor communicate empty messages to residents, leads to a difficult moral situation. With the words 'you don't want to sling mud', she conveys a wish not to blame others and presumably to be loyal or maintain good professional relations with other professionals and institutions. But this wish conflicts with her desire to give residents clarity. Here it becomes clear that residents may also be kept in the dark because this professional feels an overriding responsibility to not blame others: intercollegiate loyalty.
The discomfort is also expressed in extract 10:

Extract 10

> As local government we just try to deal with it as pragmatically as possible. But this situation also embarrasses you as a local government in relation to your own residents. Because we are made responsible for a local plan of action, which includes basic principles. But if the NCG is unable to deliver, either for financial or organizational reasons, we as local government are called to account. […] Well and that is a very awkward situation.

The local official in the above excerpt describes the discomfort in his relation with the residents in his municipality, because he is made responsible for something beyond his influence. He refers to NCG as being the responsible party, that somehow falls short in its duties. As a result, a 'very awkward situation' arises, because municipalities and its officials are the visible contact point for residents. Note that the official mentions the organisation he considers to be responsible by name (NCG), whereas the professionals in excerpts 8 and 9 remain unclear about the alleged responsible party.

Based on the above, we argue that professionals working for local authorities have to deal with moral conflicts. They reluctantly pass on policies and promises to residents, which they have little say over: they are accountable without being in charge. This creates a difficult situation, because they also do not want to blame others (decision makers) – though some of them do. Hence it is undetraydable that they struggle with their integrity.

Feelings of *powerlessness* can be inferred from these three extracts. However, the professionals do not offer solutions for the problems they encounter. Rather, in describing their struggles they only express frustration: 'very awkward situation', 'extremely difficult', 'inexplicable'. Their expressions all convey a certain powerlessness in the communication to residents, due to a *dependency* on somebody else's decisions. When looking again at extracts 5 – 7, we see a same situation of dependency: extract 5 describes the institution's dependency on another institution's poor organization. Extracts 6 and 7 are descriptions of a dependency on prerequisites to fulfil the fortification operation: financial resources that must be made available by another institution. These expressions of being dependent are closely connected to the notions of power and influence, which will be discussed further in the next section.

To sum up this section, a lack of power and being subject to the whims of others seems to act as a wake-up call to the conscience of these professionals who struggle with aspects of integrity, such as not being able to provide clear communication: they express embarrassment (extract 10) and feeling humiliated by policies handed down to them (extract 8). As a consequence, it seems the feeling arises that their trustworthiness is being undermined by the actions of others.

So, with regard to the dimension of *performance*, professionals find themselves in a situation of institutional complexity and interdependency which frustrates progress, a situation they feel powerless to change. Second, through the lens of *benevolence*, there is a degree of dichotomy between personal willingness and institutional interests. Although professionals are fully committed

to delivering good outcomes, there are institutional conflicts of interests that prevent the right actions being taken. Third, especially those working on the local and regional level experience that they are bound to policies determined over their head. Their task is to be the messenger and to confront the residents. These ingredients create an 'awkward situation' in which residents hold these professionals responsible for the delivery on all those promises. Professionals' internal struggles show the enforced lack of *integrity* that undermines their trustworthiness. Both the diverging – and even conflicting – interests and the enforced lack of *integrity* are main obstacles for being a trustworthy actor and (re)building trust relations.

Implicitly, *power* and *powerlessness* have emerged as central themes, though not straightforwardly. Power nor influence were interview topics. Nevertheless, these concepts appear to be relevant when analyzing the interviews on trustworthiness dimensions. For that reason, we reread and coded the interview transcripts again to be able to answer one additionally phrased research question: ***What role does power play with regard to trustworthiness dimensions in the discourse of professionals?*** This question is the focus of the next section.

7.4 The role of power and influence in trustworthiness

In the literature on trust, trustworthiness and confidence there is usually no explicit relation with power and influence, although it can implicitly be inferred from several definitions. Here we pick the definition of Mayer and colleagues (1995) again, which reads as follows: 'the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party'. The terms 'vulnerable to' and 'irrespective of […] control that other party' indicate the truster's *dependency* of the trustee. Being dependent implies that the other party has some degree of *power* over the one who trusts. However, power is not explicitly included in the trust definitions.

As we mentioned above, there is, to our knowledge, not much literature that explicitly studies the relation between trust, trustworthiness and power. In the field of business relations, Reinhard Bachmann studies trust and power, partly building on the work of Niklas Luhmann. His research focuses on which of the two is the 'prime coordination mechanism' in business relationships (cf Bachmann, 2006; Bachmann & Kroeger, 2017). In the field of health care, Harald Grimen (2008) points to the lack of discussions of power related to trust in physician-patient interactions. With regard to citizens' trust and confidence in institutions, politics, and government, however, we do not know of the existence of such studies.

Along the way of this study and especially after analyzing the interviews on trustworthiness dimensions, we noticed that respondents frequently express issues of power and powerlessness. This occurs in particular when professionals talk about their (in)ability to perform and their concerns about integrity. Before analyzing how power and influence are discussed in our interviews, we will outline some theoretical insights into these concepts.

7.4.1 Power and influence from a theoretical point of view

In general, people implicitly know what the words *power* and *influence* – and also *trust* – mean. Yet it is quite difficult to theoretically define these concepts in a satisfactory way. This is widely acknowledged in the literature on power and influence. However, we will provide a quick scan of this difficulty and then try to untangle them for the purpose of our analysis.

Power and influence are closely related, and both are conceptually fluid (a.o., Zimmerling, 2005; Sriram et al., 2018; Zaaiman, 2020). These common observations date back to scholars like Robert Dahl[125] and Herbert Simon[126]. The fluidity of the conceptual relationship between power and influence makes it virtually impossible to reach a final answer in the definition debate, as Zaaiman (2020) notes. Our goal in introducing these concepts is to try to provide a more explanatory context to the laborious issue of trust within a complex institutional context where there is a vertical relation between trusters and trustees.

First, we describe possible distinctions between power and influence, based on the literature and suitable for our research project. Second, we draw attention to the practical side of those two abstract concepts, namely situations in which power and influence can(not) be exerted in dealing with the consequences of gas extraction in Groningen.

The distinction between power over *and* power to

Having mentioned that power and influence are interchangeably used in many studies and are clearly closely related to each other (see Zimmerling, 2005: 5; cf Turner, 1991; Haslam, Reicher & Platow, 2020), we shall consider shortly in what ways the two are subtly different. But for our analysis, which concerns the actions of people who occupy positions that can be considered as 'middle management' and who execute decisions taken elsewhere, it is important to first consider the distinction between *power over* and *power to.* Power over refers to situations where one party has authority or control[127] over others, and power to refers to one's capacity to achieve one's own goals (Sriram et al., 2018).

Power over could be considered as *formal power* (which is hierarchically oriented). Mokken & Stokman suggest that such power is associated with the restriction or expansion of freedom. Their definition of power – 'the capacity of actors (persons, groups or institutions) to fix or change (completely or partly) a set of action alternatives for other actors' (1975: 37) – seems especially relevant here. Similarly, Keltner and colleagues (2003) define power as 'an individual's relative capacity to modify others' states by providing or withholding resources or administering punishments, whether they be material or social (see also Tyler, 2016: 210). All these different

[125] Dahl, R.A. (1957), 'The concept of power.' *Behavioral science* 2.3 (1957): 201-215. Dahl considers 'control' and 'authority' as concepts that can be used interchangeably with 'power' and 'influence'.
[126] Simon, H.A. (1953), *Notes on the Observation and Measurement of Power*. See Zimmerling (2005).
[127] Confusingly, Sriram and colleagues (2018) also use the word 'influence' (without further detail) to define such power over.

viewpoints suggest that *power over* is grounded in hierarchical position, is executed through exercise of authority and is defined by its effects on the actions of others (see Table 7.2).

By contrast, *power to* is more action oriented and is more about one's own freedom (Sriram et al., 2018). It is in attempts to distinguish power and influence that we see some echoes of what *power to* is and what makes it possible. For example, Mokken & Stokman (1975) suggest that, unlike when power is exerted over, to exercise *influence* means that actors maintain their own degrees of freedom. We believe their concept of 'degrees of freedom' is also relevant to the *power to* – even though *power to* is clearly not the same as influence. In sum, *power to* is grounded in a position of independence (which may sometimes stem from one's hierarchical position, but not always). *Power to* is executed by freedom of action and is defined by self-determination (see Table 7.2).

Table 7.2: Two senses of the concept 'power'

	Power over	**Power to**
Definition	the capacity of actors to determine others' actions or choices (after Mokken & Stokman, 1975: 37)	the capacity of actors to determine their own actions or choices (after Sriram et al., 2018)
Social position and consequence	hierarchical (being in charge) → authority over others	independent → freedom to act

Distinguishing between the exercise of power over and influence

The key difference between power over and influence lies in their *exertion*. Power can be exercised by the application of force, coercion and sanctions, by one's vested authority, or in a positive sense through the allocation of necessary resources. On the other hand, the exercise of influence takes place mainly by means of persuasion, information and advice (Mokken & Stokman, 1975). Exerting influence is therefore often a consequence of *followership* because those being influenced choose to follow and retain freedom to do otherwise (Mokken & Stokman, 1975; see also Haslam et al., 2020).

What is important for our analysis, is that the exercise of power and influence often cannot be observed clearly, because 'they are rarely manifested in the form of clearly recognizable power or influence behaviour' (Mokken & Stokman, 1975: 51). Mokken & Stokman also argue that really important power and influence are usually characterized by an atmosphere of discretion and secrecy, because the disguise of power is often an important means for its maintenance. For that reason 'solid positions of power are often presented in pluralist and fragmented forms, which constitute the appearances of that power' (1975: 51). Power can also be disguised by exercising it covertly, such as by 'not making decisions'[128] or by agenda-setting (Lukes, 2004, in Moon, 2019: 2). Thus, whilst 'power' is associated with a latent ability to use force, coercion and sanction, in practice it often operates in more subtle and indirect ways (Moon, 2019).

[128] 'Non-decision-making' was originally formulated by Bachrach & Baratz in 1962 ('Two faces of power') as a "face" of power meaning that underlying social and political norms can block or suppress actors from raising issues or taking action.

The tendency of power to be disguised may play a role in the observation of Snell about *influence*: Snell argues that when using this word, people describe the ability to affect others through 'imperceptible and non-coercive means' (2017: 38). He observes that when people talk about *influence* they often wish to emphasize an enigmatic or unobservable element. Of course this adds to the difficulty of distinguishing between *power over* and influence in everyday discourse. We highlight this because it is relevant to how our respondents discuss power: as a phenomenon that is generally not directly visible. In section 7.4.3 we will illustrate this aspect on the basis of some interview excerpts.

These elements of indirectness, disguise and fragmentation make power a very challenging research object. An insight from system justification theory (see a.o. Jost & Banaji, 1994), is that it suggests that those who are the most disadvantaged by the system are (at least sometimes) its most ardent supporters, which is also a way in which people adapt psychologically to suboptimal situations (Van der Toorn et al., 2015). This would imply that issues of power and powerlessness are discounted especially by those in powerless positions.

Against this theoretical background we analyzed the discourse of professionals that we had coded with tags referring to the trustworthiness dimensions. Additionally, we reread the complete transcripts to capture discourse excerpts where respondents refer to power and/or influence. In the next two sections we illustrate power and influence issues with regard to the lack of progress in the fortification operation. Starting point is *in what ways* respondents themselves implicitly or explicitly refer to power and influence issues.

7.4.2 Professionals' reflections on power and performance

Professionals' powerlessness versus presumed positions of power

A recurrent theme in the corpus consists of reflections on power in relation to the inability to perform. As we have demonstrated in the previous section, where we discussed the discourse surrounding trustworthiness, this lack of performance is often considered in terms of a certain powerlessness, without it becoming clear who or what is actually in power.

In many interviews, respondents refer to the position of power in two ways. With regard to the fortification operation, some professionals mention *another* institution as being in charge (or: as having formal power); others only declare that their own organization is *not* in charge, without clearly addressing power to any other institution. Extracts 11 – 13 illustrate this lack of formal power:

Extract 11

About the influence of politics on the fortification operation
Sometimes politics can be a bit schizophrenic, because it focuses on very diverging topics uh… Well and sometimes it can be helpful and other times you think, as an official: well, it doesn't help at all! But anyway, the parliament is your boss, and also

> the Minister's boss, and that's just … simply what you have to deal with, and so these are also the orders that you simply carry out.

In this interview, the parliament is portrayed as '(y)our boss' and as 'the Minister's boss'. In essence, that is how the parliamentary democratic system in the Netherlands is organized. Nonetheless, by using a heavy power-related word as 'boss', the reference to the power position of the parliament is intensified. This professional confirms the parliament's power position with the conclusion 'that is just … simply what you have to deal with', thereby rendering the Ministry as simply carrying out orders. By presenting this routine as a quite normal factuality ('just', 'simply'), the professional rules out the possibility of having sufficent decisive power himself.

The professional in extract 12 offers a similar explanation for the lack of progress in the fortification operation: it is just the way government works. Laws create delays at the implementation level, but that is presented as a logical state of affairs:

Extract 12

> It is a fact of life to me that certain things cannot go faster than they are going. And it is a fact of life to me that you have to deal with several layers where laws apply, so, we can want something, but it might not be in line with the government body above us … because it's just not legally possible. And those laws are there for a reason, because something could be suitable for you, but it might be a good thing that those laws exist.

The initial words of two utterances '(And) it is a fact of life to me that certain things […]' are conversational strategies to appeal to the factuality of 'certain things'. In this particular context, the professional refers to 'certain things' and 'several layers where laws apply' as being just facts. In effect, he describes phenomena that exist without the speaker having any influence on it. With reference to the work of Potter (1996) and the applied research of Stier & Blomberg (2015), we argue that these factual accounts are drawn upon to create a sense of 'out-there-ness' between speakers and the issue they describe. As an effect, attention is diverted away from speaker's agency or accountability. Formulations of out-there-ness can serve as justificatory arguments, and the question of personal (or institutional) responsibility is thus avoided. From another perspective, the statements in extract 12 can also be considered as forms of system justification, noting that this speaker is not among the typically powerless (cf Van der Toorn et al., 2015).

In the next extract, frustration is expressed due to a reported lack of power that affects both professionals' performance and responsibility:

Extract 13

> Just like the other municipalities, we are facing far too many delays in the process. […] Well yes, that has to change and that definitely has to chánge. That is not something we as [*name municipality*] can change at this moment. It's a matter of consulting with national government to come to proper agreements. […] Yes and what is further happening in [*name municipality*], well, what is not working is that the process is just too much delayed. […] But then again, I cannot arrange that. I'm not responsible for

> the inspections, I'm not responsible for the assessments, and that procedure is with the NCG.

Here we see a description of dependency relations between the speaker's institution and two other institutions. The first one is the national government: consultation is required to come to proper agreements. This is implicitly represented as a form of mutual dependency, where different professionals all may have some sort of power. The second institution on which dependency is reported, is NCG. This latter dependency relation is described as one-sided and the speaker expresses frustration as a consequence of lacking the power to organize because of this relation. He sees things going wrong and procedures taking too long. However, he reports that his municipality is not responsible for the procedure, so he can do little to ensure things go better. In other words, what is discussed here, is a lack of *power to* speed up performance. The professional repeatedly tells what he himself (and his organization) *cannot* do, and thereby emphasizes his (organizations') powerlessness. So here, a lack of *power to* act results in poor performance and a lack of *power over* ensures that poor organization is being maintained.

In extract 14 another professional working at the municipal level expresses dependency on NCG.

> **Extract 14**
>
> One of our major complaints is that we have no possibilities to influence, or preconditions, so the NCG should also be our implementing organization, but if they don't meet our requests, we have no possibilities to direct, to force, … uh… well! That makes it a very complicated construction, especially when it comes to: how do you explain this to your residents? Because very often, residents turn to us: "Yes but that's your job as a municipality, isn't it?! Please arrange it properly!" […] Because also from our Council, we can say: "Guys, we can show you. We have communicated about thís, we have written thése letters–" We have done it before, creating a file for a certain case. Well and the bottom line is, that what we asked for, is not happening. And then it stóps! So, we don't have any instruments of power to direct.

This professional conveys the experience of a lack of power with the words: 'we have no possibilities to influence' and 'we don't have any instruments of power to direct'. This professional is very explicit when referring to this lack of power. He states not having any means of power what makes you completely dependent on the performance of others, and at the same time creates an integrity struggle with regard to residents. So, it seems that, in order to act with integrity, one should at least have some power to influence or to (re)direct the course of events.

When comparing the discourse in extracts 11 and 12 with 13 and 14, we see a different way in discussing the power theme. In 13 and 14 both professionals present themselves as powerless agents, facing the frustrating consequences of difficult communication they have to conduct with residents. Respondents 11 and 12, in turn, express acceptance of the situation. Interestingly, the 'frustrated' professionals in 13 and 14 are individuals who have direct contact with residents, where the 'accepting' professionals in 11 and 12 occupy more senior positions behind the scenes. The

interview discourse suggests that questions of integrity are raised when professionals who have to face (groups of) residents and explain the actions taken.

In sum, across the four extracts, all professionals convey that, in essence, power is positioned somewhere else in the governance structure – not in their organization or department. This is either described as a source of frustration or as a regrettable matter of fact. Implicitly and sometimes explicitly this kind of discourse is provided to explain the failure to deliver desired outcomes by the professional's organization.

An important question is whether this is simply an attempt to find excuses and deflect blame to others? Nearly all respondents are upset, pained and/or frustrated by the poor performance. But at the same time, the interviews mostly do not contain finger-pointing to others who are entirely responsible and none of the respondents make a clear denial of personal responsibility. In some sense, everyone interviewed appears to accept that they are part-responsible. In fact, especially those working with residents convey that they want to take more responsibility, but lack the necessary means. So, respondents do not shirk their responsibility and do not make excuses, even though they feel powerless and are unable to identify concrete others who do have the power and means to change the situation.

Formal and informal power; sources of power

So far, we have made clear that our interviewed professionals perceive a lack of power to act, and that mainly those working with residents express frustration about their dependency on others. Interestingly, also professionals affiliated with organizations that formally should have power[129] and professionals holding very senior positions, express this lack of power to act. That is in line with the conceptual distinction between having formal power over others and having the informal power to act (= the ability to perform). This distinction becomes clear in many extracts. One extract that illustrates the consequences of this distinction is presented below:

Extract 15

R: And you know, and then the mandate ís granted, but that still doesn't mean that it works out in practice, right?
I: Doesn't it?
R: Look, when it is said: "There is a mandate for the fortification, within NCG", but you still have to ask for money for every single address, then you may have the mandate, but it's not enough to speed things up, is it?

The professional in extract 15 mentions that NCG has the mandate to run the fortification operation, so it is assigned *formal power*. However, formal power does not automatically mean that financial resources needed *to act* are also available. As a consequence for practice, professionals still lack the *informal power* to speed things up. The professional in excerpt 15 also gives a clue why this might be the case: In the statement 'you still have to ask for money with every single address', a dependency is revealed to *power holders*. The NCG-employee experiences powerlessness because her mandate

[129] i.e. responsibility over procedures, potential monetary resources.

does not provide control over financial resources: therefore, formally she has *power over* but in practice she has no *power to*. This is because the *financial power*, meaning 'power derived from the accessibility to financial resources […] and the use of that power in influencing decision-making'[130], is attributed to another actor in the governance structure. Thus, a discrepancy between formal power and actual power holders – who form the source of financial power – becomes visible.

The following extract is from an interview with a municipal officer. It starts with describing the difficult position of NCG[131] and ends with a firm statement that the ministries exert power over the NCG:

Extract 16

> So that makes it quite difficult for an organization like the NCG, to serve everyone [= *the seven municipalities in the earthquake region*], as they request. So they often don't, because they entirely follow their own course, consider the ministries to be their client, even though we as municipalities are their client tóó. Uh… that is nót what we see happening. So what the NCG does, as thé implementing organization, is dictated by the ministries.

The NCG is described as being controlled by two misaligned government bodies: the ministries and the local municipalities. To understand what this professional is saying, we first clarify how the situation is formally arranged: there is a mutual agreement that local authorities (i.e. seven municipalities in the gas extraction region) are formally in charge of the fortification trajectories, whilst the ministries are formally responsible for making joint policies and for providing funds to facilitate the fortification. From the perspective of the officer in extract 16, who is affiliated with local government, NCG does not succeed in 'serving' the municipalities. Instead, NCG 'entirely follow their own course' and 'consider the ministries to be their client'. Later on, the ministries are portrayed as having the power, expressed by the strong words 'what the NCG does, […] is dictated by the ministries'. 'Dictate' has a more powerful vibe than alternatives as 'determine' or 'define' and herewith the officer expresses the *institutional* power[132] that ministries have as a form of *compulsory, hierarchical* power.

What we see in the interview discourse in general, is that different forms of power are portrayed as intermingling and not aligned; what we also see is that in several interviews the view is proclaimed that the ministries' formal power overrules other forms of institutional power.

In addition to different *forms* of power, the interview discourse also gives rise to the consideration of different *sources* of power. With regard to progress in the fortification operation, we have already mentioned the huge financial interests and financial source of power (see previous extracts 6 and 7:

[130] Bourdieu (2008), 'Key concepts', in: Sriram et al., 2018.
[131] Formally, NCG is a part of the Ministry of Interior Affairs and presumably, since the junior minister of Mining appeared on stage in January 2022, again a part of the Ministry of Economic Affairs.
[132] Institutional power, as formulated by Barnett & Duvall, 2005 (in Sriram et al., 2018), is "actors' indirect control over the conditions of action of socially distant others".

'in the end it is always a money issue' and 'it is about money and about lots of money'). Another frequently mentioned source of power, is politics. An illustration is presented in extract 17:

Extract 17

> That is véry much the effect of a political case you know, so … what you see, a question is asked in parliament, well and there we go […] áll of us together have to come up with an answer, there [*laughs*] […] then I also notice, if they are not- if this official is not too much under political pressure you know, that's of course what you notice there as well, because their work is also being defined by the parliamentary questions so to speak.

Through the statement that officials' duties are 'defined by' parliamentary questions and that they operate under 'political pressure', extract 17 illustrates the role of *political* power. This is a source of power that arises from the democratic system, and is therefore inherent to governance processes (cf Bakema, 2019: 168). In describing officers' dependency, parliament is presented as a powerful entity. Although the parliament does not design or implement policies, via parliamentary questions and motions it can exert substantial power over the duties of directors and officials at the ministries.

To sum up the results in this section, we have seen that money and (to a lesser extent) politics are referred to as important *sources of power* in the gas case. In the interviews, these two sources are represented as being held at distant levels: the ministries, parliament, and, by some respondents, at the NAM. Furthermore, financial and political power are described as decisive for municipalities' and NCG's capacity to act: they constrain the *power to*. This offers a potential explanation for the expressions of powerlessness and dependency in the discourse of professionals working for local and regional government bodies.

Deviant cases

It is worth mentioning that a small minority of respondents does not attribute power exclusively to distal institutions. These professionals point out the importance of a joint responsibility of all the institutions jointly. To give a more nuanced picture of experiences of power and powerlessness, we discuss one extract in which a municipal officer, with years of experience in dealing with damage claims and fortification, argues that institutions and professionals 'are all to blame together':

Extract 18

> The professionals among each other are then very quickly inclined to say: okay, well it's more the municipality, or it's more the province, or it's more the NCG, or CVW, or NAM or maybe it is [Minister] Wiebes who should be blamed for something. No, actually we are all to blame together. That we keep talking past one another, about one another and with one another and we néver speak with one voice. And that is the biggest problem of all. If you now hear the discussion again, which volume of NPR 9998 we're going to use, that one municipality says this, the other that, the province interferes, the State Supervisor of Mines says something else again […] Pléase, let's stop pointing fingers at each other while saying: you didn't do it right there. […] When I started working at this municipality, some of my colleagues said: "Yes, but they are

> from NCG and we are from the municipality." I said: "No, we are here together, we have to fix it together."

The bottom line of his plea is that there is no sense in 'pointing fingers at each other'. The main problem that progress falls short, he argues, is a lack of speaking with one voice. As a result, *all* professionals or institutions together are to blame, ironically because there is no 'together-ness'. He bypasses a discussion of power issues; the problems at hand could be solved if professionals start to work together and speak with one voice. So, in this extract, albeit rather exceptional, the professional refrains from pointing to other institutions who play a role in this collective failure. Instead, he implicitly conveys that this kind of finger pointing is undermining the power to effect change, because the most important ingredient to effect change is to speak with one voice.

Although the opinion expressed in extract 18 is the only one that explicitly refers to the collective responsibility, one overarching conclusion can be drawn from *all* interviews: not one of the professionals constructs lack of progress in the fortification operation as a responsibility of their own institution. Lack of performance is mainly attributed to a logical consequence of how the system works or to powerful parties' reluctance to spend money.

A distinction between *power over* and *power to* is visible in the interviews. From the discourse we can conclude that *power to* is closely related to the performance dimension of trustworthiness. It is about having the ability to act. In the extracts in this section, all respondents express a lack of power to perform, to communicate clearly with residents, or to achieve progress in the fortification operation. When it comes to *power over*, most respondents point at other institutions or 'system aspects' such as legislation. Further, political power and financial power are referred to as main sources of power, though not within reach of the interviewed professionals. In short, we see a confusing entanglement of power aspects and power sources that maintain a collective failure. That very few respondents call for a shift in collaborating better and taking joint responsibility is interesting, but also raises new questions: how to take joint responsibility and share power, where *power over* is considered to be fragmented and barely visible?

The related concept of *influence* may shed some light on the vague but so relevant theme of power. In the next section, we analyze what professionals say about the exertion of influence. We demonstrate that from the perspective of locally and regionally active professionals, they have to take their advantage from influence positions, since they lack power.

7.4.3 Performance and exercising influence

Professionals working in the region implicitly and sometimes explicitly refer to *influence* they have. In the literature but also in everyday life, the concept of influence is characterized by a high degree of *unobservability*; as we noted in 7.4.1, Snell describes this as the ability to affect others through 'imperceptible and non-coercive means' (2017: 14). This unobservable aspect of influence is illustrated in extract 19 by a professional working at the regional level:

Extract 19

Professional tells about tasks of government bodies and about regular tasks of the province, such as granting permits or subsidies.
In the gas extraction case [...] there are other authorities, particularly the nátional government that are calling the shots, and what we must try to do in this case, is becoming the interpreter of the interests of the people in Groningen. [...] the only power we often represent is that our interlocutors, whether they'd be ministers, or the Shell, or uh... or the NAM, will go through an uncomfortable period when they would completely ignore the voice we express.

This professional starts with an explicit reference to *power*: in the gas case, especially the national government is 'calling the shots'. The region's job is to try to act as an interpreter of the interests of Groningen residents and so, the only power that the region has, is that ministries, Shell or NAM 'will go through an uncomfortable period' if they completely ignore 'the voice' of the people of Groningen. What the 'uncomfortable period' means exactly is not elaborated, but the description suggests that the discomfort stems from going against residents' interests. This implies that ministers, Shell and NAM do *not* look after residents' interests – apparently they have other interests. So implicitly, a conflict of interests is identified here. Also note that this professional uses the word *power*, where from the conceptual discussion in section 7.4.1, *influence* would be the more appropriate description for the effects of the activities that his institution develops.

The previous extract suggests that ministers, Shell and NAM are in a situation where their own interests diverge from or conflict with the interests of residents. With regard to the *benevolence* dimension, the aspect of *diverging interests* is also conveyed by a municipal officer in extract 20, who provides some more detail about what the influence position of the region includes:

Extract 20

About agreements made with residents from a certain batch about performing their fortification advice. These agreements were revoked by the Ministry, which frustrates the professional.
[This was] to illustrate how you have to be constantly on guard, and for me that feels like fighting for our residents. For their interests. And that ... if I notice something like that, I immediately start a lobby, so I inform my colleagues in other municipalities who are involved, I inform administrators, and, well, in that way the same issue is constantly ... also brought to the attention of the administration. And then you see that they [= *the ministry*] back down, so to speak, but you have to fight for it again.

Starting a lobby, informing colleagues and informing administrators: the professional expresses that it is a large and continuous effort for local professionals to safeguard residents' interests. Implicitly, this extract also conveys that, when it comes to honouring commitments, residents' interests do not seem to be valued by ministries. This extract also illustrates how influence is exercised: as a result of ongoing communication efforts, the Ministry eventually decided to withdraw a proposed policy change. The communicative activities expressed in extract 20 are emphasized as activities which take

a lot of energy: 'fighting for our residents' and 'you have to fight for it again'. Here, 'fighting' also implies a struggle between diverging interests.

The two regionally working professionals in excerpts 19 and 20 implicitly make a clear distinction between exerting *influence* (which requires continuous effort) and *power over* (which they situate at the national government level). It also becomes clear that exerting influence is not a simple and clear-cut process, but a pooling of resources and efforts which you hope have effect with.

Although power and influence are not explicitly embedded in the trust literature, and although we did not realize the relevance of these concepts with regard to the fortification operation, references to power and influence can be found throughout the discourse, especially in this chapter where more executive level professionals reflect on the performance of their institutions. It appears that the lack of performance raises questions about integrity and benevolence (in institutional terms: the degree to which institutional interests can be reconciled with those of residents). And in search of answers to those questions, concerns about one's own *power to* are expressed, respondents struggle to answer who has *power over* the solutions and some talk about seeking to *influence* those who hold it.

7.5 Concluding remarks

If we start from the assumption that – in order to build trust relations and help restore residents' trust – trustworthiness is crucial, the struggle that professionals report is revealing.

First, when we return to trust and the selected *trust*-definitions in chapter 3, 'accepting vulnerability' (to another party) is included in all three of them. Accepting vulnerability refers to *actions* or *intentions* of another person or party. When people have positive expectations of another's intentions or behaviour, they can build or continue trust. Nevertheless, positive expectations do not dissolve the vulnerability of the truster, who remains susceptible to the trustee's decisions and behaviour. We argue that this is where the power element comes into play: the trustee has the *power to* decide when it comes to actions and behaviour; the trustee's behaviour is based on (un)willingness, personal or institutional interests, is accompanied by moral values, and results in an observable (lack of) performance. Thus the trustee has the power to decide on its degree of trustworthiness.

A second point deals with a relevant question: who is the trusted party in the institutional system of dealing with the fortification operation? Let us assume that, with regard to residents, the interviewed professionals are all to some extent (part of) the trusted party: a collective of professionals and institutions who have to get the job done together. What the discourse shows is that when professionals express a lack of power, they mean that they have (very) limited *power to* decide and act. From the discourse analyzed in chapter 5, a picture emerges of powerless case managers at the frontline, and the discourse of these case managers themselves in chapter 6, shows that they also experience a lack of power to act and to do the right thing for residents. The professionals in this chapter, who work more behind the scenes in policy, management and

administrative positions, surprisingly enough paint a similar picture of their experiences. Despite their willingness to perform, many of them express a lack of power to actually achieve what is needed. And as a consequence, they too struggle with their inability to communicate honestly and clearly with residents. At a regional level, this failure applies to communication with residents who suffer from the procedures imposed from 'on high' but must be implemented by the professionals interviewed in this chapter.

In order to be seen as a trustworthy party, and thus be able to contribute to relations of trust, a trustee should have a certain degree of *power to* act. Many of these professionals appear to be locked in an integrity struggle because they lack the power to make decisions and influence policies, but do have to communicate these decisions and policies with residents. Moreover, these decisions, regulations and policies stem from a system that is designed to prevent abuse, and as such encapsulates a distrusting attitude towards residents (and citizens in general). This system, which is institutionally fragmented but interdependent, is referred to as a source of frustration and sometimes as just the way it is. Perhaps it is ultimately this *system power* that is the most profound form of power in the fortification operation, and the complexity of the system that makes it virtually unchangeable? What is evident is that all professionals express that it is something *they* are powerless to change. And so it continues to exist despite ongoing failure, this miraculously complex system of institutions and regulations. And this continuation apparently benefits neither residents nor professionals.

Part IV – Conclusions and discussion

8. Conclusions

We departed from our interest in trust in the context of the societal impact of gas extraction in Groningen. Because initially, we have understood trust as a characteristic of interpersonal relations, we sought to investigate stakeholders' experiences and views on relations. We expected (a lack of) trust to play an important role. Along the way we found striking similarities in how different stakeholders described issues of trustworthiness and trust. As we progressed in the analysis, we also found emergent themes of power and powerlessness, power positions and power resources. The issue of power turned out to play a key role when it comes to trust and trustworthiness.

In our attempt to tie everything together, this final chapter is structured as follows. First, the overall conclusions from the discourse of the three groups of stakeholders we interviewed are outlined: residents (8.1), case managers (8.2) and professionals in policy, management and administrative positions (8.3). In sections 8.4 and 8.5, these findings are set in the perspective of the literature on trust and confidence, and the chapter closes with implications for the desire to restore confidence in the gas case.

Before outlining the conclusions in sections 8.1 – 8.3, we will first recall the purpose and main question of our research. We started with the aim to unravel aspects of trust in a complex context, where many people and institutions are involved, and many procedures and interests play a role. Linked with this aim is our ambition to identify crucial aspects or elements which may be open to improvement.

From there, we formulated the overarching research question:

How does the complex institutional context regarding the consequences of gas extraction in Groningen affect processes and relations of trust, and what possible guidelines could contribute to restoring trust?

8.1 Trust and trustworthiness from the perspective of *residents*

In the spring of 2018, 22 residents living in the Groningen earthquake region were interviewed. All of them have experiences with damage procedures and/or the fortification operation. The following research questions served as a guide for the analysis of the interviews:

1. What experiences with professionals of proximate institutions do residents report?
2. How do residents portray the procedures of proximate institutions involved in dealing with the negative consequences of gas extraction?
3. How are residents' experiences related to the way they depict and/or judge the damage settlement and fortification procedures by distal institutions?

8.1.1 Contacts with case managers

When talking about contacts with case managers as representatives of proximate institutions, residents described their experiences in a way that shows they do not blame these professionals for their dissatisfaction with damage settlement and fortification procedures. In the discourse, the case managers are described as friendly and willing individuals, and also, to some extent, as victims of the organizations they belong to. In the eyes of residents, case managers are – like themselves – pawns in an overpowering system that seems to thwart any attempts to resolve residents' problems. So although there will certainly be interpersonal trust from human to human here, the institutions' lack of competence influences residents' overall experiences with case managers.

8.1.2 Experiences with proximate institutions and their procedures

One thing became very clear in our interviews: in general, good relations with case managers are established in which interpersonal trust is expressed to some extent. However, this trust does not transcend the interpersonal contact with the case managers and thus is not translated to trust in the institutions they represent. The reason is that case managers are not seen as accountable for the procedures of the organizations they work for. They are, to a certain extent, themselves portrayed as powerless employees of their institutions.

The descriptions and evaluations of these proximate institutions suggest that residents consider the way the fortification operation is organized as unsuitable to address the problems they experience[133]. According to the residents interviewed, institutions' procedures fall short and their communication is insufficient. In addition, they operate at huge costs with profits mainly flowing to large companies, and to make matters worse they cannot function well because they lack authority and power to effect positive change. This lack of authority and power is attributed to what is seen as a situation in which proximate institutions themselves are hemmed in by overarching policies and procedures.

So, from a resident's perspective, trust between residents and case managers – a form of *interpersonal trust* – is in most situations not at stake. This concrete form of trust does not, contrary to what Luhmann (2000) thinks to be possible, transfer to a more *impersonal form* of trust in abstract institutions, which could be better described as *confidence*.

8.1.3 Views of distal institutions and system level

Our respondents make assumptions about the structure or system that prevents case managers and their institutions from making progress and delivering on their promises. From their perspective, this system of institutions, policies and regulations operates at a more abstract level. We use the word 'abstract' here to convey these institutions are working at a distance from residents, hence the term 'distal institutions'. In this context, residents explicitly refer to the big oil companies Shell and

[133] and, to a lesser degree, damage settlement procedures: At the time of interviewing residents, damage settlement had temporarily been suspended by the Ministry of Economic Affairs. A few months before, the TCMG (Temporary Commission for Mining damage Groningen) had been established. The interviewed residents did not have experience with the TCMG yet.

ExxonMobil (of which NAM is a joint venture), the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs[134] and in broader terms: the government and politics[135]. We aimed to better gauge the understandings of this institutional construct by examining how residents speak about these actors.

Low confidence[136], vigilance towards the media and conflicting interests

After analysis of residents' statements about distal institutions, three overall themes emerged. In contrast to the discourse concerning case managers and proximate institutions, here the concept confidence is explicitly referred to many times. Residents' statements show three salient points: they have low confidence in distal institutions; they are vigilant when good news is reported via the national media; and they assume that the damage claims processing and the fortification operation are driven by financial interests.

First, low confidence in distal institutions is reported mostly as the *absence*, *impossibility* or complete *disappearance* of confidence in government and/or NAM. Second, when via the media good news is reported regarding solutions for gas problems, residents express *scepticism* or *distrust*. For example, they observe that such good news generally precedes negative consequences for residents.

The third theme concerns unprompted statements in about half of the interviews: residents presume that the way damage settlement and fortification procedures are organized, is driven by financial interests of the oil companies and/or the government[137]. From the residents' point of view, this presumed underlying financial motive has two undesirable consequences. First, the gas case in Groningen has grown into a business model for construction companies and technical/engineering experts to make a profit. Second, the parties in control of the budgets (oil companies and/or government) act in their own interest which means they strive to minimize costs for damage settlement and fortification while available budgets do not flow to the Groningen residents and region. Instead money leaks away to boost construction and engineering companies, consultancy firms, damage experts, research institutes and so on. This reasoning provides insights into why it may be so hard for *proximate* institutions to act in a competent and benevolent way. How this feeds into perceptions of proximate institutions becomes clear when residents discuss the obstacles they face in interacting with employees of these institutions, such as with case managers. Lack of confidence is directed at the *distal level* of institutions, the level where decisions are made; as a consequence, proximate institutions and their case managers cannot perform well.

[134] State of affairs until 2019. In September 2019, a responsibility shift with regard to the fortification process took place from Ministry of Economic Affairs to the Ministry of Interior Affairs. In December 2019, CVW ceased to exist and NCG took over its activities. In July 2020, TCMG merged into IMG. See also chapter 2 for background information.

[135] The two concepts government and politics are ultimately abstract and comprehensive, and can refer to many things (see Bovens & Wille, 2008).

[136] From here, we switch to the term confidence, following the distinction presented in chapter 3. For the sake of completeness, we again note that in Dutch there is only one term, *vertrouwen*, which makes it sometimes difficult to choose between trust and confidence. We reserve the term trust for interpersonal relationships and relationships with concrete organizations, and confidence for more abstract institutions.

[137] Cf. Bakema et al. (2018) and Bakema (2019). Bakema and colleagues also found that 'local people believe that economic interests are prioritized at the expense of their safety.' (2018: 3621).

Across the interviews we see a strong consensus among the interviewed residents: despite all the good intentions of case managers, their friendly and personal approach does not help restore residents' trust in proximate institutions. With regard to the dimensions of trustworthiness, throughout the discourse a lack of performance is being expressed, which is in the end attributed to a lack of benevolence to solve residents' problems. This lack of benevolence stems from a perceived divergence of *interests*: at the abstract, distal or system level, institutions such as government and NAM are seen to operate primarily in their own (financial) interests, which do not align with residents' needs regarding their homes.

In sum, although individual experiences with damage settlement and the fortification operation may vary, we find there is a notable discrepancy between trust at the interpersonal level directed towards case managers and other representatives of institutions, and confidence in the system overall. Despite all good intentions of case managers, their friendly, human approach cannot effect a positive change and thereby, does not contribute to restoring residents' confidence in institutions. Distal institutions, which are considered to set the rules for dealing with the consequences of gas extraction, are not trusted; they are portrayed as a non-transparent collusion of the national government and oil companies that protect their own economic interests. Residents talk about the position and motives of these institutions in extremes and as scripted behaviour: their integrity and benevolence are clearly in doubt.

And so, we conclude that case managers and other contacts of residents appear to be effective in establishing a relationship of trust, at least with most of the residents we have spoken to. But these interpersonal successes are not able to restore Groningen residents' trust in the institutions these case managers represent. And it appears to be an even bigger challenge to restore confidence in the institutions who are seen to be ultimately in charge: the distal institutions that pull the strings and that have organized things in such a way that available budgets do not end up where they should: actual fortification of homes and fundamental damage repair.

From this clear picture of how residents view institutions and relations with case managers, we examined the other side of the relation: frontline professionals working for proximate institutions and regularly talking with residents. In the interviews, residents frequently refer to these case managers as their main contacts at CVW and NCG. When it comes to interpersonal trust, starting from the literature, residents can be considered as *trusters*, and case managers (and their institutions) as *trustees*. So, when looking at trust relations between residents and case managers, we continued with an examination of the discourse of case managers working at the institutions' frontline.

8.2 Trust and trustworthiness from the perspective of *case managers*

We interviewed six case managers working for CVW, and seven NCG-case managers. In short, their position at the frontline means they have frequent contacts with residents, both individually, at residents' houses, and with groups of residents (for instance, during meetings in villages). The following research questions guided our analysis of the discourse:

1. What concrete experiences do case managers describe regarding contacts with residents?
2. Case managers about the performance of their duties:
   a. How do case managers describe the degree of autonomy in their job?
   b. How do case managers talk about their organization? What obstacles and stimulating factors do they experience in performing their jobs?
   c. What experiences do case managers report with colleagues (in their own organization) and professionals of the organization they collaborate with (whether NCG or CVW)?
3. How do case managers portray distal organizations such as government, politics, and oil companies?
4. What changes do case managers consider as essential changes to improve both their own performance and the fortification operation?

8.2.1 Contacts with residents

Case managers provide a coherent and clear picture concerning their contacts and relations with residents: these are mainly positive. Case managers describe their experiences as much better than expected. They express surprise about the friendliness of residents, partly because case managers believe their organizations have a negative reputation, and partly because they believe that the performance of their organization is suboptimal: the procedures in their organizations are far from ideal and sometimes even frustrating for residents (and case managers alike).

Case managers also describe negative experiences in their contact with residents: these concern about 20% of their interactions. Two general explanations are given for such negative interactions. First, case managers point to negative experiences that residents have had with their institution; for example, extremely lengthy and/or dissatisfying damage procedures, or, in the context of fortification, official house inspections that were not followed up by any communication regarding outcome or further actions that would be taken. Second, case managers mention individual causes like personality traits which would complicate relations to the case manager, personal circumstances and/or (mental) health problems.

In both the good relations with residents and in a portion of the negative relations, case managers show awareness that their organizations are not producing sufficient results. The reason underlying the failing performance and therefore the fading away of trust/confidence, cannot be attributed to the interactions of the case managers with residents. From case managers' perspective, this failure has to be found higher up in their organization or at the abstract level of distal institutions: the ministry/national government and NAM (Shell, ExxonMobil).

8.2.2 Case managers' position in their organization

Even though case managers experience autonomy in the way they communicate with residents, the reason they visit residents is determined by their organization; targeting for example at obtaining residents' signature to set inspection and fortification in motion. From the perspective of case managers these assignments do not always meet residents' needs which makes it somewhat

problematic for them. They report that residents' experiences are not in line with their institutions' mission to put 'residents first'.

As well as the contacts with residents, the collaboration with colleagues at the frontline[138] is described as positive. We generally hear that interpersonal relations are usually fine – if not, clear explanations are given. Case managers' main frustrations result from the way the fortification operation is organized and controlled from 'on high', and from the complicated context in which they have to operate; both factors are determined outside the span of control of case managers, being part and parcel of elements higher up in the construct of institutions where the actual power to decide is situated.

Case managers operate in the frontline of their institutions. In order to place their situation in perspective we use the work of scholars focusing on the positioning of 'street-level bureaucrats'. According to Lipsky, street-level bureaucrats often have considerable discretionary power meaning that the rules and regulations that exist on paper can be implemented in practice in very different and unintended ways (Lipsky, 2010). Discretionary power is essential to 'reinterpret or make policy in such a way that [it facilitates] […] them to address complexity, manage stress and gain more control'[139]. However, in the discourse of several case managers we found that they express frustration for *not* having this autonomy and power. It appears that case managers' role is merely to pilot residents through a hazardous jungle of procedures. Case managers cannot influence or change this jungle: they lack discretionary power over processes and policies. Several case managers explicitly state they need a broader mandate in order to be able to do a good job, and in such a way to potentially attribute to the restoration of confidence.

8.2.3 Views of distal institutions and system level

When comparing case managers' discourse to that of the residents, a rather similar picture regarding experiences with and views of the distal layer of institutions emerges: national government, ministry and NAM (Shell, ExxonMobil). Case managers tell us that they too do not have a clear insight into the workings of these distal institutions when it comes to the fortification operation. When seeking explanations for things going wrong at this abstract level, they assume, like residents, hidden agendas, money (making) to be the driving force, and political forces at work. They say they lack the power to make a difference themselves. Only a small minority of case managers point to their organization's responsibility to better organize and better communicate with residents.

According to case managers, the distance between 'the system' and the organizations' frontline professionals is significant. Case managers experience that 'the top' (of which they are not a part) does not always have a clear picture of residents' situation in the region – 'the bottom'. The described distance and vertical arrangements symbolizes a more general gap between policy (theory) and performance (practice), while power lies with the former. Case managers express the wish that

[138] They refer to colleagues both at CVW and NCG, as they frequently worked together until the end of 2019, when CVW ceased to exist.

[139] Erasmus, E. (2014). The use of street-level bureaucracy theory in health policy analysis in low-and middle-income countries: a meta-ethnographic synthesis. *Health policy and planning*, *29* (suppl_3), iii70-iii78. In: Sriram et al., 2018 (see chapter 7).

their experiences in the field and their insights into processes would be taken into account more in the development of policy and procedures. Having more discretionary power would mean that case managers have more leeway to make decisions which they consider as necessary to advance the fortification. Case managers conclude that if decision and policy makers in both distal and proximate institutions were to rely more on the insights, experience and competence of case managers, an important step towards helping residents could be taken.

What can we conclude from all this regarding trust and confidence? We infer from the above that because the case managers tell us they are effectively powerless mediators of a flawed and hazardous system, residents' trust in them can only relate to the *benevolence* dimension of trustworthiness. The case managers are well-meaning and do their best to assist residents. However, at the c*ompetence* level they indicate that they often fail: they lack the power to make a difference. The third dimension of trustworthiness, *integrity*, is perhaps the most complex one: several case managers indicate experiencing moral conflicts in their role when communicating delays, violating expectations and sometimes getting residents to sign on the dotted line to set inspection and fortification trajectories in motion. They indicate that their organizations do not succeed in putting 'residents first.'

Case managers' views of the distal organizations, which hold the power, echo many of the residents' concerns and views. Again, we hear them being described as an intransparent coalition of government and oil companies who have their own economic interests. Case managers talk about these institutions in the same way as residents do, albeit in less radical and negative terms.

So far we have drawn conclusions about trust from two perspectives: the discourse of residents and case managers. From both perspectives there is consensus that at the interpersonal level, relations of trust are built, however, these completely differ from confidence relations regarding the bigger institutions. It is this distal institutional level where things go wrong. And since this is the level where power is and where far-reaching decisions are made, this places case managers in a difficult position, where their institutional assignment is incongruent with residents' interests.

The dividing line between proximate and distal institutions, or more precisely, between *professionals* working for these institutions, is not entirely clear-cut. Wherefore, we also interviewed professionals who work in other positions than case managers, but are also directly associated with the fortification operation. We turn to their views and experiences in the next section.

8.3 Trust and trustworthiness from the perspective of *professionals working behind the scenes*

We analyzed interviews with 24 professionals working more behind the scenes in (senior) management, administrative and advisory positions[140]. They work for local, regional and national

[140] As explained in chapter 7, we also interviewed people involved in damage settlement but decided not to include them in the analysis: damage settlement had been moved to a separate entity in 2019 and their viewpoints are therefore not to be interchanged with those given in previous chapters nor to those of the other interviewees.

government, and for the National Coordinator Groningen. All these professionals are closely involved in the fortification operation. The following research questions guided our analysis of their discourse:

1. How do these professionals describe their (organizations') ability to perform?
2. With regard to relations with other professionals and (where applicable) with residents:
   a. How do professionals reflect on these relations and what role do (aspects of) trust and trustworthiness play in their discourse?
   b. What do professionals see as main obstacles for building relations of trust and being a trustworthy actor?
3. What role does power play with regard to trustworthiness dimensions in the discourse of professionals?

The professionals interviewed for this part of the research do not work specifically in frontline positions, although some of them also have (frequent) contacts with residents. To distinguish them from case managers, we here use the general term 'professionals'. From all interviews it became clear that with regard to the fortification operation, professionals are operating within a very complex and interdependent system of institutions; a system that according to the interviews does not seem to function well, or maybe even: a system that is so complex no one is in control anymore. Many professionals in this group are unhappy about the way things are going. They seem to be locked into a situation which they as a collective feel powerless to change. In the words of two respondents: 'It is too big and too cumbersome' and 'It is going to be a gigantic … júggernaut'. Here too, many professionals stress the financial interests in the gas case, that have been mentioned and emphasized throughout our respondents' discourse so often.

8.3.1 Failing to be a trustworthy party

From the interviews with both residents and case managers, it has become clear that they experience a lack of confidence in the distal institutions and/or in the construct of institutions and procedures. It is primarily the diverging interests that are considered to be blocking a smooth fortification operation.

Our interviews with professionals behind the scenes, however, provide further insights regarding the trustworthiness dimensions. First, with regard to the dimension of *performance*, professionals find themselves in a situation of institutional complexity and interdependency that frustrates progress: a situation they feel powerless to change. As a result, they lack the power to perform well. Second, through the lens of the *benevolence* dimension, there is a degree of dichotomy between personal *willingness* and organizational *interests*. With regard to interests in general, trusters perceive benevolence when they assume that the trustee does not primarily serve its own (institutional) interests. In the gas case however, the two aspects of the benevolence dimension usually do not go hand in hand: *individuals' willingness*, drive and motivation interfere with diverging and even conflicting *institutional interests*. This discrepancy makes it extremely difficult for institutions and professionals to perform well with regard to residents' interests. For many of these professionals – especially those working in the region – a lack of power to perform and being subject to the whims of distal institutions seems to confront them with their conscience: their *integrity* is forcedly being compromised. Professionals working in the region experience that they are torn between

overarching policies developed at the distal level they cannot influence, and the residents that hold the local institutions responsible for the practical consequences of these policies.

In sum, from the interviews we can identify the dimensions of trustworthiness – benevolence, competence, integrity – as elements that professionals actually reflect on and struggle with themselves. These elements are mostly visible in the interviews with professionals positioned in the region. Their own internal struggles become very evident, as they seem all too aware that their own integrity as a professional is at risk. At the same time they express not only an own loss of trustworthiness with regard to others (residents, professionals working with residents), but it is also not in their power to increase the integrity dimension as they have to communicate and execute decisions made by other institutions or departments.

8.3.2 Professionals' trustworthiness in relation to power

A concept that was not included in our research questions and interview topics, but which emerged from the analysis of the discourse, is *power*. The concept is referred to in two senses: the formal, hierarchical meaning *power over* someone or something, and the informal, more practical sense of the *power to* act and achieve one's goals. We elaborate on these different interpretations of the concept in the sections below.

Power in a hierarchical or more practical sense

Professionals of whom one would expect that they are in positions of considerable power and responsibility, express their lack of power to change their own or residents' situations for the better. In this more practical meaning, *power* can be paralleled to the trustworthiness dimension of *performance*. The professionals further convey that, in essence, hierarchical or more formal power is positioned somewhere else in the governance structure – not in their own organization or department. This is often referred to as a source of frustration. Most of these professionals assume or are convinced that this hierarchical power (power over the fortification procedures and policies) is situated at the national government level and as such is hindering them in doing their jobs well.

What is also noticeable, is that the professionals working regionally implicitly make a clear distinction between *influence* and *power*. Although they lack power, they do have some influence. Professionals describe the exercise of influence not as a simple and clear-cut process, but as an attempt, through the pooling of resources and efforts, to have some effect on the ministries in their decision-making process.

In the *power*-related parts of the discourse, professionals also implicitly but sometimes even explicitly, reflect on their own organization's failure to deliver desired outcomes. One might see this as an attempt to deflect blame and avert responsibility. Yet interestingly, these professionals do not deny personal responsibility or allow us to draw any firm conclusions about who is ultimately in charge of this whole situation. Whilst the sense of powerlessness is expressed implicitly and explicitly in many of the interviews, the question 'Who *does* have power?' cannot be answered conclusively.

Besides the distinction between *power over* and *power to*, we should also be aware that power is an abstract concept in another sense: as a *source* that enables a party to exercise power. We discuss two sources of power in the next section.

Political and financial power as primary sources

We can identify two *sources* of power in respondents' discourse: political and financial power. Both sources are portrayed as embedded in institutions at the distal level: the ministries, the parliament, and, by some respondents, NAM. Political and financial power of these institutions are considered to be decisive for the potential of local governments and NCG-professionals[141] to perform their given tasks. Note that one institution that did not take part in our research project (NAM)[142] is mentioned by some respondents as being the main source of *financial* power. In section 8.4.2 we will discuss another context of power, one that seems to have grown throughout the years, and is referred to by professionals in an implicit way as 'system power'.

In sum, we see that the experiences of professionals in policy, management and administrative positions have some parallels to those of residents and case managers: despite their own eagerness to make progress, they feel they lack the power to get ahead. They work inside a complex system of institutions, regulations and policies which has emerged and designed to tackle a complex and multifaceted problem. Throughout the years, this has become a miraculously complex system that sustains itself despite ongoing malfunctions. One reason this system has become so complex is that it seeks to prevent abuse[143]: it is itself founded on an implicit distrust. In chapter 7 of this dissertation, we discovered that this system is not just a source of frustration for residents and case managers, but also for the professionals in more senior positions. This is particularly the case with professionals who work at the local level: at municipalities and at NCG, and who have regular contact with residents. The majority of this group of interviewees communicate that *they* are powerless to actually make progress, despite doing their best. This perceived powerlessness leads to internal struggles: in their communication with residents, they are forced to demonstrate a lack of integrity (returning from promises, communicating new policy changes). This lack of integrity is imposed on them, as they perceive it, from above, by an opaque system of regulations and institutions. We conclude from this that it is ultimately this *system power* that is the most profound form of power in the fortification operation. We also conclude it is virtually unchangeable, according to those who work in it.

8.4 Overarching notes in relation to trust, trustworthiness and power

In the light of the three studies, our conclusion is that all respondents agree that progress in the fortification operation falls short, in other words, perceived *performance* is low. Throughout the discourse we see that also *benevolence* and *integrity* are at stake – although in a more indirect way

[141] With regard to NCG: mainly professionals working at fortification desks in the region (as opposed to professionals at the main office)
[142] See chapter 4 (section 4.5).
[143] Abuse could come from private or corporate real estate owners who file false earthquake damage claims or from private or corporate real estate owners and/or municipalities who seek to benefit from fortification of buildings.

than for the performance dimension. Because we have treated these three dimensions as parts of a trustee's trustworthiness, the question remains *whose* performance, benevolence and integrity are at stake? Cast in a different question: who is this trustee? We will return to this question in section 8.5.5 in relation to power. First, following section 8.3.1, we give a more general reflection on the trustworthiness dimensions and their interrelatedness as these were discussed or referred to in the interview discourse.

8.4.1 The interrelatedness of the trustworthiness dimensions

In general, we argue that in situations where performance is good (i.e. when perceived competence is high), it may not come to trusters to question a trustee's interests, motives or moral values. Or to turn it around, questions of trust may only be raised when performance is poor. It may also be the case that competent actions are a good answer to questions about benevolence and integrity.

In order to seek explanations for the lack of performance in the gas case, respondents question benevolence: the good will to solve problems is in doubt. But concerns about integrity are also raised, we see, when institutions repeatedly stress their benevolence, but continue to underperform. This goes together with a lack of integrity: optimistic words are continually spoken but not delivered upon, promises are repeatedly made but never kept, expectations are raised but not fulfilled. The next quotation illustrates this, from the perspective of a local professional:

> In [*name village*] we had to return to residents ten times ... with really vague excuses and stories like "sorry the piles are out of stock". So yeah, this may be [a] very concrete [reason for delays] but when it is the tenth excuse, then no matter how concrete and outside the scope of influence it is, as a resident you still feel made a fool of[144].

This is a familiar situation in the fortification operation: to excuse a lack of progress, explanations have to be provided. We relate this to a key characteristic of benevolence: it cannot be perceived directly, but only be *assumed*. Therefore, in order to maintain the appearance of benevolence, there needs to be a credible explanation for one's failure to deliver on promises. In this quotation, the professional says that a cycle of repeated promises followed by failures to live up to them, followed by excuses, more promises and more underperformance, creates a situation which is humiliating for all involved. If institutions repeatedly express benevolent words about solutions for residents, but do not follow them up in actions, their words are incongruent with their deeds. For residents, these warm words then have the effect of a breached promise, and this compromises the institutions' integrity.

We infer from this that within a complex institutional set-up such as this, the benevolence dimension appears to be most relevant to the interpersonal side of institutional relations, at least, where intentions and willingness are concerned. Questions of integrity are more relevant to the

[144] Original text: "In [name village] zijn wij al tien keer terug moeten gaan, of de NCG dan, […] , nou ja… [..] … vége eh… achtergrond excuses tot en met… eh… geen heipalen op voorraad. Dus … ja, 't is wel lekker concreet, maar als dat de tiende smoes is, dan werkt het- dan kan het zo concreet zijn en dan kan het zo buiten ieders invloedssfeer liggen, als bewoner voel je je dan nog steeds in je hemd gezet."

(impersonal) system which these relations are embedded in. Respondents in all three studies express high *individual* willingness and motivation of the professionals involved: this aspect of benevolence is not in doubt in any of the interviews conducted. But because explanations for poor performance are still required, in the discourse we see that respondents point to the divergent and even *conflicting interests* of institutions versus those of residents. We can conclude that continually using warm words regarding residents' interests, without corresponding action, could be a means of masking the pursuit of *institutional interests* that conflict with residents' interests. Warm words, promises and expectations invite people to have confidence. That confidence is eroded if, time after time, performance is not good, and new excuses and explanations are provided. People then get into a situation where institutions' integrity is visibly shot: great promises turn out to be false promises. And because integrity is in doubt, the institutions' benevolence is too.

It is interesting that in the discourse of a small minority of professionals working at a *more distal level* from residents, the explanations for underperformance tend to be confined to the competence level. These professionals attribute poor performance either to a very complex institutional situation or to the fact that the (democratic, legislative or administrative) system in the Netherlands just works this way.

8.4.2 Trust and a lack of power

In general we see a sense of *powerlessness* in the discourse of especially professionals: the power to perform is consistently attributed to some other cause or actor within 'the system'; a system that is seen to be driven by political and financial interests – rather than those of the residents. Because underperformance is central to questions of trust, the concept of *power* turns out to be of central relevance in our study of trust and trustworthiness.

We see that many respondents, both professionals and residents, place responsibility for underperformance with distal institutions, or to aspects such as legislation, or to lacking mandates. In this context, they refer to political processes and financial resources as the key determinants of outcomes in the fortification operation. The majority of interviewed professionals feel powerless to influence these processes and resources.

As we have concluded from the discourse of professionals working behind the scenes (chapter 7), there was an unexpected aspect of mutual distrust that is especially relevant here. This relates to the party we have thus far considered as the trustee: 'the system' or the comprehensive institutional level involved in dealing with the negative consequences of gas extraction. A number of professionals working for these institutions stretched this system more broadly, beyond the context of gas problems, and characterized 'the system in the Netherlands' in general[145] as determined by a culture of justifying, controlling and accounting for – which hinders them. This culture has a financial origin, as was expressed in a professional's statement: 'The fear of spending a dime too much, costs a tenner.' This 'ingrained distrust' within the institutional system might be a root cause for the continued lack of performance, which in turn breeds distrust not just among citizens but also among professionals doing their best to deliver. Paradoxically, a system that departs from the perspective

[145] Sic their words: 'het systeem'.

that citizens are prone to take advantage of public money, ends up squandering public money to prevent this and ends up being ineffective in delivering solutions for citizens' problems. And in doing so, the system ends up sustaining itself: it becomes an ever-growing beast.

So far, we have drawn conclusions from the discourse. Going beyond that, we observe that power is a factor in the background that respondents themselves do not directly relate to one particular dimension or aspect of trustworthiness. It is our own impression that power is not just closely related to performance, but is also relevant to benevolence. Especially, it is the *interest* aspect of the benevolence dimension where the power theme kicks in. Throughout the discourse, we see that power is being attributed to *positions* where big interests are at stake: especially political and financial interests, which in turn are important *sources* of power at the macro institutional level. These interests do not seem to reconcile very well with the interests of residents and the region. The political and financial interests are not publicly discussed in a transparent way, which points at the elusive and intangible nature of power known from the literature (Mokken & Stokman, 1975).

In the next section we connect these conclusions to the literature on trust and trustworthiness. We also add the concepts of confidence and distrust, and discuss them within the frame of our interviews.

8.5 Connection to the trust literature

This section relates our research findings to the literature with regard to interpersonal trust and institutional or system trust (8.5.1); preconditions of trust (8.5.2); the role of power in trust relations (8.5.3) and a perspective on distrust (8.5.4).

8.5.1 Trust versus confidence in an institutional context

Trust at the interpersonal level

Following the trust definitions that we started with in chapter 3, we conclude that *trust* applies to the interpersonal level of contacts between residents and case managers, and also between case managers and other professionals among each other. However, relations between residents and case managers differ from the trust relations that are typically considered in the trust literature and that are captured by the definitions in section 3.2. Case managers are assigned to residents as their dedicated contact person, so residents' choices are not free[146]. This assignment derives from the *institutional* involvement of dealing with the consequences of gas extraction.

The position of case managers, active on the level of interpersonal interaction, guidance and care, appear to have been introduced at least in part as an ambition to restore and enhance Groningen residents' trust[147]. There is an implicit assumption here: restoring interpersonal trust will be a

[146] Although in exceptional situations residents can ask for a different case manager.
[147] See chapter 3, NCG 2015; 2016.

pathway to restoring confidence in institutions. However, from both residents' and case managers' experiences we learn that this interpersonal level is not the level where problems of trust arise. Both parties are in general positive about these relations themselves. Case managers are generally trusted (with some exceptions). In this respect our findings confirm the consensus among trust researchers that trust is a quality of interpersonal or *human* relations (e.g. Lewicki & Bunker (1996), Levi & Stoker (2000), Lenard (2008), Noordegraaf-Eelens et al. (2010), Van der Meer (2010), Morgner (2013), Schoorman et al. (2015), Bachmann et al. (2015), Bertsou (2019), Schnaudt (2019), and Peeters et al. (2021)).

The results also show that when residents talked about a *lack* of trust, this stems from their lack of confidence in the institutional system; a lack of confidence that is in many cases disconnected from the interpersonal trust placed in case managers. In a nutshell, case managers are portrayed as kind and willing, but unable to help resolve residents' problems. Where authors such as Luhmann (2000) and Kroeger (2017) argue that building up trust relations on the micro-level can protect systems against a loss of confidence on the macro-level, the analysis of our interviews shows otherwise: The street-level interactions with case managers – on the micro-level – appear to be considerably divorced from perceptions of the system – the macro-level. The case managers themselves essentially echo the residents' impressions: they too experience this inability to deliver on promises, they too question the system for it. Our results thus lead us to conclude: trust at the interpersonal level is disconnected from confidence in more abstract institutions. This is because confidence conceptually differs from trust.

Confidence in institutions and in the system

We had already inferred from the literature that the concept of *confidence* may be more relevant to the context of our research than the concept of trust. The Dutch language itself has only one word for both: *vertrouwen*. In that sense, the English language may be better suited to describing the Groningen context. Confidence is generally considered to differ from trust because it is *impersonal, diffuse* and *non-addressable.* Further, confidence characterizes situations where a truster cannot *choose* another trustee[148]. This all applies to the Groningen case: there are no alternative actors or institutions but the designate ones; the relation of confidence is vertical and *imposed*, which allows us to introduce the concept of confidence in the gas case. This 'no-choice' aspect has consequences when confidence gets violated: a truster may experience alienation or apathy, but has no exit-options (see, e.g. Abts, 2005; Luhmann, 2000; Noordegraaf-Eelens et al., 2010; Morgner, 2018; Schnaudt, 2019). For this reason, violated confidence may be more difficult to repair than violated trust, because the truster has no control over the relationship.

On the basis of the results, we argue that it is appropriate to speak of trust in situations where residents have direct contact with professionals. To use the term 'trust' to describe peoples' relations with the vague constellation of manifold institutions and regulations is problematic. In the gas case, it is appropriate to speak of confidence: this system, too, is *impersonal* in the sense that no concrete

[148] We stick to the terms *truster* and *trustee*, because confidence has no denotations for actors in a confidence relation.

actors exist[149]*, diffuse* and *non-addressable* in that it is not clear even to the institutions themselves who is end responsible for what. What we can infer from institutions' communication about *vertrouwen* (CVW, NCG, IMG[150]) is that they have tried to fulfill their ambition to regain residents' *confidence* by attempting to rebuild *trust* via interpersonal relations. Our research has shown that in practice residents and case managers see trust as unrelated to confidence. And we propose that the reason for this is that trust in individual institutional actors and confidence in the institution are fundamentally different. Trust is a quality of one's interpersonal relations. Confidence in the system refers to one's relation to an abstract phenomenon that is structured in such a way that the actions of individuals are irrelevant.[151]

In the analysis of confidence in Groningen, it became clear that trust needs to be placed in a nebulous system of institutions and regulations where it remains unclear who has power. This 'system' is such an abstract and unclear description that it undermines the clarity of what having 'confidence in the system' means or how it could be restored.

The 'system' in Groningen can in fact refer to all kinds of things that hang together in creating the conditions under which the individuals in it interact. Perhaps because of its vagueness it tends to be used quite easily and indiscriminately in the discourse we analysed. For our research, we propose to define the meaning of 'the system' as *the construct of interdependent institutions, procedures and policies at a more comprehensive institutional level, where decisions are made*. In this system, a number of institutions pull the strings according to our respondents: government[152], NAM and NCG are the main actors. These collaborating institutions do not necessarily have the same interests, hence the problem within the benevolence dimension as described in section 8.4.1, and to be elaborated further in 8.5.2.

A main characteristic of this comprehensive institutional system is the *invisibility* of powers and responsibilities to residents and case managers, as well as to many professionals working behind the scenes. A professional characterized the institutional system as follows:

> It is a jungle! It is really growing over everyone's head. I think you won't talk to ánybody who says: 'I understand it totally and completely.' Well, I would immediately request this person to explain it.[153]

[149] This is apparent from the lack of clarity about who is responsible for decisions surrounding gas extraction in the 'Gasgebouw' (state and oil companies), and split responsibility for residents' safety (NAM, regulator, municipalities) and its restoration (CVW, NCG) , see chapter 2.
[150] See chapter 3, section 3.1.2.
[151] There may be one exception to this: when it is clear that a single individual exists who personifies the system. In the Netherlands examples are the National Ombudsman (Reinier van Zutphen). In the Groningen case, typically, the National Coordinator Groningen had this role when Hans Alders was nominally responsible. On closer inspection, however, Alders had no power because he acted on behalf of three layers of government and no means because he required consent from NAM.
[152] mostly national, but also regional/local when it comes to governmental agreements.
[153] Also quoted in Bovenhoff et al., 2021. Dutch translation: "Het is een jungle! Het groeit echt iedereen boven de pet. Ik denk dat je níemand zal spreken die zegt van: 'Nou, ik heb het helemaal op de plaat.' Nou die wil ik acuut vragen om dat uit te leggen."

At the same time, this 'institutional jungle' is assumed to be *all-powerful* in determining the course of affairs in the fortification operation. This paradox of an all-powerful system within which it is unclear where power resides, we conclude, is essential in relation to confidence and its restoration. We shall return to this in section 8.5.3. But before that, we need to more closely examine what was learnt about the concept of trustworthiness in relation to confidence. Because 'confidence' does not have a verbal equivalent to 'trustworthiness', we use the term trustworthiness also in relation to confidence.

8.5.2 Disentangling the dimensions of trustworthiness

It is helpful to unravel processes of trust with respect to antecedents that influence trust building. In the trust literature, different *preconditions* of trust have been proposed, examined and elaborated:
1) the truster's own propensity to trust, which is more or less a personality trait.
2) dimensions of perceived trustworthiness: *competence, benevolence*, and *integrity*.

In the present research, we examined discourses surrounding trust from a social relational point of view and therefore did not take the first precondition into account. The discourse in which interviewees reflect on social relations among (institutional) actors contained many unprompted statements on trustworthiness dimensions.

With regard to the competence dimension we can be brief (see also section 8.4): all respondents agree that performance with regard to the fortification operation fails. This failure is attributed to characteristics of a comprehensive institutional top level (or 'the system'), characteristics that lead many respondents to question the benevolence dimension. With respect to individuals, all respondents agree on good intentions and great efforts of all professionals involved. However, we found that trust (or rather, confidence) in institutions is in doubt. How does this discrepancy between trust at the interpersonal level and its absence at the institutional level relate to the other two dimensions of trustworthiness, benevolence and integrity?

Benevolence: distinguishing between intentions and interests

Based on our research, we conclude that there are two crucial and distinct aspects to the benevolence dimension of trustworthiness. Although these aspects can be found in the literature this distinction has not been explicitly discussed in the trust literature (e.g. Colquitt, Scott & LePine, 2007; Grimmelikhuijsen & Knies, 2017; DiBattista et al., 2020). But from the discourse we find that distinguishing these two aspects is relevant and helpful for understanding why a trustee is perceived as benevolent.

The first aspect consists of the *intentions* of the trustee toward the truster, which is often inferred from concrete *efforts* made. Consistent with the literature, the inference of intentions appears to be common among *human* trustees. Even though institutions may have mission statements which make explicit goals and objectives, the inference of institutions' intentions appears to be less common in the discourse. This may be because inferring an institution's intentions from mission statements and such is difficult because they tend to be rosy, generic and abstract (such as 'Resident first'). Inferring institutions' true intentions from concrete actions is also complicated: one would need a well-documented pattern of actions, or a fully transparent decision-making process.

The second aspect of benevolence is the extent to which a truster perceives that the trustee is concerned about the *truster's interests*. Interests are commonly attributed to both individuals and institutions. An institution's interests can be inferred from the type of organization (e.g. private or public), from the stated mission or from an institution's actions. Benevolence of an actor is assumed when they do not merely pursue their own interests, but heed the interests of the truster.

In the interview discourse, we generally saw that individual professionals were trusted but institutions less so and the 'system' of institutions least of all. In the discourse, (positive) intentions were most often associated with individual professionals, whereas interests were associated with the institutions. Typical statements about individual professionals were positive about their intentions and efforts: 'they do their utmost'. The system of institutions was almost never associated with such relational intentions, but rather with diverging or conflicting interests. The implication is that institutions look after themselves first. This corresponds to a conclusion of Bakema and colleagues (2018) that economic interests of the involved parties[154] often prevail over residents' interests regarding safety. In the discourse, the divergence of institutions' interests from those of residents was frequently presented as the cause for the lack of performance.

In sum, we conclude that benevolence can be inferred from the other's intentions (e.g., do they want to do good?) and the other's interests (e.g., do they have my interests at heart?). From the discourse we see that intentions appear to be more central in interpersonal interactions, and that interests are more central when interactions with institutions and 'the system' are reflected upon.

Integrity: reconciling actions and values

The perceived lack of *performance* and *diverging interests* both impact on the *integrity* dimension. Integrity has to do with moral values like justice, impartiality, keeping promises, and honest and clear communication with regard to the truster. From our analysis we conclude that integrity is inferred from the congruence of benevolence in words and deeds.

At the interpersonal level, we see that case managers and other professionals sometimes struggle with *their own integrity.* They find themselves torn between the lifeworld of residents and the institutions they work for. They describe themselves as messengers of unpleasant news, having to communicate promises that cannot be kept and expectations that cannot be met. They say they are not responsible for the failure to deliver upon their communications and feel powerless to change this.

In the interviews with professionals in more senior positions, sometimes case managers are described as those who have to do the dirty work: 'the floor drain'[155]. These interviews echo that case managers cannot solve residents' problems, because they lack any form of power. As a result, case managers as well as professionals in more senior positions describe experiencing inner struggles. They communicate *others'* decisions – others who are in positions of power – to residents

[154] Especially the entangled relationship between the Dutch state and the NAM, as detailed in chapter 2.
[155] Dutch: *het afvoerputje.*

who in turn experience the negative consequences of these decisions. The professionals are torn because they feel they need to represent residents' interests, but lack the tools to do so.

In sum, we see that professionals feel they lack integrity because of the incongruence of their institutions' words and actions. The professionals want to do well, but they work in a system (or for an institution) whose *interests* are not sufficiently aligned with those of residents to deliver on the promises and expectations. They struggle with their own inability to act with integrity as a result.

Implicit referrals to the integrity dimension were also found in residents' discourse, especially where they are discussing media coverage of statements by politicians or directors, whose words appear incongruent with their deeds. We interpret this as another confirmation that repeated and emphasized communication of benevolent intentions ('generous compensation', 'acceleration approach'[156]) which is belied by flagging performance, can breed skepticism about integrity.

In sum, determining *integrity* is a complex assessment in which the congruence of words (appearances) and actions (practical outcomes) is especially diagnostic. Case managers and other professionals work in a system which promises to solve residents' problems. But because they lack the power to solve residents' problems, they end up struggling with their own integrity. It appears, therefore, that power and power positions play a crucial role in making judgments of trustworthiness on the basis of poor performance.

8.5.3 The role of power in trust relations

We already touched on the importance of *power* that emerged from the discourse. It seems that *power* is a necessary precondition for being trustworthy as a professional. This especially applies to power in the sense of *power to*: having the ability to do what is needed. However, apart from terms as 'monitor', 'control' and 'being vulnerable', power is not explicitly mentioned in definitions of trust.

Above, we saw that proximate institutions such as CVW, NCG and IMG have (sometimes implicitly) tried to enhance interpersonal trust through the deployment of case managers. The use of case managers underscores benevolent intentions. But when case managers and residents alike seek explanations for poor performance to deliver, they indicate lacking 'power' and 'mandate'. According to classic attribution theory, one is not held responsible for actions outside of one's control (cf Weiner, 1992): it therefore makes sense that most residents we interviewed see their case managers as benevolent, but do not hold them accountable for the lack of competence.

What this finding points to is that the literature on doing 'face work' to restore trust in institutions implicitly assumes that the institutions' representatives who do this face work have the capacity to deliver. In cases in which this is not the case, i.e. when they lack the power, we suggest that face work ceases to be effective.

A second issue the research raises is that the trust literature ceases to be informative about the restoration of confidence when it is lost in a situation where powers remain hidden. Who or what *does* hold power remains a mystery to all involved: there is a problem of intangible *power* (Mokken &

[156] Dutch: *ruimhartige compensatie, versnellingsaanpak.*

Stokman, 1975). The analysis above suggests that hidden powers make it impossible to trust. There appear to be two reasons for this.

One reason is that the system is manifold and confusing to both residents and professionals: issues of power and control are obfuscated because it is shared among so many. The institutional system is incomprehensible and complex even to professionals. This means that individual responsibilities are unknown and interests and intentions therefore remain unobservable: trust assessments cannot be made and one can only have implicit confidence in institutions or in 'the system' as a whole (Hardin 1999).

Another reason is that there is a frequent assumption that higher powers are at work – among residents as well as professionals also in more senior roles. These powers never come into focus except in nebulous terms, as 'the parties which benefited most from the gas revenues' or as 'the state and oil companies'. The implication of this way of thinking is that, in the background, there are invisible higher powers whose interests are always going to be incongruent with those of residents and who therefore cannot be trusted. But because they are invisible powers, their pernicious influence cannot be removed or neutralized.

Our conclusion is that as long as power structures and positions remain veiled, it will be impossible to have trust: one can at most maintain *implicit* confidence that the world is a just place or that society's institutions are generally trustworthy (cf Lerner & Miller, 1978; Stroebe et al., 2015). Maintaining this implicit confidence has become problematic now that confidence in the fortification operation has been damaged. By inference, it would become easier to restore confidence when there is one concrete actor who holds power, who is responsible and should deliver the explicitly stated desired outcomes.

We believe this conclusion is a novel insight in the trust literature: that the restoration of confidence in a system is easier once the actors or factors are known who are responsible for past failings, and once the system is restructured in such a way that roles, responsibilities and powers with regard to future performance are made clear. The key issue to restoring *confidence* may therefore lie not so much with restoring impressions of benevolence and integrity, as with restoring clarity about *who* should perform and deliver.

In the next section we make some concluding remarks on the concept of distrust, which seems to be closely related to perceptions of a lack of benevolence.

8.5.4 Distrust

In the previous sections we concluded that trust is lacking, but we did not talk much about *distrust*[157]. Our findings shed some light on the distrust literature by clarifying in what ways the benevolence dimension appears to be at stake in situations and relations of distrust.

[157] In this study we refrain from distrust as a personality trait, and limit ourselves to distrust as a quality of social relations and situations.

In this dissertation, we follow the understanding of trust researchers who consider 'lack of trust' as the opposite of 'trust' (see section 3.5). In their view, lack of trust is a *passive* concept. For example, a trustee can be willing and honest, but simply lacking the skills or powers to perform: in such situations, according to trust researchers, there should be an absence of trust, but not typically distrust. Distrust points to *active*, *negative* assessments of trustworthiness, especially about benevolence. Distrust is about *unwillingness* to perform in the truster's interests; in its most far-reaching form, *malevolence* is presumed.

In the Groningen case, we see a widespread lack of trust, but little active distrust. It appears that this is because the failures to deliver on promises are not attributed to malevolence, but to a combination of systemic incompetence and diverging interests of the institutions who ultimately reign power. In the discourse we never encountered the statement that it is NAM's or government's intention to harm Groningen residents: they are just pursuing their own (economic) interests.

Closest to malevolence (or at least culpable negligence) are utterances expressing that Groningen residents are not relevant to the NAM and The Hague. From the discourse in our interviews, distrust seems to be directed at situations people cannot oversee or do not have sufficient knowledge about, mainly with regard to distal institutions (NAM, 'The Hague') and the system. Interviewees only implied *possible* malevolence when a trustee was described with *vague terms* as 'politics', 'government', 'those at the top'. In such statements, diverging or even conflicting interests were assumed between Groningen residents' interests and big institutions' interests. Most often, financial interests were assumed to be a driving force. What is interesting here is that even though such assumptions of diverging interests were quite common, *explicit* inferences of malevolence were very rare. Perhaps this is because malevolence is not inferred from self-interested actions that do harm in addition, but only from harm done that serves no self-interest?

Our conclusion with respect to the distrust literature is twofold. One is that the threshold for distrust appears to be very high: there should be proof of malevolence that serves no self-interest. In other words, if an institutional party acts in self-interests and causes harm in the process, *malevolent* intentions are not assumed. The second is that because distrust is directed most at systems that are impenetrable or at distal institutions, the best way of combating distrust would vest powers in concrete and proximate actors with whom direct contact is possible.

8.5.5 Proposals to restore trust and confidence

In the previous paragraphs, we have highlighted various factors involved in the restoration of trust. In this closing paragraph we will repeat and integrate the key insights. It is useful to distinguish two related challenges: to restore Groningen residents' trust in proximate institutions dealing with the consequences of gas extraction, and to increase confidence in the system of distal institutions and the procedures they are associated with. To conclude this chapter, we distil from the previous four proposals which may help address these challenges.

First of all, it is difficult to restore trust as long as it remains unclear *in what* or *who* residents should place it. Responsibilities for handling of the problems (and for fortification of homes in particular) are shared among many different actors. This means that if something goes wrong, blame lies with some

part of 'the system' or with the entirety of its organization. This means that *confidence in a comprehensive institutional system* is at stake with every fault, failure or delay. This does not make restoration easier, because confidence is considered to be more difficult to restore than trust in a concrete actor. Our first proposition is that confidence is more easily restored if it is clear ***who is responsible for what*.**

Second, with respect to the concrete actors residents have most contact with, we found that interpersonal trust is not the main obstacle for residents. Case managers and other professionals are seen as benevolent and trustworthy people, as *good* people. But as representatives of their institutions and as deliverers of a public good, they are not perceived as trustworthy, because of persistent problems in performance. To restore trustworthiness in relation to delivering the desired outcomes, *power* is likely to play a vital role. Without sufficient *power to* act, it is impossible for case managers and other professionals to demonstrate competence. Without power, these professionals risk being perceived as pitiful people, whose willingness and good intentions as individuals contrast with their inability to perform as representatives of the institutions. They also risk struggling with their own integrity and with disillusionment, when hard work and good intentions do not lead to sufficient performance. Our second proposition is that ***street-level actors must have sufficient discretionary power*** in order to meet their organizations' stated objectives (such as 'Resident first').

Third, with regard to the system of distal institutions, we believe it will be necessary to restore their *trustworthiness*. This is because in the current system, the trustworthiness of actors such as 'the state' or 'the oil companies' is a precondition for proximate institutions to be credible in their attempts to repair adverse consequences of gas extraction. The trustworthiness of these distal institutions lies primarily with their *intentions* and *interests*. According to many respondents, the reason why the current system fails to solve residents' problems caused by gas extraction is that these distal institutions' interests are not aligned with those of residents. This work of restoring trustworthiness has already begun by removing the influence of the NAM from 'the system': indeed it may be required to strip an actor of power or influence where this is not appropriate or desired (for example, because their interests collide with those of residents). But to vest all powers in government has not improved performance sufficiently yet. Here our proposition is ***to be clear about interests and intentions, aligning different layers of government*** and ending the perceived schism between local and national interests.

The final proposition concerns the comprehensive institutional system, procedures and policies. This, according to the interviews we held, has been developed from a sceptical or even distrusting attitude toward citizens in general. According to our respondents, this 'ingrained' distrust results in a system with elaborate procedures consisting of planning, justifying, checking and monitoring. These systems are not just time and money consuming; at worst they prevent projects from going to execution. Overhead costs are disproportionate and residents see little work done; the *Algemene*

Rekenkamer[158] concludes that the ministers, the IMG and the NCG have taken measures to accelerate execution and to reduce execution costs, 'but we hardly see the effect of these measures in the results for 2021' (Algemene Rekenkamer 2022: 49). Our proposition is to focus on ***establishing a fruitful*** (and by implication more direct) ***collaboration with residents themselves***. In such working relations it would be appropriate to explicitly depart from a recent history of mutual distrust and to make 'restoring mutual confidence' an explicit goal.

These four propositions cover our main insights about the ambition to regain *vertrouwen* of Groningen residents. They concretize what trust means and what it is built on, based on the present research. Of course, that is not without limitations. The final chapter is devoted to reflecting on this project, on possible future research and practical recommendations for restoring confidence.

[158] Translated as 'General Audit Office', an institution independent of the government or parliament that has legal powers to control the collection and spending of public money.

9. Reflections and recommendations

In this chapter we reflect on the methodological aspects of the three studies: how could the selection of participants, interviewing, analysis and other choices have affected the results (section 9.1)? In the final section 9.2 some recommendations for future research are presented as well as practical recommendations for restoring confidence.

9.1 Reflections on methodology and results

In the following subsections, we critically reflect on the data collection, quality of the interviews, the coding process, and the degree of reliability and validity.

9.1.1 Lacunae in data collection

Collecting data from different stakeholders enabled us to perform an analysis of multiple perspectives. Although we evaluate the diverse range of stakeholders as valuable and sufficient, two flaws that might slightly affect the quality are discussed here. In the second study we had hoped to also interview former employees of the institutions NCG and CVW. It seemed to us that we could gain from their retrospective and more distant views and we hoped that they would talk more freely about their experiences. In the third study we had hoped to interview employees of NAM, because this key private sector party has played a leading role in the gas extraction and in paying for all the mitigation efforts. We could not find anyone from these groups willing to participate in the study. Especially not having NAM's perspective is regrettable: this organization was, according to the research of Gronings Perspectief, the least trusted among residents. The perspective of NAM employees would have further completed our perspective on the system's complexity and the failures to deliver on promises. In relation to trust, NAM employees could have shed light on some things our current respondents speculated about: hidden interests and powers. Nevertheless, our current data is relevant and sufficiently complete for the purpose of answering our research questions.

9.1.2 Quality of the interviews

Especially with regard to the first two studies we were surprised by the openness of the majority of the respondents: their willingness to talk resulted in deeper understandings of peoples' perspectives regarding institutional workings, relations and trust. With regard to the third study we noticed that, although many respondents also talked very freely, some of them appeared to be holding back a little when speaking about sensitive issues and about their institution's role in dealing with the consequences of gas extraction. We already reported this in chapter 4[159]. An example of a professional who explicitly shows reluctance is presented in the quotation below, which is a reaction to a question about how the professional thinks the system of accountability and justifying has come to develop this way:

[159] See section 4.5, under the heading *Reliability of the respondents' answers*.

> Now I'm going out on a limb a bit, and because this is being recorded, I'm not going to make that statement, but I have some suspicions about …. Those suspicions are based on uh… of course uh … … … observations over the past six to eight years […]

We heard these statements quite often, for example in the form of insertions like 'you are not allowed to write this down, but …' and 'I'm talking more carefully now because this stuff is politically explosive.' These are indications that we may not have been told the whole story, or that respondents show awareness that they are talking about issues that are sensitive. A circumstance that might have contributed to this reluctance in some of the interviews, is that many of the interviews in study 3 were conducted via phone or video connection, due to the COVID-restrictions from March 2020 onwards. Although this way of interviewing turned out to work pretty well, we observed that it was more difficult to build a relation with respondents from behind a screen.

9.1.3 Reflections on the quality of coding and analysis

Some of the key insights in this dissertation were unanticipated because they emerged from the analysis: if we had known the importance of system trust, confidence, and the trustworthiness dimensions, we could have probed deeper in the interviews. In future research on the trustworthiness dimensions, especially the process of inferring benevolence and integrity are relevant. Also, when respondents talk about diverging interests, this is an excellent opportunity to invite respondent to elaborate their views and experiences of how this affects perceptions of trustworthiness.

In the third study, we explicitly asked about examples of good and bad *performance*. Their statements provided us with lots of opportunities to elaborate on explanations for and consequences of the (lack of) performance. This proved to be a very fruitful approach to learn not just about performance, but also about benevolence and integrity. So, when asked about performance, respondents spontaneously elaborate on the concept of trustworthiness and its distinct dimensions. This underlines the importance of the trustworthiness dimensions for relations between institutions, professionals and residents in the Groningen gas case.

Finally, the importance of the concept of power was also emergent and was actually pointed out to us by a fellow researcher who specializes in global health issues. We found the perspective of power positions and power sources to be very helpful for understanding how trust and trustworthiness issues are affected in this specific institutional context. It emerged that none of those interviewed appear to actually experience having power: nearly all respondents attribute power to other actors in the system. On the one hand, this powerlessness is used as an explanation of why things keep going wrong: it could be an excuse for one's own failings. However, our overriding impression is that most respondents themselves are in search of answers to the fundamental questions: who has power and what are their interests is opaque, even to them. Because power was an emergent issue, we could have probed this more explicitly.

When writing up our results, which is also a cyclic process of rereading coded interview excerpts and sharpening analysis and narrative, we discovered that our initial code book (main and sub codes) and our coding process could have been even sharper. This is an illustration of how the analysis and writing process gives rise to feed the coding process again. There is of course a point where you need

to say: and here it stops. Nevertheless, especially for a theme like *influence* (and what distinguishes exerting influence from exerting power?), it turned out to be necessary to look at all coded fragments again, because influence is so elusive and people do not always refer to it as such (sometimes they even call it 'power'), that we had to look, judge and interpret the fragments again. In addition, the themes of power and influence only emerged when the interviews were read and coded again, this time using codes for the three dimensions of trustworthiness.

Another overarching comment concerns the emergent nature of coding as a result of interpretations. An inductive qualitative analysis of the data comprises rereading code reports after having written down (preliminary) results. It was during this iterative finetuning process of writing chapter 5 and 6 that the interviews for the third study were also being completed. Only at this stage did we realise that the theme of power and powerlessness was also present in the interviews with residents and case managers, as distinct from influence. However, when we first analyzed these interviews from our original perspective on trust, we did not see these power issues as a separate theme of central importance. This illustrates how new understandings about the relations between variables and their role evolve during the analysis and potentially even after the analysis has been completed, as new insights are gained. For this reason, the analysis process may never be complete.

This issue that re-interpretation and re-assessment are needed as new evidence comes to light is a process that can be found in all good research, but it may be amplified in this case because so much is opaque and unclear. The minister who was responsible for a long time, Eric Wiebes, called the Groningen gas case a 'Dutch government failure of un-Dutch proportions'[160]. The current junior minister who holds the Mining portfolio, Hans Vijlbrief, uses the metaphor of 'conducting medieval science'[161] for his effort to understand the reasons for this failure. The lack of clarity may exist because this is such a large failure: many actors may be damaged by too much transparency and may be keen to downplay their own involvement, role and responsibilities. All this means that there is high potential for new information to come to light, for example during the parliamentary enquiry in 2022-2023, when those who held positions of power will speak for the first time. Understandings are likely to continue to evolve.

9.1.4 Assessment of reliability and validity

In chapter 4, we already reflected on reliability and validity issues when designing this research project. Now is the time to address the *external validity* or *ecological validity*. In other words: to what extent do our results apply to the population beyond the respondents we interviewed, and beyond our specific research context?

With respect to the analysis, interpretation and conclusions of the discourse, we built in a form of 'member checking'. To check the overall interpretations in our research findings, we sent our final Dutch reports to the respondents and asked explicitly for feedback. For the first and second study we

[160] Dutch: 'Nederlands overheidsfalen van on-Nederlandse proporties' (November 2017).
[161] Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal (May 4, 2022), *Verslag van Commissiedebat Gaswinning*. Kamerdossier 33529 nr. 1005. Junior Minister Vijlbrief: "It is a bit reminiscent of a medieval scientist who looks at natural phenomena, notes that there are phenomena and that certain things occur, but has no idea of the real connections."

received reactions from only a minority of the respondents, all expressing approval with the results. We may conclude that the silence of the majority means an implicit consent with the results.

With regard to the third study, of which the summarized findings in section 7.2 are based on a Gronings Perspectief report (see Bovenhoff et al., 2021), a few respondents disagreed with some of the preliminary results we sent them for feedback. Eventually this resulted in a few adjustments which are discussed in the final version of the Gronings Perspectief report in question. The majority reacted with approval and expressed identification with the results. Our member checking activity – or 'member reflections' as described by Braun & Clarke (2014: 282-287) – provides support that the conclusions in our studies are valid from the perspective of the vast majority of our respondents.

Regarding external validity, we are fairly confident that our results can be generalized to a wider population within the context of dealing with the consequences of gas extraction. One reason is that we included analyses of interviews with almost 60 respondents. Our conclusions are echoed by others in their research (e.g. Pot and colleagues' analysis of Krewerd, Gronings Perspectief's interviews with 64 residents in 2017 and the follow-up interviews with 14 residents in 2020 (see Pot et al., 2021; Postmes et al., 2017; Stroebe et al. 2021a). Furthermore, the findings in the above mentioned Dutch reports are supported by various organizations such as Groningen Ground Movement, Groningen Gas Council, as well as informally by numerous professionals who did not participate in the interviews themselves. In January 2021, the Minister of Interior Affairs and Kingdom Relations sent a letter to the parliament regarding the attention points in the Gronings Perspectief report[162], which may be considered as an attempt to demonstrate the seriousness of the situation in Groningen. This letter confirms that the ministry (and presumably the organizations it consulted when sending its letter) agrees with Gronings Perspectief's and our characterization of the situation, but they also indicate believing this to be a thing of the past, referring to the Administrative Agreements regarding the fortification in Groningen of November 2020[163].

With respect to the wider external validity of these results, the key question is whether our main conclusions about trust can be generalized to other complex institutional contexts with failures to deliver on promises. The key conclusions from the research would, at first sight, appear to be generalizable in principle – although of course future research would need to establish such replicability.

To make this more concrete, let us consider some key findings. One finding is that trust at the interpersonal level is disconnected from confidence in more abstract institutions, because trust and confidence are conceptually different. For this reason, building trust relations at the micro-level does not protect against a lack of confidence in macro-level (institutional) systems. This would appear to be also the case, for example, in an entirely different complex systemic arrangement such as the EU, which inspires little confidence in several nations notwithstanding its benefits for nations and

[162] Ollongren, K.H. (2021), *Rapport Voortgang en voetangels in het gaswinningsdossier.* Kamerbrief 2021-0000027582. January 22, 2021.
[163] *Bestuurlijke afspraken versterking Groningen* (2020). Extra afspraken tussen rijk, de provincie Groningen en de gemeentes Appingedam, Delfzijl, Het Hogeland, Groningen, Loppersum, Midden-Groningen en Oldambt. Gepubliceerd 6 november 2020 op https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/publicaties /2020/11/06/bestuursakkoord-groningen-6-november-2020.

inhabitants. It would be worthwhile for example examining trust in the EU in sectors which both benefit from it and are regulated by it, such as farming.

Another key finding is that for perceptions of trust and trustworthiness, power and power positions play a key role. We suspect that it is not just in the Groningen case that professionals need discretionary power to be trustworthy representatives of their institutions. And the other finding with respect to power is that if it is distributed across a system of institutions, the failures of this system will feed speculations about actors who ultimately hold power and are responsible. Here it would be interesting to compare issues of trust in Groningen to issues of trust in the management of the corona pandemic, where a similar phenomenon may be found.

Finally, our results deepened our understanding of trustworthiness and its three dimensions. We concluded that in Groningen, integrity is inferred from the congruence of benevolent words (e.g., voicing good intentions, making promises) and deeds. We suspect this finding to be generalizable too. Interesting cases to examine the generalizability of these conclusions in the Netherlands may be the *Toeslagenaffaire*[164] and internationally the war in Iraq and its consequences for confidence in leaders such as Tony Blair. We also suggested that the benevolence of institutions is mainly inferred from institutional interests, whereas the benevolence of professionals who work for them is inferred from intentions and efforts. There are numerous cases which would be interesting and important to pursue here, also among corporate actors who seek to change their image (e.g., oil companies who want to promote the energy transition, fast food corporations who want to promote good health).

In sum, although generalizability of these conclusions to other cases obviously needs to be established in future research, it is clear they are potentially generalizable. So, with regard to generalizability it seems to us that issues of confidence and doubts about benevolence are likely to crop up in any situations in which institutions fail to deliver and continue to do so, whilst claiming otherwise. Furthermore, these doubts about benevolence are likely amplified when, as is the case in Groningen, the lead protagonist has obligations of care towards those who suffer from its failures.

9.2 Recommendations

This study has resulted in new insights into the connection between trust, confidence and power, and the connectedness of trustworthiness dimensions. Some of the conclusions lead to recommendations for practice and others may deserve further research in future. In this final section we first mention some suggestions for further research. Finally, we close this dissertation with four practical recommendations for restoring confidence.

9.2.1 Suggestions for further research

Building on the new insights from this study (section 8.5), here we name a few aspects that we believe deserve further investigation. These aspects concern both theory, practice and methodology, and are presented in a list of questions. The list that follows is not exhaustive, but a personal selection based on what interested us most as a result of our research.

[164] Translated as 'Childcare Allowance Affair'.

Our ***first question*** is to what extent are actors themselves aware of the difference between trust and confidence, given a complex institutional context? Our research has shown that trust and confidence (both translated with the Dutch word *vertrouwen*) are fairly different concepts. To further investigate peoples' awareness of these concepts in everyday life, we can think of a research design that concerns in-depth interviews with various stakeholders within a specific institutional context.

Another suggestion is to induce guided group conversations (*focus groups*) with homogenous groups of stakeholders (e.g., residents, engineers, healthcare providers, public officers), with the aim of probing understandings of trust and confidence. The reason for individual interviews, or focus groups with people from the same profession, is to ensure that concepts can be explored in depth, without the conversation or interview being influenced by other stakeholders' (conflicting) views or experiences. Furthermore, we assume that among like-minded, people may feel more free to talk. To better understand the meaning of the concepts trust and confidence, questions concerning emotional reactions, cognitions, and concrete experience could be explored and connected to each other.

Our ***second question*** concerns the theme of 'giving trust': What exactly does 'giving trust' mean to trusters and trustees, more specifically, to citizens and different groups of professionals? Related questions concern the role of institutions (that indicate they would like to be trusted) in giving trust. To answer these questions, a combination of document analysis and interviews may prove insightful. Document analysis would seek to comprehend how institutions' policies and strategies are designed towards this theme (or not), whereas interviewing professionals would aim to understand the impact of these policies and strategies on employees' jobs.

A ***third question*** relates to how trust relations develop when power structures are reconfigured. Put slightly different: how does a reconfiguration of power positions affect trust among citizens, between citizens and professionals, and confidence in institutions? This could be studied, for example, in the Groningen village of Krewerd, where an experimental approach is used to speed up the fortification operation (see Pot et al., 2021).

We add that this dissertation does not include a study of the *group-level* nature of trust. However, when looking at the effects of gas extraction at the community level, a social identity approach to understanding the dynamics of trust in interpersonal relations as well as confidence related to distal institutions, may provide relevant insights. Such a research approach could aim to answer the question of how social group membership and a shared sense of identity affect trust at the community level on the one hand, and confidence at a more abstract level with respect to institutions and government on the other. The above-mentioned research *Experiment Krewerd* also gives rise to explore how initiators[165] in a community experience acting at the boundary of intragroup and intergroup dynamics, as they are simultaneously community members and organizers (cf Gray & Stevenson, 2020: 351). This knowledge is especially relevant regarding our last recommendation in section 9.2.2, where we propose a bottom-up approach with local communities.

A ***final question*** concerns the power issue that we could not answer on the basis of our research. Within the Groningen gas case, where is power positioned? Who has the power to decide? And in case of fragmented power positions: how do different power positions work together or work against

[165] Dutch: *kartrekkers*

each other? These questions emanate from the general insight that power is complex to examine conceptually and methodologically. So, researchers interested in this concept should be aware that investigating power can entail risks for involved parties. For example in the Groningen gas case, the National Coordinator Groningen or the Ministry may not be comfortable investigating power relationships, because this may also reveal failures that would be threatening positions of responsible people.

From research in the field of health policy and systems research, we derive a selection of methods that could be used for power research in complex institutional contexts. Looking ahead to our final recommendation in 9.2.2 – to restructure the current institutional system into a single leading institution combined with facilitation of local communities to solve the problems – this recommendation will include a change in power relations. Following Topp and colleagues a participatory action research is suitable as a methodology that seeks to build new understandings of power while also changing power relations (2021: 11).

Government agencies are social systems in which employees implement policies; systems that are shaped by values, intentions, and relationships between human and institutional actors. This provides an opportunity to examine which individuals and institutions make and influence policy and system decisions, and how and why they relate to each other. In our view it is relevant to investigate factors, processes and dynamics that are more general to how crises are handled in the Netherlands[166].

9.2.2 Steps toward confidence restoration

In section 8.5.5 we mentioned four proposals for the restoration of *vertrouwen* in the Groningen gas case. Can these proposals be developed into actionable recommendations? Doing so requires going beyond the findings of the research itself. Based on our understanding of the situation, we make an attempt to take this extra step.

The first proposal was based on the analysis that the key issue was not restoring trust, but *restoring confidence* in a comprehensive institutional system. We proposed that confidence is more easily restored if it is clear who is responsible for what. Violations of confidence are well regarded as more serious than violations of trust, because confidence violations are more difficult to repair. We suppose that good performance (which should manifest in tangible results) is a *necessary* factor, though not *sufficient* to regain residents' confidence.

On this basis, our more concrete recommendation is therefore to (a) **deliver on promises** and (b) to **clarify who is responsible** for decisions and their execution. It is necessary to weed out uncertainties about responsibilities, so that residents and professionals stop being bewildered by the jungle of institutional governance. In Groningen, this means a single institution is better placed to restore confidence than a web of institutions.

We should take into account that the ambition to restore Groningen residents' confidence might simply be too challenging in the short run. Improving the performance should be enough to ensure

[166] Based on an earlier research proposal by Hanneke Pot, *Veerkrachtige bewoners en instituties in het Groninger aardbevingsgebied.*

that residents can at least get on with their lives, and that may be a more urgent goal than restoring their confidence. In the longer run, the restoration of confidence is not going to happen spontaneously however. It requires a concrete actor who delivers on decisions made.

The second proposal was based on the observation that there are *complex and intangible power structures*. *Who* has power to actually change things for the better? And *where* is this power positioned? What *sources* of power are necessary to effectuate change? From the interviews it became clear that nobody has a conclusive answer to these questions. One of the most salient statements was: 'having the mandate, does not mean you actually can start work. Because there also needs to be money.'[167] In other words: formal power does not necessarily mean the power to act.

Our proposition was that *street-level actors must have sufficient discretionary power* in order to meet their organizations' stated objectives (such as 'Resident first'). This is already quite concrete. Our recommendation is also to **make power more transparent**. There are at least two seemingly opposite ways in which this can be achieved: one is a 'crisis management approach' (proposed by a.o. State Supervisor of Mines) in which **a powerful institutional crisis manager** makes decisions and executes them.[168] A second one is a **bottom-up approach**, in which power is vested in local communities to solve their own problems. This approach was proposed by several interviewed residents and case managers, and giving street-level actors more discretionary powers fits with such an approach. Someone will have to provide the financial and legal scope for such an approach, and in this respect a powerful crisis manager may be more effective than the current institutional system.

A third proposal was based on the observation of *diverging* and *conflicting interests*. When trusters perceive continued underperformance linked to repeated breaches of promises, they are inclined to speculate about possible causes of this. In our interviews, underperformance was often attributed to diverging interests. In our view, it is important that citizens and professionals *do not need to speculate* about intentions. Hence we propose that institutions are clear about their interests and intentions, that different layers of government are better aligned so that the oft-mentioned schism between local and national interests ends.

A more concrete recommendation for how this can be achieved may be a combination of the two previous recommendations. A much simpler institutional system with a clear leading institution (a 'crisis manager') makes it possible to **be much more transparent about interests and intentions** and it has the benefit of aligning local and national interests. We add that consistency of interests and intentions is of key importance. For example, the announcement of extra gas extraction in January 2022 by the Minister of Economic Affairs did not benefit residents' confidence, especially not in the context of former Minister Wiebes' decision in 2018 to end gas production as soon as possible.

Finally, the fourth proposal was based on the supposed ingrained distrust within Dutch government. This was described as an important barrier for restoring confidence. This *distrust culture* refers to a perceived excess of monitoring, controlling and accounting to ensure that money is spent sensibly,

[167] Original Dutch tekst: "dat je mandaat hebt, betekent nog niet dat je ook daadwerkelijk aan de slag kunt. Want er moet ook geld zijn."
[168] The National Coordinator Groningen appeared to be such an actor, but on closer inspection appears to have held neither power nor financial resources to carry out this task.

frugally and carefully[169]. The intent is that people do not abuse certain arrangements and benefits. This is of course quite imaginable when it comes to (public) money, but it also creates a distrust towards residents, the Groningen residents whose confidence is so important to regain. The core issue here is that the problems of Groningen residents have mounted and in some cases escalated because of this distrust culture.

The only way to determine what the problem is and how it can best be restored, we proposed, is to establish a fruitful (and by implication more direct) collaboration with residents themselves. This can be made more concrete by adopting the bottom-up approach mentioned above, in which **collaborations with local communities** are set up to solve their own problems. It is then possible to say farewell to the problems that the ingrained distrust culture has created. To set up such collaborations with local communities it is necessary **to invest trust in local expertise and intentions**. This works best in small-scale initiatives, based on familiarity where people need each other to achieve the goals. For an explanation of this idea in an entirely different context, see Van der Meer (2017).

We emphasize here, however, that such an approach alone is unlikely to produce purely successful and satisfactory results. Attention will need to be paid to already emerging tensions in social relationships within communities, as the case study by Pot and colleagues (2021) regarding the fortification experiment in Krewerd shows. This experiment, started in 2018 and so enthusiastically promoted, also has a dark side, as documentary filmmaker Liefke Knol showed in June 2022: after years of waiting in which nothing happened, residents have become frustrated, disappointed and cracks appeared in the interpersonal relations: 'the once close togetherness at the beginning of the project is now a long way off'. (documentary released by local television channel RTV Noord[170])

In sum, our recommendation for the restoration of confidence and trust is to restructure the current institutional system which has failed it. Restoring confidence may require a single leading institution who, as 'crisis manager', holds the power to make decisions and execute them, who is transparent about interests and intentions, and in whom local and national interests are aligned. This crisis manager should in turn vest trust in local communities by providing them with financial and legal means to solve the tangle of problems which have mounted for a decade or more, and which furthermore have led to tensions in community relations (or are at risk of such tensions). In this new approach, street-level representatives of the crisis manager must have the discretionary power to facilitate local communities.

[169] The mission of the General Audit Office is: to contribute to the improvement of the functioning and performance of national government and its affiliated bodies. See Missie en strategie | Algemene Rekenkamer | Algemene Rekenkamer

[170] Hulsegge, E. (2022), Experiment Krewerd, de film: 'Niet alleen huizen gaan kapot, wij gaan ook kapot.' *RTV Noord*, 3 juni 2022 via https://www.rtvnoord.nl/nieuws/927615/experiment-krewerd-de-film-niet-alleen-huizen-gaan-kapot-wij-gaan-ook-kapot

Nederlandse samenvatting (Dutch summary)

Dit proefschrift gaat over vertrouwen als kenmerk van relaties tussen burgers, professionals en instanties. Met mijn begeleiders onderzocht ik hoe vertrouwen zich ontwikkelt in de context van de gevolgen van gaswinning in Groningen, te weten schade aan gebouwen door aardbevingen en bodemdaling, en de versterkingsoperatie.

Achtergrond

In het noordoosten van Groningen werd in 1959 een groot aardgasveld ontdekt. De exploitatie van dit aardgas heeft de Nederlandse energievoorziening, de werkgelegenheid en de financiële situatie van de Nederlandse staat sinds die tijd een grote impuls gegeven. De negatieve gevolgen van gaswinning werden pas vanaf de jaren negentig geleidelijk merkbaar, en hebben sinds de beving bij Huizinge in 2012 steeds meer aandacht gekregen. Het gaat daarbij niet alleen om schade aan gebouwen (van funderingsschade tot cosmetische scheuren), maar ook om onveiligheid van gebouwen die bij een zwaardere beving (deels) zouden kunnen instorten. Om schade op te lossen en de veiligheid van hun huis te waarborgen, krijgen veel inwoners van Groningen langdurig te maken met een woud aan instanties, procedures en regelingen. Specifiek voor de versterkingsoperatie geldt dat velen van hen tot op heden nog steeds niet weten of en wanneer hun huis versterkt moet worden. En bij complexe schadesituaties duurt het voor veel Groningers nog steeds lang voor zij bericht krijgen of en in welke mate de schadeclaim toegewezen wordt.

In eerste instantie moesten claims van aardbevingsschade worden ingediend bij, en beoordeeld en afgehandeld worden door de NAM[171]: het bedrijf dat gas oppompt en daardoor schade veroorzaakt. Ook moest de NAM ervoor zorgen dat het ondanks haar mijnbouwactiviteiten veilig bleef in Groningen. Deze situatie leidde tot veel ontevredenheid. Nadat in 2017 respectievelijk 2020 zowel de schadeafhandeling als de versterkingsoperatie onder publieke verantwoordelijkheid waren gebracht, is de NAM steeds meer op afstand komen te staan van inwoners. Sinds die tijd zijn overheidsinstanties een belangrijke rol gaan spelen in het oplossen van de negatieve gevolgen van de gaswinning. Het gaat om veel instanties (waarvan gemeenten, provincie, ministeries van EZK en BZK, NCG en IMG de belangrijkste zijn), die moeten samenwerken, besluiten nemen en handelingen uitvoeren waarmee zij het leven van inwoners en hun leefomgeving sterk beïnvloeden.

Er speelt nog iets anders wat een vlotte en soepele afhandeling van schade en aanpak van de versterking niet vanzelfsprekend maakt. In 2018 is duidelijk geworden dat het gaswinningsbedrijf NAM en de Nederlandse staat een nauwe samenwerking in de besluitvorming over gaswinning hebben[172]. Deze partijen waren overeengekomen dat de NAM 85-90% van het gas aan de Nederlandse staat verkocht, zodat de staat dit kon verhandelen op de internationale markt en daarmee een aanzienlijke extra bron van inkomsten kreeg. Het gegeven dat de staat het grootste deel van de gasopbrengsten ontvangt, bracht echter ook tegenstrijdige rollen met zich mee: enerzijds

[171] Nederlandse Aardolie Maatschappij, een joint venture van Shell en ExxonMobil.
[172] Zie o.a. Maaike Wind (2018), Hier zijn ze dan, die geheime stukken uit 1963 over de gaswinning in Groningen. *Dagblad van het Noorden*, 31 januari 2018.

het streven naar rendabele gasopbrengsten, anderzijds waarborgen dat de inwoners van Groningen veilig kunnen wonen.

De gevolgen van de gaswinning (zoals bevingen, bodemdaling, schade aan gebouwen en twijfel over de veiligheid van huizen) en de pogingen van de vele instanties om deze gevolgen op te lossen, zijn over het algemeen weinig positief te noemen. In deze situatie – die vaak kortweg het 'Groningse gasdossier' wordt genoemd – hebben we de laatste jaren veelvuldig het woord 'vertrouwen' kunnen horen en lezen. CEO's, bestuurders en andere vertegenwoordigers spraken over het verloren gegane vertrouwen van Groningers en over de wens om het vertrouwen van Groningers te herstellen. Uit deze uitspraken blijkt niet alleen dat vertrouwen een positieve, wenselijke kwaliteit is, maar ook dat iedereen wel zal weten wat vertrouwen is en tot wie of wat het gericht is. Dat laatste is echter niet het geval. Het is niet duidelijk in wie of wat het vertrouwen van Groningers moet worden hersteld noch wat dat vertrouwen precies betekent. Daarmee zijn dergelijke uitspraken in feite nietszeggend: iedereen is het er wel mee eens, maar er verandert niet veel.

Doel en hoofdvraag

In dit proefschrift ontrafelen we de betekenis en de componenten van vertrouwen in een complexe situatie waarin veel stakeholders (zowel menselijke als institutionele) betrokken zijn en waarin veel verschillende procedures, regelingen en belangen een rol spelen. Dit hebben we gedaan door zorgvuldig te luisteren naar wat Groningse inwoners en professionals van de betrokken instanties zelf vertellen over vertrouwen. We kozen een sociaal-psychologische invalshoek en hielden diepte-interviews met bijna 60 mensen die op één of andere manier geraakt worden door de gevolgen van gaswinning, of die professioneel werkzaam zijn om deze negatieve gevolgen te helpen oplossen.

Onze centrale vraag luidde: *Hoe beïnvloedt de complexe institutionele context met betrekking tot de gevolgen van gaswinning in Groningen, processen en relaties van vertrouwen, en welke mogelijke richtlijnen zouden kunnen bijdragen aan het herstel van vertrouwen?*

Toen we begonnen – eind 2017 – was er al een complexe institutionele situatie ontstaan om schade te beoordelen en af te handelen, en om de versterkingsoperatie te organiseren en uit te voeren. Dit institutionele construct is sindsdien aan verdere veranderingen onderhevig. Zo zijn in deze periode zowel de schadeafwikkeling als de versterking onder publieke verantwoordelijkheid gebracht, eerst bij het Ministerie van EZK, later BZK, en op moment van schrijven weer bij EZK.

Eerder onderzoek naar vertrouwen in Groningen

Met betrekking tot de sociaal-maatschappelijke gevolgen van de Groningse aardbevingen is al het nodige onderzoek gedaan; daaruit is gebleken dat schadeafhandeling, procedures en onzekerheid over de versterking al jarenlang een diepe impact hebben op het leven van Groningers, hun gezondheid en toekomstperspectief (zie Gronings Perspectief[173]). Deze diepe impact creëert een voedingsbodem voor verlies van vertrouwen en voor wantrouwen. Gronings Perspectief heeft in

[173] Gronings Perspectief: lopend wetenschappelijk onderzoek naar de maatschappelijke gevolgen van gaswinning, zie https://www.groningsperspectief.nl/

longitudinaal onderzoek het vertrouwen van Groningers in verschillende instanties gemeten en daarmee een globaal beeld geschetst van de ontwikkeling van vertrouwen. Daarmee is nog niet duidelijk wie of wat inwoners precies vertrouwen, of wat (een gebrek aan) vertrouwen betekent. Vragenlijstonderzoek naar een complex begrip als vertrouwen wordt verder gecompliceerd doordat niet duidelijk is vanuit welk(e) perspectief of gemoedstoestand respondenten de vragen beantwoorden, doordat mensen als ze het antwoord niet weten vaak de middelste scores kiezen, en doordat de antwoorden ons geen inzicht geven in wat het precies betekent voor respondenten als zij aangeven (geen) vertrouwen te hebben. Instanties als de rijksoverheid en de Nationaal Coördinator Groningen noemen vertrouwen in Groningen als belangrijk om te herstellen. Echter, zonder een verdere specificering van het begrip kan deze ambitie het daadwerkelijke vertrouwensherstel onbewust behoorlijk tegenwerken.

Dit proefschrift kijkt daarom vanuit een andere methodologische invalshoek naar *vertrouwen*: via discourse analyse onderzochten we hoe mensen zelf praten over ervaringen, relaties met inwoners, professionals en instanties, en welke beelden zij hebben van instanties waarmee zij geen concrete ervaringen hebben.

Wetenschappelijke literatuur over vertrouwen en gerelateerde begrippen

Los van onderzoek gericht op de situatie in Groningen, blijkt uit de wetenschappelijke literatuur over *trust* dat vertrouwen een belangrijk concept is binnen menselijke relaties en maatschappijen om goed te functioneren; tegelijk zijn vele wetenschappers zich ervan bewust dat het een vaag en veelzijdig begrip is dat vanuit veel verschillende disciplines wordt bestudeerd en ook vele definities heeft opgeleverd[174]. In plaats van de grote lijst definities te verlengen met een nieuwe, hebben wij de relevante overeenkomstige kenmerken gedestilleerd op basis van drie kerndefinities[175]. Onze opvatting van vertrouwen luidt dat vertrouwen de bereidheid inhoudt om kwetsbaarbaarheid te aanvaarden, vanuit positieve verwachtingen van het gedrag van een ander. Deze ander is niet (volledig) controleerbaar, en dus geven mensen bij vertrouwen een zekere mate van controle op. Ze zijn dus in bepaalde mate kwetsbaar voor het gedrag van de ander.

In vertrouwensrelaties is er sprake van een individu of groep die vertrouwen stelt (de *truster*) in een andere persoon of partij (de *trustee*). Dat maakt vertrouwen een *relationeel* begrip[176]. Naast relationeel is vertrouwen *dynamisch* – het ontwikkelt zich – en *situationeel*, namelijk afhankelijk van een specifieke context.

Trust en confidence

Een eerste belangrijke specificering van vertrouwen bestaat uit het onderscheid tussen interpersoonlijk vertrouwen (tussen mensen of groepen mensen), institutioneel vertrouwen (tussen mensen en grotere bedrijven/instanties), en 'systeemvertrouwen' (tussen mensen en systemen op macroniveau, bijvoorbeeld het financiële systeem). Om deze begrippen concreter te maken,

[174] Zie onder andere: Mayer, Davis & Schoorman (1995), Hardin (1999), Van der Meer (2010), Lyon, Möllering & Saunders (2012), PytlikZillig & Kimbrough (2017), Tyler (2016), Grimmelikhuijsen & Knies (2017).
[175] Uit de studies van Mayer, Davis & Schoorman (1995), Möllering (2006) en Rousseau et al. (1998).
[176] Zie onder andere: Lewicki & Bunker (1996), Levi & Stoker (2000), Noordegraaf-Eelens et al. (2010), Schoorman et al. (2015), Schnaudt (2019).

beginnen we met het wezenlijke verschil tussen de Engelse concepten *trust* en *confidence.* Het Engels kent bovendien verschillende termen voor *vertrouwen*, waarvan voor dit proefschrift *trust* en *confidence* de belangrijkste zijn. Hoewel deze begrippen in alledaags Engels door elkaar heen lopen, wordt in verschillende wetenschappelijke studies het onderscheid tussen *trust* en *confidence* helder uitgewerkt[177]. Volgens ons is dat onderscheid heel goed toepasbaar op de Groningse situatie.

Trust wordt gezien als een kenmerk van horizontale relaties tussen mensen; *trust* is persoonlijk, specifiek en te adresseren aan een concrete actor. Mensen kunnen uit een horizontale *trust*-relatie stappen (exit-optie). Als *trust* geschonden wordt, voelen mensen doorgaans boosheid en spijt dat ze de ander vertrouwd hebben (interne attributie). *Confidence* daarentegen is een kenmerk van verticale verhoudingen die mensen hebben tot abstractere entiteiten en verschijnselen, zoals grote instanties op macroniveau. *Confidence* is onpersoonlijk, diffuus en moeilijk te adresseren. Een ander kenmerk is dat een verticale vertrouwensrelatie wordt opgelegd door een autoriteit of iets wat een truster niet kan beïnvloeden ('de economie' bijvoorbeeld). Er is geen alternatief en mensen kunnen ook niet uit een dergelijke verticale relatie stappen (geen exit-optie). Schending van *confidence* leidt eerder tot gevoelens van vervreemding of apathie (externe attributie).

Hoewel *confidence* meer bestand lijkt tegen schendingen, omdat mensen ertoe neigen deze als uitzonderingen te zien, kan een reeks aan *confidence*-schendingen wel degelijk een grote invloed hebben, en het herstel ervan juist minder makkelijk maken.

Volgens ons is *confidence* de meest geschikte term voor 'vertrouwen' in het Groningse gasdossier. De institutionele context, waarbij inwoners sterk afhankelijk zijn van beleid en beslissingen van instanties, is niet overzichtelijk; de belangrijkste actoren zijn grote instanties die abstract en diffuus zijn voor Groningers (overheid, regering, NAM, Shell). Bovendien is er sprake van een verticale relatie, waarin inwoners geen keuze hebben: zij kunnen niet overstappen op een andere regering, NCG of gemeente, en ook de (handelingen van) oliebedrijven vallen buiten de invloedssfeer van inwoners.

Dimensies van betrouwbaarheid: competentie, welwillendheid en integriteit

Een tweede belangrijke specificering heeft betrekking op de trustee, degene die vertrouwd wordt. Daarbij is het begrip 'betrouwbaarheid' (*trustworthiness*) relevant. Door in te zoomen op kenmerken van betrouwbaarheid – wanneer wordt een trustee gezien als betrouwbaar? – wordt inzichtelijker op basis waarvan mensen vertrouwen ontwikkelen. Door de literatuur heen komen steeds drie dimensies van betrouwbaarheid terug: competentie, welwillendheid en integriteit (*competence, benevolence* en *integrity*)[178]. De ontwikkeling van vertrouwen kan volgens deze literatuur ontrafeld en ook voorspeld worden door een combinatie van de dispositie van de truster zelf, en hoe de truster de drie dimensies van betrouwbaarheid waarneemt. Omdat we naar relaties kijken, beperken wij ons tot de drie dimensies van betrouwbaarheid. We lichten ze alle drie hierna toe.

Competentie (ook: vermogen, performance, 'kunnen') verwijst naar de mate waarin de trustee resultaten en prestaties levert, vaardigheden en expertise demonstreert. Met andere woorden, is de trustee capabel?

[177] Zie onder andere Luhmann (2000), Abts (2005), Noordegraaf-Eelens et al. (2010), Schnaudt (2019).
[178] Zie onder andere Mayer, Davis & Schoorman (1995), Colquitt, Scott & LePine (2007), Grimmelikhuijsen & Knies (2017).

Welwillendheid (ook: benevolentie, commitment, 'willen') verwijst naar de mate waarin de trustee gezien wordt als betrokken bij de truster en diens belangen, en de mate waarin de trustee zijn eigen belang nastreeft. Ook gaat welwillendheid over zichtbare motivatie en inspanning jegens de truster. Met andere woorden, toont de trustee zich gemotiveerd om zich in te zetten voor het belang van de truster?

Integriteit is de morele dimensie, die verwijst naar waarden als beloftes en afspraken nakomen, de waarheid vertellen, en eerlijk en onpartijdig handelen.

Met name de dimensie van welwillendheid is lastig concreet waar te nemen, en helemaal als de trustee een abstracte referent is zoals 'de politiek' of 'de overheid'. Wel is het een belangrijke dimensie in vertrouwensrelaties: de literatuur suggereert dat een gebrek aan competentie minder impact heeft op verlies van vertrouwen dan een gebrek aan welwillendheid en integriteit.

Wantrouwen

We besteedden kort aandacht aan het begrip 'wantrouwen', dat oppervlakkig beschouwd het tegenovergestelde lijkt te betekenen van vertrouwen. Volgens verschillende studies kan wantrouwen echter beter als apart concept benaderd worden[179]. Het tegenovergestelde van vertrouwen is dan 'gebrek aan vertrouwen'. Bij wantrouwen gaat het om actieve, negatieve verwachtingen van vooral de welwillendheid van de trustee; er is sprake van achterdocht en cynisme ten opzichte van de trustee. Wantrouwen blijkt veel lastiger om te buigen naar vertrouwen dan simpelweg een gebrek aan vertrouwen. Een groot probleem voor het herstel van vertrouwen is dat wantrouwen kan ontaarden in actieve twijfel aan goede intenties (welwillendheid), wat in extreme gevallen kan leiden tot vermoedens van *kwaadwillendheid* (malevolentie).

Wederzijds vertrouwen

Tot slot keken we naar wederzijds vertrouwen (*mutual trust*). Stelt of geeft de partij die als trustee gezien wordt, ook vertrouwen in/aan de truster? In de literatuur heeft deze andere kant van de vertrouwensrelatie nog niet zoveel aandacht gekregen. In de Nederlandse context is er wel onderzoek gedaan naar in hoeverre overheidsinstanties vertrouwen geven aan de burger én de burger vertrouwen. Daarin wordt vastgesteld dat een wantrouwende houding naar burgers negatieve gevolgen kan hebben, zoals dat burgers slechts na grote inspanningen krijgen waar zij recht op hebben[180]. Een vergelijking met de Toeslagenaffaire dringt zich op, waarbij het wantrouwen zich op specifieke groepen burgers richtte.

Macht en machtsposities

In de trust-literatuur wordt de relatie met macht meestal niet rechtstreeks gelegd. In ons onderzoek bleek het echter wel een belangrijk thema te zijn. Uit een selectie van literatuur over macht en invloed leerden we dat er een verschil is tussen formele of hiërarchische macht (*power over*) en informele of uitvoerende macht (*power to*). Deze laatste is volgens ons gerelateerd aan de

[179] Zie onder andere Lenard (2008), Van de Walle & Six (2013), Bertsou (2019), Devine et al. (2020), Peeters et al. (2021).
[180] Zie Raaphorst & Van de Walle (2018).

compententie-dimensie van betrouwbaarheid: om resultaten te kunnen leveren, is een zekere macht (*power to*) nodig om besluiten te nemen en handelingen uit te voeren.

Het aan macht gerelateerde concept *invloed* wijst op het vermogen om anderen te beïnvloeden via niet direct merkbare en niet-dwingende middelen[181]. Wanneer mensen over invloed spreken, willen zij vaak een ongrijpbaar element benadrukken. Dit maakt het nog moeilijker om in het dagelijks taalgebruik een onderscheid te maken tussen *macht* (in de betekenis van *power over*) en *invloed*.

Een andere relevante constatering uit de literatuur is dat belangrijke posities van macht en invloed vaak gekenmerkt worden door een sfeer van geheimhouding, omdat het verhullen van macht een doeltreffend middel is voor de instandhouding ervan. Om die reden worden belangrijke machtsposities vaak gepresenteerd in pluralistische en gefragmenteerde vormen, die de verschijningsvormen van die macht vertegenwoordigen[182]. Deze elementen van verhulling en versnippering maken macht tot een uitdagend onderzoeksthema.

Methode

We analyseerden diepte-interviews met bijna 60 respondenten, die de gevolgen van de gaswinning, zoals schade(afhandeling) en versterking, beschouwen en ervaren vanuit verschillende perspectieven (*multiperspective interviews*). Deze respondenten vielen uiteen in drie groepen: inwoners van het aardbevingsgebied, professionals in frontlinieposities, en professionals die meer achter de schermen werken. Het belangrijkste theoretische perspectief van dit proefschrift is dat vertrouwen een kwaliteit is van relaties. We analyseerden de transcripten van de interviews volgens de richtlijnen en stappen van thematische analyse (meer specifiek, *reflexive thematic analysis*[183]).

Tijdens de analyse, interpretatie en verslaglegging ontdekten we dat de ene vorm van vertrouwen de andere niet is, maar waar de Engelse taal in elk geval twee woorden kent die dit onderscheid weergeven (*trust* en *confidence*), heeft het Nederlands er maar één. Verder vonden we in de beschrijvingen van onze respondenten veelvuldig verwijzingen naar dimensies van betrouwbaarheid, zonder dat we daar expliciet naar vroegen. Deze insteek, dat we inwoners en professionals zélf hebben laten vertellen over de context waarin aspecten van vertrouwen mogelijk een rol spelen, levert volgens ons een verrijking op van de kennis over vertrouwen en betrouwbaarheid. Tot slot bleek in een veel later stadium van ons onderzoek dat het thema macht (*power*, *power positions*) heel prominent aanwezig was in het discourse van veel van onze respondenten. Dat dit thema pas veel later boven tafel kwam, is kenmerkend voor een organische, inductieve benadering van de onderzoeksdata.

Hierna bespreken we in het kort de conclusies die we trokken uit de analyses van de interviews.

Resultaten

[181] Zie Snell (2017).
[182] Zie Mokken & Stokman (1975).
[183] Zie Clarke, Braun & Hayfield (2015).

Inwoners van Groningen

Veel geïnterviewden noemden in hun beschrijvingen van het contact met instanties, hun bewonersbegeleider. Dit is een contactpersoon van de instanties NCG en (voormalig) CVW die inwoners tijdens trajecten van inspectie en versterking door processen heen loodst, informatie geeft en hen bijstaat. Over de hele linie laten de interviews een consensus zien: ondanks alle goede bedoelingen en de grote inzet van deze bewonersbegeleiders kunnen zij geen positieve verandering teweegbrengen en daardoor niet bijdragen aan het herstel van het vertrouwen in de instanties Nationaal Coördinator Groningen en (voormalig) Centrum Veilig Wonen. De grotere, abstractere instanties (rijksoverheid, ministeries, NAM) worden gezien als bepalers van het beleid en de procedures voor het omgaan met de gevolgen van gaswinning. Inwoners vertrouwen deze instanties niet en schilderen ze af als een verstrengeld construct van overheid en oliemaatschappijen die hun eigen financieel-economische belangen beschermen. Vertrouwen opbouwen is moeilijk wanneer er twijfels bestaan over de betrouwbaarheid van de trustee. Deze twijfels hebben niet alleen betrekking op de prestaties van instellingen (*competentie*), maar vooral op de *belangen* van grote instituties, die sterk uiteenlopen met die van inwoners, maar wel primair beschermd lijken te worden door het construct van instanties zelf.

Bewonersbegeleiders

Aan bewonersbegeleiders van CVW en NCG werd gevraagd te vertellen over hun ervaringen met het begeleiden van inwoners, over hun instantie en de versterkingsoperatie. Daaruit blijkt dat zolang bewonersbegeleiders over de juiste kwaliteiten en vaardigheden beschikken, en zolang de meeste bewoners openstaan en bereid zijn mee te werken, er op het niveau van de intermenselijke contacten (*interpersonal trust*) geen winst te behalen is. Uit de interviews blijkt ook dat deze contacten doorgaans positief verlopen; wanneer dit niet het geval is, komen bewonersbegeleiders met concrete verklaringen.

Een onderwerp waarover bewonersbegeleiders met frustratie spreken, is de wijze waarop de versterkingsoperatie is georganiseerd en wordt gestuurd door een systeem, en over de ingewikkelde institutionele context. Beide frustratieverhogende factoren liggen echter buiten de invloedssfeer van bewonersbegeleiders. Mede daardoor voelen zij zich soms in een spagaat tussen de bureaucratische rompslomp binnen en tussen instanties enerzijds, en de belangen en behoeften van bewoners anderzijds. Ze identificeren zich met bewoners en hun problemen, terwijl ze zich tegelijkertijd realiseren dat ze vertegenwoordigers van een instantie zijn en een professionele opdracht te vervullen hebben.

Het lijkt erop dat bewonersbegeleiders graag echte 'street-level bureaucrats'[184] willen zijn in plaats van vooral een doorgeefluik van bureaucratische instanties, procedures en beslissingen. Vanuit het perspectief van de literatuur over street-level bureaucratie zouden bewonersbegeleiders een zekere mate van autonomie moeten hebben om beleid te laten werken op het 'street-level' (hier: in de situatie van bewoners). Deze vorm van autonomie wordt *discretionaire bevoegdheid* genoemd[185]. Het gebrek aan discretionaire bevoegdheid met betrekking tot processen en beleid, dat veel geïnterviewden ervaren, heeft gevolgen voor het vertrouwen van bewoners. Weliswaar doen

[184] Zie Lipsky (2010).
[185] Zie Lipsky (2010).

bewonersbegeleiders hun uiterste best om bewoners te helpen; ze zijn goede luisteraars en informatievertalers, en zo zijn ze, op interpersoonlijk niveau, in staat om vertrouwensrelaties (*trust*) op te bouwen. Deze vorm van vertrouwen heeft echter een marginaal effect, omdat die *alleen* de welwillende houding en het welwillende gedrag van de bewonersbegeleiders weerspiegelt. Op *competentie*niveau kunnen ze niet slagen, omdat ze niet de macht hebben om meer te doen dan een goede luisteraar en een goede procescoach te zijn. De derde dimensie van betrouwbaarheid, *integriteit*, is de meest complexe, omdat uit de verhalen van de bewonersbegeleiders blijkt dat zij morele conflicten ervaren: zij moeten de bewoners op de hoogte brengen van vertragingen, onduidelijkheid en geschonden verwachtingen, allemaal factoren waarvoor zij zelf niet verantwoordelijk zijn.

Professionals achter de schermen (op beleids-, management- en bestuursposities)

We analyseerden interviews met professionals die verschillende functies vervullen voor gemeenten, provincie Groningen, ministeries (EZK en BZK) en de Nationaal Coördinator Groningen. Sommigen van hen hebben ook geregeld contact met inwoners, een heel aantal niet.

Vanuit de literatuur zagen we dat in vertrouwensrelaties *kwetsbaarheid* (van de truster voor het gedrag van de trustee) een belangrijk element is. Tegelijk zijn *positieve verwachtingen* van de trustee (intenties, gedrag, prestatie) de basis waarop vertrouwen kan worden opgebouwd of voortgezet. Echter, ondanks positieve verwachtingen blijft een truster kwetsbaar voor de beslissingen en het gedrag van de trustee. Wij stellen dat hier het element 'macht' (*power*) in het spel komt: trustees hebben de macht om te beslissen over hun gedrag, gedrag dat is gebaseerd op (on)*welwillendheid*, persoonlijke of institutionele belangen, dat gepaard gaat met *morele waarden*, en uiteindelijk resulteert in waarneembare (afwezigheid van) *prestaties*. De trustee heeft daarmee de macht om te beslissen over zijn mate van betrouwbaarheid.

Een tweede punt heeft betrekking op een prangende vraag: wie is eigenlijk de vertrouwde partij (*trustee*) in het institutionele systeem rondom de versterkingsoperatie? Laten we aannemen dat, vanuit het perspectief van inwoners, de geïnterviewde professionals allemaal in zekere mate (deel van) deze vertrouwde partij zijn: een collectief van professionals en instanties die samen de klus moeten klaren. Het discourse van deze groep professionals laat zien dat wanneer zij een gebrek aan macht uitdrukken – en velen doen dat – zij bedoelen dat ze (zeer) beperkte macht hebben om te beslissen en te handelen.

Uit de interviews met inwoners komt een beeld naar voren van bereidwillige, maar machteloze bewonersbegeleiders, en uit de interviews met deze bewonersbegeleiders zelf blijkt dat ook zij een gebrek aan macht ervaren om te handelen en het juiste te doen voor inwoners. De professionals op beleids-, management- en bestuursposities, die meer achter de schermen werken, schetsen verrassend genoeg een vergelijkbaar beeld van hun ervaringen. Ondanks hun bereidheid om te presteren, uiten velen van hen een gebrek aan macht om daadwerkelijk te bereiken wat nodig is. En als gevolg daarvan worstelen ook zij met hun onvermogen om eerlijk en helder met bewoners te communiceren. Op regionaal niveau geldt dit onvermogen ook voor de communicatie over procedures die van bovenaf worden opgelegd, maar die door een aantal van deze professionals moeten worden uitgevoerd, en waarvan zij de negatieve gevolgen voor inwoners zien.

Al met al is het, om als betrouwbare partij gezien te worden en dus te kunnen bijdragen aan relaties van vertrouwen, noodzakelijk dat een trustee voldoende handelingsbevoegdheid (p*ower to*)

heeft. Veel van de geïnterviewde professionals lijken te worstelen met morele kwesties (integriteitsdimensie), omdat zij enerzijds niet de macht hebben om beslissingen te nemen en beleid te beïnvloeden, en anderzijds beleidsbeslissingen wél moeten communiceren met inwoners.

Daarbij komt dat deze beslissingen, beleidsmaatregelen en procedures voortkomen uit een systeem dat is ontworpen om misbruik te voorkomen, en dat als zodanig vertrekt vanuit een wantrouwende houding tegenover bewoners (en burgers in het algemeen). Dit systeem, dat institutioneel gefragmenteerd maar ook onderling afhankelijk is, wordt door veel geïnterviewde professionals als een bron van frustratie genoemd. Misschien is het uiteindelijk wel deze 'systeemmacht' die de meest ingrijpende vorm van macht is in de versterkingsoperatie, samen met de complexiteit van het systeem die het nagenoeg onveranderbaar maakt? Wat in elk geval duidelijk is geworden, is dat alle professionals te kennen geven dat het institutionele systeem iets is wat zij niet kunnen beïnvloeden, laat staan veranderen. En dus blijft ondanks voortdurende ondermaatse prestaties het systeem in stand: een wonderbaarlijk complex systeem van instanties, procedures en regelgeving. Helaas lijkt het voortbestaan ervan noch de Groningers noch de professionals ten goede te komen.

Daadwerkelijk herstel van vertrouwen: conclusies en aanbevelingen

Vanuit onze resultaten en in het licht van de *trust*-literatuur destilleren we vier voorstellen die de uitdagingen rondom vertrouwen en herstel van vertrouwen kunnen helpen aanpakken. We ondernemen ook een poging om deze voorstellen uit te werken tot uitvoerbare aanbevelingen.

In de eerste plaats is het moeilijk om vertrouwen te herstellen zolang onduidelijk blijft in wat of wie de inwoners van Groningen moeten vertrouwen. De verantwoordelijkheden voor de aanpak van de problemen (en voor de versterking van woningen in het bijzonder) zijn verdeeld over veel verschillende actoren die samen een complex institutioneel systeem vormen. Dit betekent dat als er iets misgaat, de verantwoordelijkheid ligt bij een deel van 'het systeem' of bij de hele organisatie ervan. Daarmee kunnen we stellen dat *confidence* in een alomvattend institutioneel systeem op het spel staat bij elke fout, mislukking of vertraging. Dit maakt het herstel er niet gemakkelijker op, want *confidence* wordt gezien als moeilijker te herstellen dan vertrouwen in een concrete actor (*trust*). Wij stellen dat het vertrouwen in de zin van *confidence* gemakkelijker te herstellen is als duidelijk is wie waarvoor verantwoordelijk is.

Op basis hiervan is onze meer concrete aanbeveling dan ook om (a) beloften na te komen en (b) *duidelijk te maken wie verantwoordelijk* is voor besluiten en de uitvoering ervan. Onduidelijkheden over verantwoordelijkheden moeten worden weggenomen, zodat bewoners en professionals niet langer in verwarring raken door het oerwoud van institutioneel bestuur. In Groningen betekent dit dat één instantie beter in staat is om het vertrouwen te herstellen dan een web van instanties.

We moeten er rekening mee houden dat de ambitie om het vertrouwen van de inwoners van Groningen (in de betekenis van *confidence*) te herstellen op korte termijn wel eens een te grote uitdaging kan zijn. Het verbeteren van de prestaties zou voldoende moeten zijn om ervoor te zorgen dat de bewoners in ieder geval verder kunnen met hun leven, en dat is misschien een dringender doel dan het herstellen van hun vertrouwen.

Ten tweede, met betrekking tot de concrete actoren waar bewoners het meest contact mee hebben, vonden we dat interpersoonlijk vertrouwen (*trust*) niet het belangrijkste obstakel is voor bewoners. Bewonersbegeleiders en andere professionals worden gezien als welwillende, hardwerkende en betrouwbare mensen. Maar als vertegenwoordigers van instanties worden ze niet als betrouwbaar gezien, vanwege aanhoudende problemen met de prestaties (competentie). Om de betrouwbaarheid met betrekking tot het leveren van de gewenste resultaten te vergroten, speelt macht waarschijnlijk een essentiële rol. Zonder voldoende handelingsbevoegdheid is het voor bewonersbegeleiders en andere professionals onmogelijk om goede prestaties te laten zien. Zonder macht lopen met name professionals in de frontlinie het risico te worden gezien als beklagenswaardige mensen, wier individuele bereidwilligheid en goede bedoelingen in schril contrast staan met hun onvermogen om te presteren als vertegenwoordigers van de instanties. Ze lopen ook het risico te worstelen met hun eigen integriteit en met ontgoocheling, zeker wanneer volharding, grote inzet en motivatie niet leiden tot voldoende prestaties. Onze tweede stelling is dat professionals op het 'street-level' over voldoende *discretionaire bevoegdheid* moeten beschikken om de missie van hun organisaties (zoals 'Bewoner centraal'[186]) daadwerkelijk te kunnen verwezenlijken.

Onze aanbeveling is ook om machtsposities transparanter te maken. Er zijn ten minste twee, schijnbaar tegengestelde, manieren waarop dit kan worden bereikt: de ene is een 'crisismanagement aanpak' (voorgesteld door onder andere Staatstoezicht op de Mijnen[187]) waarbij één aangewezen crisismanager beslissingen neemt en uitvoert. De tweede is een 'bottom-up'-benadering, waarbij de macht bij de plaatselijke gemeenschappen wordt gelegd om hun eigen problemen op te lossen. Deze aanpak werd voorgesteld door verschillende geïnterviewde bewoners en bewonersbegeleiders, en het toekennen van meer discretionaire bevoegdheden aan professionals in de frontlinie past in een dergelijke aanpak. Iemand zal de financiële en juridische ruimte voor een dergelijke aanpak moeten verschaffen, en in dit opzicht kan een daadkrachtige crisismanager effectiever zijn dan het huidige institutionele systeem.

Ten derde, wat betreft het systeem van abstracte instanties op macroniveau geloven wij dat het nodig zal zijn om hun *betrouwbaarheid* te herstellen. In het huidige systeem is de betrouwbaarheid van actoren zoals 'de staat', 'de overheid', 'het ministerie' of 'de oliemaatschappijen' namelijk een voorwaarde voor de geloofwaardigheid van de instanties dichterbij (momenteel de Nationaal Coördinator Groningen en de gemeenten, die de versterkingsoperatie moeten uitvoeren). De betrouwbaarheid van de abstracte instanties ligt in de eerste plaats bij hun intenties en belangen (dimensie van welwillendheid). Volgens veel respondenten is de reden waarom het huidige systeem er niet in slaagt de problemen van de bewoners op te lossen, dat de belangen van deze abstracte instanties niet op één lijn liggen met die van bewoners en de regio. Ook nadat vanaf 2020 alle bevoegdheden bij de overheid zijn neergelegd, zijn de prestaties nog steeds onvoldoende. Hier is ons voorstel om duidelijk te zijn over belangen, verschillende bestuurslagen op één lijn te brengen en een einde te maken aan de waargenomen afstand tussen lokale en nationale belangen.

Een concretere aanbeveling voor de manier waarop dit kan worden bereikt, kan een combinatie zijn van de twee vorige aanbevelingen. Een veel eenvoudiger institutioneel systeem met een duidelijk

[186] Zie Nationaal Coördinator Groningen (2018), *Veiligheid voorop en de bewoner centraal. Plan van aanpak Mijnraadadvies*.
[187] Zie Staatstoezicht op de Mijnen (2020).

leidend orgaan (een 'crisismanager') maakt het mogelijk veel transparanter te zijn over belangen en intenties en heeft als voordeel dat lokale en nationale belangen op één lijn komen te liggen. Wij voegen daaraan toe dat belangen en intenties consistent moeten zijn. Zo kwam de aankondiging van extra gaswinning in januari 2022 door de minister van Economische Zaken het toch al broze vertrouwen van inwoners niet ten goede, zeker niet in de context van het besluit van voormalig minister Wiebes in 2018 om de gaswinning zo snel mogelijk te beëindigen.

Het laatste voorstel betreft het alomvattende institutionele systeem, de procedures en het beleid. Dit systeem is, volgens onze respondenten, ontstaan vanuit een sceptische of zelfs wantrouwende houding ten opzichte van burgers in het algemeen. Dit *'ingebakken' wantrouwen* heeft geresulteerd in een stelsel van uitgebreide procedures om te kunnen verantwoorden, controleren en toezicht houden. Deze procedures kosten niet alleen tijd en geld: zij verhinderen ook dat projecten tot uitvoering worden gebracht. Dat de overheadkosten onevenredig hoog zijn en de inwoners weinig resultaat zien, sluit aan bij een recente conclusie van de Algemene Rekenkamer, die stelt dat ministers, de IMG en de NCG weliswaar maatregelen hebben genomen om de uitvoering te versnellen en de uitvoeringskosten te verlagen, 'maar het effect van deze maatregelen zien wij nauwelijks terug in de resultaten voor 2021'[188]. De bedoeling van al die procedures is dat mensen geen misbruik maken van bepaalde regelingen en voordelen. Dat is uiteraard goed voor te stellen als het om (overheids)geld gaat, maar het creëert ook wantrouwen naar de burger, in dit geval de Groningers wier vertrouwen zo belangrijk is om terug te winnen. De kern van de zaak is hier dat de problemen van de Groningers door deze cultuur van wantrouwen zijn toegenomen en in sommige gevallen zijn geëscaleerd.

Ons voorstel is om een vruchtbare – en daarmee directere – samenwerking met inwoners zelf tot stand te brengen. In dergelijke samenwerkingsverbanden is het belangrijk om bewust afscheid te nemen van de geschiedenis van wederzijds wantrouwen en om 'herstel van wederzijds vertrouwen' tot expliciet doel te maken. Dit kan concreter worden gemaakt door te kiezen voor de eerder genoemde bottom-up benadering, waarbij samenwerkingen met lokale gemeenschappen worden opgezet om hun eigen problemen op te lossen. Om dergelijke samenwerkingsverbanden met lokale gemeenschappen op te zetten is het nodig om te investeren in vertrouwen in lokale expertise, motivatie en daadkracht. Dit werkt het beste bij kleinschalige initiatieven, gebaseerd op 'elkaar kennen' waarbij mensen elkaar nodig hebben om de doelen te bereiken. En niet onbelangrijk: binnen deze samenwerkingsverbanden kan niet voorbijgegaan worden aan reeds ontstane spanningen in de sociale verhoudingen binnen gemeenschappen (zoals het Experiment Krewerd heeft laten zien).

Kortom, onze overkoepelende aanbeveling voor het herstel van vertrouwen is om het huidige institutionele systeem dat het heeft laten afweten, te herstructureren. Die herstructurering kan één leidende instantie vereisen die als 'crisismanager' de macht heeft om besluiten te nemen en deze uit te voeren, die transparant is over belangen en intenties, en waarin lokale en nationale belangen zijn afgestemd. Deze crisismanager moet op zijn beurt de lokale gemeenschappen vertrouwen geven door hun de financiële en juridische middelen te verschaffen om de wirwar van problemen op te lossen die zich al tien jaar of langer opstapelen. In deze nieuwe benadering moeten de professionals

[188] Zie Algemene Rekenkamer (2022: 49).

die in de frontlinie werkzaam zijn, van de crisismanager voldoende discretionaire bevoegdheid krijgen om de lokale gemeenschappen daadwerkelijk te helpen.

Dankwoord (Acknowledgements)

En dan nu eindelijk het sluitstuk. Het meest gelezen hoofdstuk, zo gaan de geruchten, over mensen die een belangrijke rol gespeeld hebben tijdens de promotiejaren. Hoewel promoveren aankomt op veelvuldig alleen werken en je afsluiten – tot letterlijk stramme knieën van het stilzitten aan toe – heb ik het nooit als een eenzame klus ervaren. Dat komt doordat dit proefschrift het resultaat is van verschillende vormen van samenwerking. Een aantal mensen waren cruciaal tijdens mijn onderzoek en voor het afronden ervan. Jullie wil ik hier graag bedanken.

Als eerste mijn begeleiders gedurende de afgelopen vijf jaar. Ik waardeer jullie sterke betrokkenheid bij en enthousiasme over mijn onderzoek. Elles, dank je wel dat je mij in november 2016 wist te overtuigen dat promoveren een goed idee zou zijn. Ik dacht daar toen heel anders over, maar je had gelijk! Zoals we jou kennen, was het contact met Tom – als beoogd promotor – al gelegd, kon ik het onderzoeksvoorstel voortvarend op papier zetten en binnen een jaar van start gaan. Tom, bedankt voor je grote inhoudelijke expertise, je vertrouwen dat het zou gaan lukken en je stilistisch vermogen bij het schrijven van gezamenlijke rapporten. Katherine, voor je genuanceerde opmerkingen tijdens de overleggen, je zorgvuldigheid en zo voelbare betrokkenheid bij de impact van gaswinning en versterking op het leven van Groningers.

Als tweede de beoordelingscommissie van het manuscript: Clifford Stevenson, Hanneke Muthert en Michel Dückers, bedankt voor het lezen en beoordelen van het proefschrift, en voor de commentaren vanuit jullie professie en invalshoek waarmee ik het manuscript nog kon bijschaven. *Thanks for reading and assessing the manuscript, as well as the comments from your profession and point of view, which allowed me to fine-tune this thesis.*

Alle respondenten die deelnamen aan mijn onderzoek. Zonder de bereidheid van meer dan zestig inwoners en professionals van wie velen de gevolgen van gaswinning veel te intens moeten ervaren, had dit proefschrift er niet gelegen. Bedankt voor jullie medewerking en openheid, en voor de reacties op de Nederlandstalige rapporten, waarop dit proefschrift deels is gebaseerd.

Mijn collega's van het team Vastgoedkunde aan de Hanzehogeschool Groningen. Ik was er de afgelopen jaren vaak niet, omdat mijn tijd voornamelijk op ging aan onderzoek, helemaal toen ik werd uitgeleend aan Gronings Perspectief van de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. Weer steeds meer terug op mijn plek, staat de opleiding voor een grote verandering en is het team volop uitgebreid met nieuwe collega's; ik verheug me erop iedereen (beter) te leren kennen. Hetzelfde geldt voor mijn collega's bij het Kenniscentrum NoorderRuimte en bij het lectoraat Leefomgeving in Transitie in het bijzonder, dat in de afgelopen jaren een nieuwe naam kreeg en ook is uitgebreid met nieuwe en zeer toegewijde onderzoekers. Hanneke en Hiska, jullie inhoudelijke opmerkingen en bespiegelingen leverden waardevolle bijdragen aan dit proefschrift.

Mijn tijdelijke collega's van Gronings Perspectief van de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, waar ik tussen 2019-2021 deel van mocht uitmaken en waardoor ik van dichtbij kon zien met hoeveel bevlogenheid en toewijding de onderzoeken werden opgezet en uitgevoerd. En niet te vergeten de management-assistenten en coördinatoren van Sociale en Organisatiepsychologie, met wie de lijnen zo kort en plezierig waren en de afspraken zo snel geregeld. Tot slot het team van Kennisplatform Leefbaar en

Kansrijk Groningen, voor de gelegenheid om een eerste deel van mijn onderzoek te presenteren en voor de bijeenkomsten en kenniscafés die mijn blik verruimden en mijn denken inspireerden.

Familie en vrienden, dit boek laat zien waar ik al die jaren weliswaar druk mee bezig, maar niet altijd even spraakzaam over was. Het is eindelijk klaar! Jullie steun en vertrouwen op de achtergrond waren zo belangrijk. Mijn schoonouders, dank voor jullie niet-aflatende belangstelling, en voor de vele uitjes met onze kinderen naar Wildlands, waardoor ik ook op schoolvrije dagen aan de slag kon. Papa en mama, jullie zijn altijd trots en ondersteunend geweest tijdens mijn school-, studie- en verdere loopbaan. Het is dan ook nog steeds moeilijk te beseffen dat papa afgelopen zomer ernstig ziek werd en korte tijd later al overleed: de voltooiing van dit proefschrift kon je niet meemaken, en zoveel meer niet meer… Bas, Fara en Oscar, mijn grappige, enerverende en heerlijk eigen thuisfront: jullie zorgden er wel voor dat ik me nooit helemaal vereenzelvigde met mijn onderzoek en proefschrift.

Noordhorn, december 2022

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This qualitative study examined how the complex institutional context of gas extraction in Groningen affects relations and processes of trust, and seeks to better understand what is necessary for restoring *trust*. In the Groningen gas case, responsibilities for dealing with multiple negative consequences of gas extraction are shared by many different organizations who together form a complex institutional system. Numerous professionals are doing their best to help solve the problems. As individuals, case managers and other professionals are seen as benevolent and hard-working people. But as representatives of (large) institutions these professionals struggle to be seen as trustworthy because of persistent problems with institutional performance, with professionals themselves feeling they have insufficient discretionary power. More than interpersonal trust, a different form of trust appears to be at stake here: *confidence* in the system itself. According to many respondents, confidence in the system is low because the perceived interests of the institutions that shaped this system are not aligned with those of residents and the region. In addition, the positions of power and responsibility within this system are opaque to both residents and professionals. Moreover, the institutional system is perceived to be based on a distrustful attitude toward citizens in general, resulting in elaborate procedures for accountability, control and monitoring. These factors have become obstacles to restoring confidence in the system, no matter how well residents and professionals get along as individuals.