Transparency and Trust

An experimental study of online disclosure and trust in government

Stephan Grimmelikhuijsen

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TRANSPARENCY AND TRUST

An experimental study of online disclosure and trust in government

TRANSPARANTIE EN VERTROUWEN

Een experimentele studie naar online informatie ontsluiting en vertrouwen in de overheid (met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

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1. The promise of transparency

'Too often the American people don't know who Washington is working for, and when they find out, they don't like what they hear. . . . We're not going to be able to change America unless we challenge the culture that has dominated Washington for far too long. And that means shining a bright light on how Washington works.'

- Barack Obama, Speech in New Hampshire, September 4th, 2007

1.1 Transparency as the key to trust in government?

Obama's promise of 'unprecedented forms of government transparency' to restore trust fits neatly with the interest currently being shown in attempts to improve government accountability. There is a widely shared opinion that transparency will lead to an open culture in government that benefits us all (Hood, 2006b, p. 216). Transparency is ultimately seen as something good which will eventually increase citizen trust in government. This claim is made by many politicians, pressure groups and some scholars, all of whom have been strong advocates of 'shining a bright light' on government practices. According to champions of transparency, it will cause governments to be unable to hide their secrets, which is eventually best for all.

Government transparency does indeed appear to be a principle worth striving for: it is seen by many as the "key to better governance". It can help prevent corruption, contribute to legitimacy, enhance government performance by increasing efficiency, and promote principles of good governance (e.g. Blendon et al., 1997; Bok, 1997; Nye, Zelikow & King, 1997; Florini, 1998; Oliver, 2004; Addink, 2005; Birkinshaw, 2006b; Hood, 2006b; Roberts, 2006a). Government transparency is seen not only as a means to achieve certain goals but has become a goal in itself. Transparency or, "the right to know", is said to be a basic human right (Birkinshaw, 2006a; 2006b; Florini, 2007).

One of the most basic and fundamental ways for government to become more transparent is by enacting freedom of information legislation. Numerous countries

have enacted these laws that guide the appropriate provision of information (Roberts, 2006a; Relly & Sabharwal, 2009). Freedom of information is said to be a human right for individuals against inefficient, oppressive, or even bullying government (Birkinshaw, 2006b). Freedom of Information Acts (FOIAs), however, mainly concern a passive form of openness: information is available upon request.

In recent years, the *active* provision of information has become increasingly popular. Transparency has become a buzzword, a panacea for all things that have supposedly gone awry within government (Hood & Heald, 2006: x). What has caused transparency to become such a buzzword? According to Roberts (2006b, p. 107), it has become commonplace to blame policy failures on a culture of secrecy within government organisations. If more information were available to the public, failures might be avoided more often. An example of this tendency became apparent in the case of a major fireworks explosion in a residential area in Enschede, the Netherlands, which left 23 dead and 950 injured. The fireworks depot was officially permitted and was checked only minimally by the local government. People were not informed about the presence of a large fireworks depot in their neighbourhood. The idea is that if citizens or groups in the local community had known about the depot in advance, this tragedy might have been prevented.

Another, broader, development lies behind the call for more transparency, however. In the 1980s and 1990s the focus of the New Public Management doctrine on transparency and the emergence of the World Wide Web coincided. NPM-style reforms emphasised the need for transparency and the measurement of government performance through performance indicators in order to enhance performance and increase citizen trust.

The emergence of the Internet caused increased possibilities to store information and enabled analysis of information from multiple perspectives and different levels (Zuboff, 1988; Davenport, 1993)[1]. In addition, government information can now be read by

[1] Statistical data about Internet use show us that it indeed has great potential. The Internet is increasingly used for obtaining information from sites of public authorities. Euro barometer data shows that the percentage of Internet users in the European Union who obtained information from public authority websites increased from 41 percent in 2005 to 47 percent in 2007. US survey data shows that government websites are used by 50 percent of all Americans and 75 percent of American Internet users (Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006).

anyone with access to the Internet; independent of time or place. This gave rise to a particular form of transparency: computer-mediated transparency (Meijer, 2009). ICTs have catalysed the spread and permeation of (government) information and eventually transparency practices throughout government. Although Freedom of Information Laws form the backbone for government transparency, we could say that modern day transparency is first and foremost computer-mediated transparency.

Transparency is now coined as the solution for one of the most intangible problems of democratic governance: citizens' increasing mistrust in government (e.g. Roberts, 2006b, p. 107-108; Worthy, 2010). It is said to create a culture of honesty and openness amongst public organisations, or at least the perception that such a culture exists. Furthermore, several authors argue that increased citizen knowledge of government processes and performance increases understanding and trust in government (Blendon et al., 1997; Bok, 1997; Cook et al., 2010). This dissertation focuses on this "claim to fame" of transparency: restoring trust in government.

But why should we care about trust in government in the first place? Trust in government is regarded as an essential element in developed societies. For example, if institutions are not trusted by the citizens they serve, they are unable to function properly. Also, a trustworthy government aids in generating interpersonal trust among citizens, helping to make a country's economy run smoothly and maintaining its prosperity (Ayres & Braithwaite, 1992; Fukuyama, 1995; Inglehart, 1999; Levi & Stoker, 2000; Putnam, 2000).

A lack of trust has inspired NPM-style government reforms since the 1980s.. One of the major aims of these reforms, initiated in nearly all OECD countries, is making government more transparent, which is believed to have benefits for government legitimacy (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004; Van de Walle, 2011). Citizen trust in government in the Netherlands has been volatile in recent years, with a sharp decline at the beginning of the millennium and recovery in recent years (Bovens & Wille, 2008). In other countries, such as the US, trust in government has been declining for more than three decades now (Nye, 1997; Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006). Transparency is often seen as the solution that will restore citizen trust in government. But does it actually work?

1.2 Why transparency might weaken trust in government

Despite the highly positive connotations of transparency, a body of literature with a critical approach of transparency has emerged (e.g. O 'Neill, 2002; Bovens, 2003; Prat, 2005; Etzioni, 2010)[2]. Increased transparency, they find, would make government organisations more vulnerable to both just and unjust blame of citizens or sensation-loving journalists. Transparency pessimists stress that increased transparency could lead to increased blaming of government. This is exemplified by the recent stir about the disclosure of hundred thousands of cables by WikiLeaks. Mass media reported on several cables and other "war logs", instigating larger or smaller political scandals, political games or particular statements done by politicians. Some reports have been more serious (e.g. the deaths of Iraqi civilians and the American military appeared to be greater than the numbers made public) than others (e.g. American diplomats describing personalities of world leaders). The disclosure of such events might not have had a positive effect of trust in government. In other words, although transparency could shine a bright light on how government works, people might not like what they hear.

Critics also argue that transparency is overrated. For transparency to work, it needs receptors capable of processing it (Heald, 2006). The latter is a fundamental problem of government transparency. If these receptors (be it citizens, journalists or other intermediaries) are interested at all, the information disclosed by governments is mostly too complex to digest, even for experts. There are limits to knowing, limits to the people's ability to process information (Etzioni, 2010). Furthermore, checking the sources and who modified or added what information is difficult if not impossible, especially when disclosed on the Internet. As a result, critics argue, online misinformation only leads to more uncertainty and less trust (O'Neill, 2002). Negative effects of transparency are acknowledged by most proponents, yet the main difference with the transparency critics is the way these effects are assessed. According to the critics perverse effects are inherent, while proponents argue that these effects can be mitigated by a proper implementation of transparency policies. This raises the question of what effects on trust can be attributed to transparency empirically.

[2] In addition there are skeptics who argue that it has no effect at all (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003) or that transparency's effect is marginal compared to other factors (Roberts, 2006).

1.3 The need for empirical research

The ongoing debate on government transparency between optimists and pessimists represents an unsolved controversy. Opponents and proponents in this controversy mainly base their arguments on normative assumptions. Thorough empirical analyses of the trust-transparency relation are lacking (Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006, p. 366; Etzioni, 2010, p. 395). This dissertation seeks to fill this gap in the ongoing debate about the effect of government transparency on citizen trust in government. Therefore, the central research question of this dissertation is the following:

Does government transparency have an effect on citizen trust?

As the central question is very general, it will be specified in much greater detail in the following chapters. In order to do so three analytical questions will be answered in subsequent chapters. Both "trust in government" and "government transparency" are grand concepts and need specification to make them suitable for empirical research. Further, the supposed relationship between transparency and trust is contentious and is fleshed out in a separate analytical question.

1. What are the components of trust in government?
First, "trust in government" is defined and broken down into four components. These components are specified and described in order to make the concept of trust in government suitable for empirical research. Most importantly, the object of trust is specified (who or what is trusted?) and three dimensions of trust are distinguished.

2. What are the components of government transparency?
The second conceptual question provides a definition for government transparency. Again, this definition is used to break down this concept into researchable components. Two important components of transparency that are fleshed out are the objects of transparency (what is made transparent?) and dimensions of information (what are characteristics that cause information to contribute to transparency?).

3. How can we conceptualise the supposed relationship between transparency and trust in government?

The final conceptual question looks into how transparency hypothetically affects trust in government. An important distinction is made between the potential *overall effect* of transparency and *how* transparency might affect trust in government. The first part explores whether transparency is expected to have an effect on trust in government at all, whereas the latter part looks into specific relations in the mechanism between transparency and trust, such as knowledge or the credibility of the information itself.

These three questions contribute to making the core concepts of this dissertation suitable for empirical study. The empirical data are gathered by means of an experiment.

1.4 Research design: an experiment

The use of experiments in public administration research is rare. Several examples can be found in research on "red tape" (e.g. Scott & Pandey, 2000) and in studies investigating influences on individual decision-makers in public policy and management (Bozeman & Scott, 1992). For example, Scott (1997) carried out an experiment regarding street-level decision-making. More recently De Fine Licht (2011) examined the effect of transparency in health care policy decision-making on trust and the acceptance of decisions. This list is not exhaustive, but it should be clear that the experimental method is not a regular method of public administration research.

Bluntly stated, the main goal of an experiment is to assess the *causal effect* of variable A on variable B. Compared to other more conventional research methods in public administration research, experiments are pre-eminently useful for determining causality. In this dissertation the causal effect of transparency on trust will be examined. Several groups of people are presented with different stimuli, and afterwards the groups are compared to assess the difference in attitudes between groups. An experiment is not used to exactly mirror a "real life situation", since this is too complex to convert into an experiment. Moreover, experiments aim to assess whether an effect exists as such; for this purpose experiments can be considered the most powerful method in science (Cook & Campbell, 1979). The power of experiments is best explained by an example.

One of the most famous (or infamous) examples of social-psychological experiments are the Milgram experiments carried out in 1961. In these series of experiments the obedience of people to authority was investigated. The goal of this study was to explain how ordinary civil servants and citizens could have accepted the atrocities of the Holocaust. Two concepts were abstracted from reality, in this case obedience and authority. These were applied in a laboratory setting in which people had to give electric shocks to a person they could only hear. Participants were asked by the leading researcher (authority) to increase the voltage with each shock (obedience). Despite the screaming and potential death of those who were supposedly receiving the shocks participants obeyed the researcher's instructions. Authority and obedience are abstracted concepts which were applied outside this laboratory setting in order to explain obedience and authority in the "real world". In this experiment, statistical generalisation to the whole population is not necessarily a problem. Most important is that Milgram and his team proved the *effect* of authority on obedience by isolating these two concepts and applying them in an experiment.

An experiment is pre-eminently useful to assess the actual effect of transparency on trust instead of mere correlation. Several groups of people are presented with different degrees and types of transparency. Afterwards their trust levels are measured by means of a questionnaire. By carrying out experiments, an empirically funded and more refined view on transparency can be provided.

1.5 Contribution of this dissertation

What contribution can be expected from the results of this dissertation? First, this study will contribute to the scientific debate on transparency and trust. The current debate is still mainly based on normative assumptions about the 'goodness' of transparency (e.g. Brin, 1998; Birkinshaw, 2006b). Although a more critical stream of literature about transparency has emerged (e.g. Bovens, 2003; and Etzioni, 2010), the debate about what transparency actually does lacks empirical evidence.

First, however, the normative debate is in need of conceptual clarification. Therefore, the first contribution is conceptual. In the current debate on (government) transparency the term transparency is used in very different and rather unspecific ways, a predicament which is also true for the relationship between transparency and

trust. Scholars have only started to conceptualise transparency in a more systematic manner (Piotrowski & Van Ryzin, 2007; Piotrowski & Borry, 2010; Grimmelikhuijsen & Welch, 2012; Meijer, Hillebrandt, Curtin & Brandsma, 2012). This dissertation provides an extensive conceptualisation of transparency, trust and their relationship. What objects and dimensions of transparency can be distinguished? How can it be used in empirical research?

The main scientific contribution of this dissertation is empirical: testing the assumptions in the transparency debate. In assessing the relationship between transparency and trust, not only assumptions about the effects are tested, but also the mechanism through which transparency leads to trust. Does transparency really lead to more trust, and if so, how?

To achieve this, methodological innovation is needed. This study combines the more practical approach of public administration research with the rigor of social psychological experiments. The potential use of the experiments for public administration scholars is evaluated in this dissertation. Does this method work? And what are its potential drawbacks and advantages in advancing theories in public administration science?

The study's practical relevance lies within testing whether transparency "works". The results might be relevant for public officials at different levels of government. First, government agencies coordinating transparency policies could use the results to assess whether or not the current expectations surrounding transparency are justified. Does it pay off for government organisations to invest in transparency, and to what extent is there any truth in the optimistic political rhetoric surrounding transparency?

For individual government organisations, this study will provide data about to what extent it is worthwhile to invest in transparency in order to strengthen citizen trust. Public officials designing transparency policies could learn what types and dimensions of transparency are effective. In other words, this dissertation will provide knowledge and insights in the principles and design choices of computer-mediated transparency. For example, does it help to disclose complete information, or should attention focus on the usability of information? Should particular objects of transparency be placed at the forefront to increase trust: for example, decision-making or policy results? This

study will thus investigate what to expect of transparency and what governments can do with it.

1.6 Book outline

How will the contributions mentioned in the previous section be achieved? To attain the conceptual clarification mentioned in the previous section, Chapter 2 explores the concept of trust in government: a great deal of literature on trust exists and with so many definition and dimensions available, trust has been coined a 'conceptual potpourri' (Shapiro, 1987, p. 625). This chapter sheds light on what trust is and how it is used in this study. Chapter 3 looks at government transparency. Definitions of this concept are often very general and normative. A more descriptive notion of transparency is used in this study. Chapter 4 opens up the "black box" that is the relation between transparency and trust and investigates what exactly constitutes the relation between transparency and trust in government. Which elements are seen as important the current debate? What have the limited number of prior studies found out about the effects of transparency on trust?

To achieve methodological innovation, multiple experiments were designed. Chapter 5 outlines the details of the experiments in this dissertation. This chapter will elaborate on how the experiments have been designed. How was the robustness of the experiment safeguarded and strengthened? Further, the procedures, sample composition, validity and reliability are outlined.

The most important contribution of this dissertation is that it provides rigorous empirical data to the current normative debate on transparency and trust. The results of the experiment are presented in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. Each of these chapters investigates a particular type of transparency. These types will be further explained in Chapter 3. Chapter 6 investigates the effect of decision-making transparency. Decision-making transparency is the oldest form of transparency and is imperative to be able to check government decisions. The second experiment (Chapter 7) examines another form of transparency: disclosure of policy information. Overly positive reporting about policy measures on websites is a well-known practice. Will transparency of policy information help to increase trust, or do government organisations get away with using their website as "just another" communication

channel? Chapter 8 outlines the results of the experiment into the effects policy outcome transparency.

Chapters 9 and 10 constitute the final chapters of this dissertation. Chapter 9 brings forth the analysis and weaves the results of all three experiments together. To what extent are the results comparable or diverging? And which dominant patterns emerge from the experiments? This chapter ends with an evaluation of the use of experiments for public administration research. This also contributes to one of the goals of this dissertation, namely methodological innovation. Finally, Chapter 10 discusses the broader implications of the results. In addition, the practical contribution of the results – principles and design issues of transparency – will be discussed in this final chapter.

2. Trust in government

2.1 The importance of trust in government

High levels of trust in government and among people in society are considered essential for societies to prosper and for governments to function well. Further, trust is important for society as a whole as it enables the effective functioning of "symbolic media of exchange". The following quote by Parsons (1967; 1968, cited in Lewis & Weigert, 1985, p. 974) points out this overarching importance of trust:

"Without public trust and confidence in the reliability, effectiveness and legitimacy of money, laws, and other cultural symbols, modern social institutions would soon disintegrate."

A lack of trust thus threatens the functioning of these symbolic media of exchange and as a consequence the prosperity of societies at large. The effects and antecedents of trust (in government) are therefore among the most widely studied in the social sciences (e.g. Easton, 1975; Zucker, 1986; Gambetta, 1988; Ayres & Braithwaite, 1992; Fukuyama, 1995; Nye et al., 1997; Hetherington, 1998; Inglehart, 1999; Chanley, Rudolph & Rahn, 2000; Costa, 2000; Levi & Stoker, 2000; Putnam, 2000; Dalton, 2004; Van de Walle, 2004; Hendriks, 2009).

Can government exist without its citizens' trust? In short, the answer is "yes". People obey a repressive government, not because they trust it but because they fear the consequences of disobedience. According to Hardin (1999; 2002), trust in government is only needed under relatively benign circumstances. Further, Hardin argues that government functions well as long as it not actively *dis*trusted by people. The natural state for people is to neither trust nor distrust government. His main argument is that people are simply not able to possess sufficient knowledge about the complex web of government organisations and its civil servants. In addition, one could argue that we should not always trust government. A certain critical attitude towards government is necessary and perhaps expected in democratic societies. It is hard to imagine a way in which trust that has become blind faith in authorities could be something good (Hardin, 2002).

So trust in government is not necessarily needed: extremely oppressive governments are able to reign, but do so purely on the basis of fear and repression. However, a huge infrastructure of police, state security and informants is needed to maintain such a government. Aside from the moral issues surrounding this oppressive type of government, its controlling nature undermines its effectiveness in carrying out other useful programs to improve people's quality of life, e.g. education, safety, welfare or health-care.

Many scholars argue that if government is perceived as being trustworthy, citizens tend to comply more often with its demands, laws and regulations without coercion (Ayres & Braithwaite, 1992; Chanley et al., 2000; Levi & Stoker, 2000). In addition, Tyler and Degoey (1996) found empirical data showing that people's evaluations of the trustworthiness of organisational authorities shape their willingness to accept the decisions of authorities and influence their feelings of obligation to follow organisational rules and laws. Hetherington (1998) highlights the relevance of political trust. Political trust concerns trust of citizens in their political leaders, which translates into more support for political leaders and political institutions. This gives leaders more leeway to govern effectively and offers institutions more support and legitimacy. Furthermore, without public support for solutions, problems tend to linger and become more acute, and if not resolved this becomes the foundation for discontent.

In addition, there is social trust, which concerns trust amongst people in society. Trust in government is positively interrelated with social trust. It is unclear whether trust in government generally affects social trust or vice versa. In a literature review Levi and Stoker (2000) point out that most empirical evidence indicates that trust in government leads to social trust. The state plays a key role in creating societal values, which are important in creating and maintaining social trust (Gambetta, 1988). A crucial source of trustworthiness in this regard is the capacity of governments to make credible commitments, to implement policies nonarbitrarily and to show competence. A trustworthy government generates interpersonal trust among citizens, allowing the economy to run smoothly by lowering transaction costs (North, 1981; 1990) and by enabling cooperative behaviour (Gambetta, 1988), which in the end maintains a country's prosperity (Fukuyama, 1995; Inglehart, 1999; Putnam, 2000).

While trust in government might not be a necessary condition for its very existence, it *is* necessary for the effectiveness of its actions. That is, when people no longer trust government it is difficult for it to make decisions binding or to secure citizen compliance without coercion. Also, trustworthy government organisations foster societal trust, allowing economic transactions to run smoothly. Ultimately, a long-term and deep lack of trust can erode the legitimacy of a democratic regime (Chanley et al., 2000). Legitimacy refers to the extent to which government rules are obeyed and accepted by citizens (Easton, 1975, p. 451). This means that higher levels of citizen trust in government is something worth striving for. It is not clear yet, however, what is meant with trust in government in this dissertation. Trust in government is therefore defined and extensively discussed in the next section.

2.2 Defining trust

2.2.1 What trust is

The previous section made clear that trust in government is of pivotal importance. In spite of its importance, both "trust" and "trust in government" are nebulous concepts: not only are there a myriad of definitions of "trust in government"; "trust" in general has been a central object of study for decades in many disciplines. According to Lewicki, McAllister, and Bies (1998), trust is often seen as a foundation for social order by many intellectual disciplines and levels of analysis. Understanding why and how people trust has thus been the central focus of research for psychologists (Deutsch, 1962), sociologists (Gambetta, 1988; Zucker, 1986), political scientists (Hetherington, 1998), economists (Barney & Hansen, 1994) and organisational scientists (Kramer & Tyler, 1996). Furthermore, trust is studied at different levels of analysis: trust between people (Putnam, 2000), trust in teams (Costa, 2000), trust within organisations (Janowicz & Noorderhaven, 2006), trust in systems and trust in institutions (Zucker, 1986; Tyler, 2001; Cook & Gronke, 2005).

The abovementioned disciplines all seek to broaden our knowledge about trust. This has resulted in a great deal of scholarly attention which as a whole has produced a 'conceptual confusion' (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). In order to fully understand trust in government, we need to examine the definitions and perspectives stemming from those disciplines. Across disciplines and even within disciplines, a myriad of definitions, concepts and operationalisations are being used in research. It is for this

reason that trust has been said to have 'a confusing potpourri of definitions' (Shapiro, 1987, p. 625). Because of this pluralism, Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, and Camerer (1998) tried to formulate a multidisciplinary view of trust.

Two conditions need to be met in order for trust to arise. Across disciplines, risk and interdependence are elements that are agreed to be crucial (Zucker, 1986). Risk in this sense means that there is some kind of uncertainty about the organisation in which trust is being placed. Without any uncertainty, that is, if the truster (i.e. citizen) were to actually know everything about the future actions of the trusted (i.e. government) there would be no need for trust. The role of knowledge in trust relationships is thus somewhat awkward. On the one hand, knowledge is thought to be needed to actually build trust (Lewicki & Bunker, 1995; Hardin, 1999; 2002), while other scholars argue that the need to trust implies a lack of knowledge. Trust can even be seen as an alternative for rational prediction and complete knowledge, since this implies complete certainty, which would make trust unnecessary (Luhmann, 1979; Lewis & Weigert, 1985; McAllister, 1995).

The condition of interdependence implies that the interests of one party cannot be achieved without reliance on the other party. So, for example, if citizens want government to solve pressing social problems, they are often dependent on government organisations to deliberate on decisions, carry out policy measures and monitor their effects. Government, on the other hand, depends on citizens to cooperate and act according to certain rules for its policies to have any effect.

The conditions that cause trust to arise have now been made clear, but what components actually define trust? Scholars appear to agree fundamentally on the meaning of trust: confident expectations and a willingness to be vulnerable (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995) are critical components of all definitions. Based on these elements, Rousseau et al. (1998) developed a multidisciplinary definition of trust. This definition has been very influential and much cited in the social sciences. Trust is *'a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another.'* (Rousseau et al., 1998, p. 395)

Following from this definition, trust has the following defining elements:

1. Psychological state
2. The acceptance of vulnerability
3. Positive expectations
4. Intentions or behavior of another actor

What is meant with these four components of trust? First, several "psychological states" are possible with regard to trust. This regards the nature of the psychological state: trust can be cognitive or affective; it can be seen as a purely individual character trait or something that is determined collectively; furthermore, the timeframe is important in determining the psychological state. Secondly, 'the acceptance of vulnerability' concerns the dependency on of the truster on the trusted. The third component is 'based on positive expectations' about intentions or behaviour of the other. Trust implies some kind of dependent behaviour on the intentions or behaviour of another. These expectations consist of perceptions of another person or organisation and, subsequently, the intention of a person to act upon these perceptions. The fourth and final component of trust regards the object of trust 'of another actor'. The characteristics of the object of trust are essential in filling in this definition of trust since it regards trust in government. First we will look into three concepts in order to demarcate what trust is not.

2.2.2 And what trust is not

Three concepts that are used particularly often by scholars on trust in government are legitimacy, confidence and distrust. Naturally distrust is different from trust, yet the way it relates to distrust is often misunderstood. Therefore, this section explains the way distrust and trust differ from each other.

In their daily use trust and *legitimacy* are often confused with each other. Legitimacy refers to the extent to which citizens accept government rules and actions as binding (Easton, 1975). Legitimacy can be approached in a legalistic way, i.e., to what extent a particular authority is constituted according to legal rules and procedures (Curtin & Meijer, 2006). On the other hand, scholars focus on social legitimacy, which concerns the extent to which groups affectively support a political system by evaluating whether its values fit with their own primary values (Lipset, 1959). Scharpf (1999) made an important contribution to the literature on legitimacy. He made a distinction between input-legitimacy and output-legitimacy. Input-legitimacy relies on

the participation and consensus by people. It is attained by people who reach a consensus through deliberation ('democracy by the people'). Output-legitimacy is derived from government's capacity to solve problems that require collective solutions (democracy for the people). According to Easton (1975, p. 453), both legitimacy and trust contribute to political support[3]. Hence, these concepts are separate and may vary with relative independence. For example, people may lose trust in government, but this is still a long way from actively refusing to accept rules or policy outputs as binding.

The second concept that is related to trust is *confidence*. Both terms are sometimes used interchangeably because they are so hard to distinguish. In this dissertation the term 'trust' is used instead of confidence. A subtle distinction between both concepts exists: Luhmann (1988) extensively elaborates on this. According to him, trust is something active, a relationship that can be avoided in contrast to the passive form, which is confidence. A relationship involves confidence if that relationship is unavoidable or when a person is unable to influence it in his or her perception. Confidence is primarily related to a system as such; for instance, confidence in the monetary system. Good results of the system may strengthen this confidence but do not do so necessarily. In contrast, a trust relationship involves a deliberate risk assessment (can I trust this government organisation?), whereas confidence does not. Both concepts refer to expectations, in which the normal case is that of confidence. This means that a person is confident that one's expectations will not be not disappointed; however, with confidence these expectations are somewhat neglected. For instance, you can be confident that you will not be shot on the street when you go out for a drink. This is not a deliberate assessment or expectation; it is implicit and is therefore a form of confidence. To trust something means that a more active expectation or decision is involved. There might be cases in which trust in government actually involves a case of confidence. Nevertheless, this dissertation focuses on trust relations between citizen and government, as it intends to examine (online) interactions of individuals with a particular government organisation. This leads to a deliberate assessment of whether or not to trust this organisation, which is thought to be a matter of trust instead of confidence.

[3] Easton defines political support as: 'an attitude by which a person orients himself to an object either favorably or unfavorably, positively or negatively. Such an attitude may be expressed in parallel action.' (Easton, 1975: 436)

The third concept related to trust is *distrust*. This may seem like the other end of a trust continuum, i.e. the absence of trust is equal to distrust. Yet scholars increasingly emphasise that trust and distrust are conceptually distinct: a lack of trust does not necessarily imply distrust. Distrust is the presence of suspicion, whereas a lack of trust is merely the absence of trust (Lewicki et al. 1998; Bigley & Pearce, 1998; Cooke & Gronke, 2005; McKnight & Chervany, 2006). Distrust is defined in terms of confident negative expectations regarding another's conduct, while trust refers to people's positive expectations. This means that trust and distrust are separate yet linked dimensions. They are, however, not opposite ends of a single continuum (Lewicki et al., 1998, p. 439).

We have now defined what trust is, and what it is not. The definition has brought forward four components that need clarification: 'a psychological state', 'comprising the acceptance of vulnerability', 'based on positive expectations' and 'of another actor'. The following sections outline what is meant by these terms in this dissertation.

2.3 Component 1: psychological state

This section discusses the first defining component: trust as a psychological state. For the purpose of this study, this component is defined as a mechanism for reducing the complexity of reality to manageable proportions. It is impossible to rationally predict or evaluate every possible situation, because we do not have sufficient time and recourses to collect and process information about known (causal) relationships. There has been thorough discussion in the literature, however, about the character of this process. This section explores three parts of the psychological state of trust. First, it is examined whether trust can be seen as an individual trait or as a collective attribute. Next we explore the extent to which trust in this dissertation is to be seen as cognitive or affective. Lastly, the element of time in trust relationships is discussed (initial versus ongoing trust relationships).

Trust as an individual trait and collective attribute

According to behavioural psychologists, trust is rooted purely in individual traits and, hence, a decision to trust is an individual decision. However, Lewis and Weigert (1985) made an important contribution by criticising this purely economical and rational model of trust. Lewis and Weigert (1985) conceptualised trust as a collective

phenomenon. What sociological concepts of trust have in common with economical trust concepts is that they both focus on the 'impersonal mechanisms of trust production' (Costa, 2000, p. 18). Zucker (1986), Luhmann (1979) and Lewis and Weigert (1985) criticise the purely individualistic approach of behavioural psychologists. They argue that trust is a *social* reality, as it should be conceptualised as a collective attribute of people. People trust not only because of a certain psychological makeup, but also because other people trust (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). This is a critique of experimental behavioural psychologists carrying out prisoners dilemma games based on pure calculation. Although Lewis and Weigert view trust to be essentially a collective phenomenon, they acknowledge the importance of individual differences and past experiences, as they are known to be important determinants of trust (Luhmann, 1979; Costa, 2000).

In this dissertation trust is regarded to be determined by individual people in a social context, which means the psychological state of trust is both a collective attribute and an individual trait. Hence, trust here is understood as a combination of individual decision-making and 'social reality'. This means that the degree of trust an individual has in a government organisation can be influenced by individual traits of character and interactions with a government organisation. The next section delves deeper into another element that comprises the psychological state: to what extent is trust cognitive and/or affective?

Cognitive and affective trust

Conceptual analyses of trust by Lewis and Weigert (1985), and McAllister (1995) recognise that trust is multifaceted; both cognitive and affective consideration play a role in trust relationships. These two facets of trust are connected and mutually supportive: trust in everyday life is a mix of feeling and rational thinking (Lewis & Weigert, 1985, p. 972).

The affective dimension is based on values and understandings shared by the truster and the trusted. People make emotional investments in trust relationships, express genuine care and concern for the welfare of others and believe that this care is reciprocal. These affective ties linking individuals can contribute to trust (McAllister, 1995). However, this dissertation focuses on trust in government organisations, and institutional trust is recognised to be more depended on the cognitive dimension than

the affective dimension (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). According to Lewis and Weigert (1985, p. 970), cognition-based trust works as follows: *'We cognitively choose whom we will trust in which respects and under which circumstances, and we base the choice on what we take to be "good reasons", constituting evidence of trustworthiness.'*

Cognitive trust arises from an accumulated knowledge that allows one to make relatively confident predictions, regarding the likelihood that the object of trust is indeed trustworthy. Nevertheless, an incomplete state of knowledge is implied when considering cognition-based trust (Johnson & Grayson, 2005). If people have total knowledge, there is no need to trust, since the behaviour of the other can be predicted. On the other hand, if people have no knowledge at all (i.e. if they are ignorant of the situation), there are no grounds upon which to rationally trust. Knowledge provides 'good reasons', and these are required for the basis of cognition-based trust decisions (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; McAllister, 1995).

Thus, although trust in government is thought to be a mix of cognition and affection, just as with trust in everyday life, the cognition-based more prevalent in much studies on trust in government.

Initial versus ongoing trust relationships

Furthermore, 'time' is a defining characteristic in the psychological state of trust. Trust will evolve, develop and build over time. Therefore it is important to discern *initial* trust relationships from *ongoing* relationships.

Lewicki and Bunker (1995) suggested a trust-building model with three sequential and linked levels: 1) calculus-based trust, the lowest and most fragile form of trust; 2) knowledge-based trust, which is formed over time with increased knowledge. This level of trust represents a relatively strong bonding between two parties and is practical for an exchange relationship; 3) identification-based trust, which is based on shared interests and values. According to Bigley and Pearce (1998), initial trust refers to interactions among unfamiliar actors. These are actors who do not have an established affective bond with, and have little information about, the other. This kind of relationship often occurs in the distant relationship between an individual and a

government organisation. As people do not regularly have direct contact with most government organisations, they generally only have little information about them.

This study focuses on a combination of initial and ongoing trust relationships. Although in general the citizen's contact with government organisations might be described as an ongoing relationship, this study focuses on a relationship with a *specific* government organisation. This mainly focuses on initial trust relations with government. Over time, people's trust in a government organisation may be influenced by other things which may confirm or cause decline of the initial trust level. The most critical time frame for trust development is at the start of the (distant) relationship between a person and an institution (McKnight, Cummings & Chervany, 1998).

In sum, the definition of a 'psychological state' of trust in government is not unequivocal. In this dissertation trust in government is seen as the individual decision to trust, as influenced by a social context. Furthermore, although the literature suggests that the cognition-based view of trust is dominant when it concerns institutional trust, it is recognised here that affective ties with government organisation might still play a role in their relationship with citizens. The timeframe of a trust relationship was also emphasised in this section: this dissertation focuses on a combination of initial and ongoing relations between citizens and government. It is initial, because citizens may deal with a specific government organisation they have not dealt with before, yet it is an ongoing relationship between citizens and government in general.

2.4 Component 2: the acceptance of vulnerability

The second component of Rousseau's definition of trust concerns the acceptance of vulnerability. This element is very much related to the two conditions needed for trust to arise: risk and interdependency. In other words, to be vulnerable in a trust relationship means that there is some risk involved but that the truster also depends on the other. Mayer et al. define trust as the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party. This willingness is based on expectations that the other will act in way that is advantageous to the truster (Mayer et al., 1995, .p. 712).

This component is rather particular for government organisations: the interdependence in the trust relation between citizen and government is often involuntary. There is often no choice than to accept rules and regulations; people are often subject to governments' decisions and policy measures. Vulnerability in this relationship consists of the following elements. Government yields power over its citizens. This power is unequal because governments are generally better organised and have more money than individual citizens. This power can be abused intentionally to bully or even oppress citizens. More specifically, governments are endowed with the sole right to exert violence, which makes citizens vulnerable to the aggression of government officials. Finally, citizens must accept vulnerability involuntary because government is needed to solve problems of collective action (Olson, 1965/1971). This causes interdependence of citizens on their government: dependence is thus not an individual choice. The element of vulnerability is also expressed in case of policy fiascos (cf. Bovens & 't Hart, 1996). For instance, a policy fiasco resulted in a major disaster in a residential area of Enschede, The Netherlands. A fire and subsequent explosions of a storage area of fireworks killed 23 persons and injured over 900 people. Later it became known that the municipality of Enschede had issued a permit that allowed the fireworks company to store a huge amount of fireworks in this area that was located in the middle of a residential area. The risk of policy fiascos exemplifies that although we might generally trust government to solve collective action problems well, this always entails the acceptance of vulnerability and risk.

2.5 Component 3: positive expectations

The third component comprises the expectations of a person regarding the object of trust. What are these positive expectations, and what are they based on? Since uncertainty is involved in trust relationships, some kind of positive *expectation* is involved regarding the intentions and behaviour of the object of trust. These expectations are based on the perceptions that people have of the 'other'; in other words: are the intentions and behaviours of the other perceived to be trustworthy?

Trustworthiness then refers to the characteristics of the object of trust as perceived by a person. A large body of literature elaborates on what elements constitute perceived trustworthy behaviour. Several dimensions of perceived trustworthiness are distinguished. Table 2.1 sums up several studies related to perceived trustworthiness

within several disciplines. This is by no means an exhaustive enumeration of all literature on this topic; however, the key studies concerning perceived trustworthiness in 'distant relationships' are covered in the table below. Distant trust relationships are those in which people rarely meet the one being trusted in person or those that concern some collective entity (McKnight & Chervany, 2006). This will be explained further in the next section, which concerns the object of trust.

Various dimensions are discerned throughout different disciplines that study different objects of trust. However, as Rousseau et al. (1998) argued, trust is 'not so different after all' among these disciplines. Although several differences exist between scholars, all these dimensions show a clear resemblance to each other. All authors find some form of *competence* to be a part of trustworthiness. Some call it *ability* (Jarvenpaa, Leidner & Knoll, 1998), *effectiveness* (Hetherington, 1998) or *expertise* (Peters, Covello & McCallum, 1997), yet the differences in meaning are subtle, so it should be clear that some evaluation of government performance is part of its trustworthiness.

Further, with the exception of Hetherington (1998), all authors regard *benevolence* as a part of trustworthiness. This can be viewed as an ethical dimension of trustworthiness, as it particularly focuses on the intention of government action. Some authors call this *dimension care* (Peters et al., 1997), *commitment* (Levi & Stoker, 2000) or *concern* (Mishra, 1996). It expresses some kind of interest by the one being trusted in those other than itself. Benevolence might be the term that best fits with this study's object of trust, namely government organisations. A government organisation that genuinely cares about the citizens it is serving would most likely be perceived as being benevolent.

A third dimension often reported by scholars that is also ethical is *honesty*, or the integrity of the trusted. Only Levi and Stoker (1998) and Mishra (1996) do not report this as a dimension of trustworthy behaviour. Honesty refers to the extent to which the other is perceived to tell the truth and keep commitments. Benevolence and honesty are of a different nature than competence, as they reflect ethical traits rather than some kind of capability. Benevolence reflects the trustee's motives and is based on altruism. In contrast, competence is a utilitarian dimension of trusting beliefs, as it refers to the *functioning* of government organisations themselves.

Table 2.1 – Dimensions of perceived trustworthiness

Dimension *Authors*	*Compe-tence*	*Bene-volence*	*Honesty*	*Other*	*Object of trust*
Hetherington (1998)	x		x		Political trust
Jarvenpaa, et al. (1998)	x	x	x		Trust in teams
Kim (2005)	x	x	x	Commit-ment, Fairness	Trust in govern-ment
Levi & Stoker (2000)	x	x			Political trust
Mayer et al. (1995)	x	x	x		Organi-sational trust
McKnight et al. (2002)	x	x	x		Trust in organisatio ns
Mishra (1996)	x	x		Reliability Open-ness	Trust in organis-ations
Peters et al. (1997)	x	x	x	Open-ness	Trust in risk communi-cation
Tyler (2001)	x	x	x		Public trust in legal authorities
Welch et al. (2005)	x	x	x		E-governmen t and trust

Honesty implies reliability and keeping commitments (McKnight, Choudhury & Kacmar, 2002). Mishra (2006) regards reliability as a distinct dimension of perceived trustworthiness. However, as reliability is often conceived to be part of honesty, there no reason to treat 'reliability' as a different dimension.

Kim (2005) discerns two extra dimensions with regard to trust in government: credible commitment and fairness. However, these two dimensions overlap with each other and are incorporated by the honesty dimension. They will therefore be regarded as one dimension of perceived trustworthiness. Furthermore, openness is regarded as an independent variable in this study and is not part of trustworthiness. Hence, openness presumably causes trust rather than being part of it. For the purposes of this study the following three dimensions of perceived trustworthiness have been identified from the literature:

- *Competence:* 'Competency involves the knowledge and skills necessary for effective operations with the aim of maintaining or increasing organisational productivity.' (Kim, 2005)
- *Benevolence*: 'One cares about the welfare of the other and is therefore motivated to act in the other person's interest.' (Mayer et al., 1995)
- *Honesty*: 'One makes good faith agreements, tells the truth, and fulfills any promises made.' (Mayer et al., 1995)

The first three elements of the definition of trust – trust as an attitude and the expectations towards the trusted object – have now been specified. Until now, however, the object of trust has remained rather vague ('the other' or 'a government organisation'). The precise object of trust is therefore specified in the next section.

2.6 Component 4: intentions or behavior of another actor

This section delves deeper into the nature of 'another actor', or the object of trust, which is the fourth component of the definition by Rousseau et al. (1998). Political scientists and scholars in public administration essentially focus on the trust relationship between people and government and/or institutions. This is often called 'institution-based trust' (Zucker, 1986). As mentioned in the previous section, trust between a citizens and an organisation is a 'distant relationship'. In distant relationships initial trust arises due to the newness of the relationship. A social distant

venue might be public trust in politicians, government (Nye et al., 1997), or other public official or bodies with whom most people never interact in person. In the case of distant relationships, trust is based on a cognitive process which discriminates among institutions that are trustworthy, distrusted, and unknown (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). The cognitive dimension of trust is of greater importance because of the distance in the trust relationship.

The most important objects of trust discerned in political science and public administration literature will be discussed in this section. According to Luhmann (1988), research about trust and distrust in politics has relied on rather general and unspecified ideas. This is confirmed by Cook and Gronke (2005), who argue that literature on trust in government largely relies on attitudes towards undifferentiated constructs. This has caused confusing conceptual problems of trust, with positive or negative attitudes toward political leadership or political institutions, with alienation, with hopes and worries, or with confidence.

Thus many notions about trust in government are used, employing different levels of analysis. These can be discerned regarding the object of trust (political/public sector) and the level of trust (macro, meso or micro) (Table 2.2). Trust at the macro-level refers to political trust in a generalised and mostly unspecified set of institutions or organisations. At the meso-level the object of trust is a more or less specified to an institution or organisation. One level further down, trust at the micro-level refers to a group of individuals or a specific individual working for an institution or organisation. Further, the second axis distinguishes the object of trust concerning its function, i.e. whether it is a political object or an object in the public sector in general.

The different objects and levels of trust overlap to an extent; therefore it is useful to discern the several types of political trust. *Trust in democracy* refers to how people perceive the functioning of democracy in general, rather than specific political institutions. Satisfaction with how democracy works is also an often-used indicator, for example in the Euro barometer series, and has been used in prior research as a proxy for trust in democracy (e.g. Van de Walle, Roosbroek & Bouckaert, 2008).

Table 2.2 – Levels and objects of institution-based trust

	Political trust	*Public sector trust*
Macro	• Trust in democracy	• Trust in government (in general) • Trust in bureaucracy
Meso	• Trust in political institutions (e.g. parliament)	• Trust in a government organisation/ administration • Trust in public institutions (e.g. police, media)
Micro	• Trust in politicians/ in a particular politician	• Trust in civil servants • Trust in policemen, journalists, etc.

Trust in government is a rather unspecific notion of the object of trust, which does not refer to a particular organisation or agency of government. Many things can be referred to with "trust in government"; however, it is a useful yardstick as a general judgment of trust in government (e.g. Cooke & Gronke, 2005). *Trust in the government bureaucracy* refers to whether one trusts the executive apparatus. Only little research has been carried out on this topic, an example is Van de Walle's dissertation on bureaucratic performance and trust in government and bureaucracies (Van de Walle, 2004).

Trust in politics or political institutions refers to trust in political institutions like the current government in office, political parties and parliament (e.g. Dekker, Halman & Van der Meer, 2006). Scholars studying this object of trust often compare levels of trust between institutions (Mishler & Rose, 1997). *Trust in public institutions* is the object of study in which trust in institutions like mass media or the church are investigated (e.g. Van de Walle, 2004, p. 47; Cook & Gronke, 2005; Dekker, 2006, p. 49). Some scholars seek to understand how trust in public institutions works and whether it differs from other types of trust (e.g. Cook & Gronke, 2005), or they try to understand changes in trust in public institutions over time (Newton & Norris, 1999). *Trust in a government organisation* is the object of this dissertation. As mentioned and explained above, this means trust in a particular government organisation will be examined.

At the micro-level we first have *trust of citizens in administrators and politicians*. This can be measured at a general level, e.g. can politicians be trusted, as well as an individual level, e.g. is the Prime Minister trustworthy? (e.g. Lanoue & Headrick, 1994). A related concept often used in political science is 'political efficacy'. Internal efficacy refers to beliefs about one's own competence to understand and to participate effectively in politics; external efficacy refers to beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizens' demands (e.g. Craig, Niemi & Silver, 1990). The second object of trust at the micro-level concerns *trust in a specified group of civil servants*. This might be considered the micro-level version of trust in a government bureaucracy. We do not examine bureaucracy in general but civil servants as a group of individuals.

Central to this study will be trust in a specific government organisation. The advantage of choosing this object of trust is that it is more precise than most other objects of trust. A more specific object of trust is also clearer to when questioning people about the trusted object. For example, the object of 'trust in government' in general could refer to very different things for both individual citizens and researchers. Further, we know from empirical studies that perceptions of the system (i.e. at the macro level) do not necessarily correlate with people's assessment of individual cases in this system (Luhmann, 1988; Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003; Van de Walle, 2004). People might have little trust in 'the bureaucracy' in general but have good experience with a specific government administration or individual civil servant. A concrete government organisation can be more or less transparent, whereas government in the abstract is in fact a heterogeneous collection of organisations. Moreover, trust in government in general is likely to have myriad and diffuse determinants. For example, trust in general is affected by dissatisfaction with the economy or other political factors (Nye et al., 1997; Roberts, 2006b; Bovens & Wille, 2008).

2.7 Conclusion

A great deal of research has been done employing different perspectives on citizen trust. This chapter has aimed to make the 'grand' concept of trust and trust in government suitable for empirical research. For this purpose, this dissertation focuses on trust in a government organisation using a cross-disciplinary definition of Rousseau et al. (1998). The first component of this definition resulted in a conceptual

specification of trust in government, which in this book is seen as a mixture of cognitive and affective considerations, and individual and collective attributes. Further we will focus on the *initial* trust relationship between citizen and government. The second component specified what is meant with 'the acceptance of vulnerability'; this is particularly important in the public context since citizens have high vulnerability to government. It is the result of the unequal distribution of power between government and citizen, including government's sole right to use violence and government policy being responsible for collective action problems. Components three and four are shown in Figure 2.1.

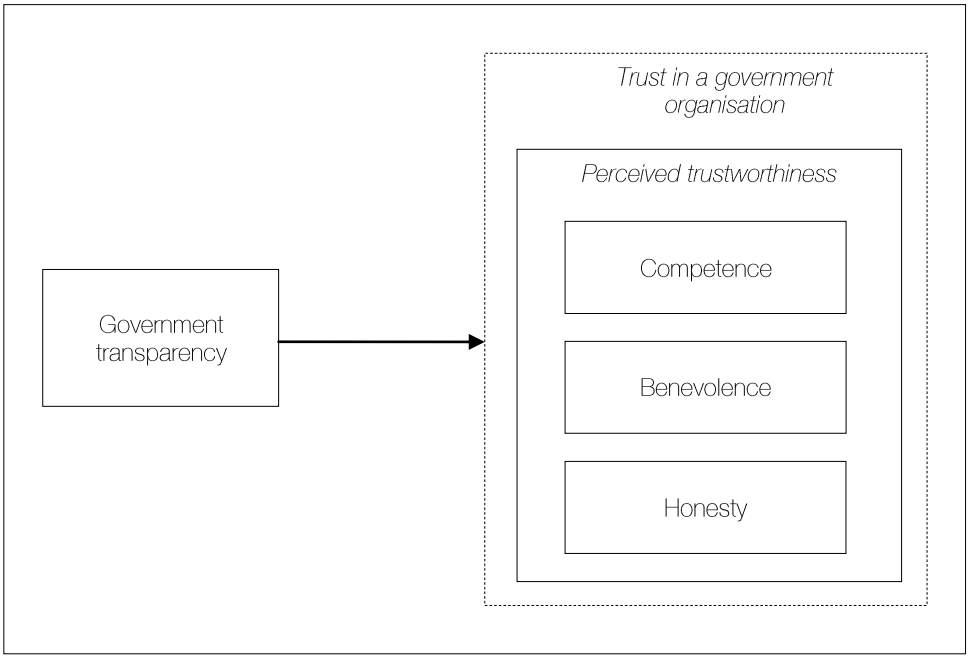

Figure 2.1 – Conceptualisation of trust in this dissertation

The third component of trust regarded the 'positive expectations' of a citizen towards a government organisation. Several dimensions of these expectations were distinguished; this resulted in three dimensions of perceived trustworthiness. Perceived *competence* comprises the perceived effectiveness and skillfulness of a government organisation. Perceived *benevolence* consists of the perceived intentions of government: are they perceived to be acting merely in their own interest or in that of citizens? Perceived *honesty* fundamentally touches on how one sees a government

organisation: whether is it telling the truth and if it is righteous towards citizens. The fourth and final defining component ('another actor') specified the object of trust. In this dissertation we will focus on trust in a specific government organisation instead of general and unspecified objects of trust.

In Chapter 1 the debate between transparency optimists and skeptics was shortly outlined. This chapter made clear that trust in a government organization actually consists of multiple components. Does transparency cause people to have more trust in government's honesty, benevolence, competence, or in all three dimensions? Before exploring the relation between transparency and trust in more detail in Chapter 4, the next chapter delves into the left side of Figure 2.1, which concerns the second core concept of this dissertation: government transparency. What does it mean, what types of transparency exist, and which of these are investigated in this study?

3. Government transparency

3.1 Transparency in the limelight

Transparency is "hot": politicians, pressure groups and some scholars have been strong advocates of shedding "sunlight" on government organisations in order to reduce corruption, enhance performance and restore or strengthen citizen trust in government (Brin, 1998; Oliver, 2004; Addink, 2005; Florini, 2007). Transparency is seen as a panacea for enabling good governance (Hood, 2006): it is said to be something that is best for all. Especially in the United States the call for more transparency is strong after the "secrecy administration" of former President George W. Bush. In response, President Barack Obama placed government transparency at the forefront of the political agenda by instigating the Open Government Directive.

Notwithstanding these highly positive connotations of transparency, many scholars point out the negative effects of transparency. First, transparency could encourage the "blame games" of sensation-loving journalists (Hood, 2007; Worthy, 2010). Small mistakes can be enlarged and subsequently used to create newspaper headlines, which leads to politics of scandal and eventually distrust. Transparency can also have detrimental effects on the quality of political decision-making (Prat, 2005). Officials might behave in a suboptimal way if they know that their decisions are scrutinised before consequences are known fully. Further, Stasavage (2006) found that increased transparency of the proceedings of the European Council of Ministers only pushed negotiations to less transparent, lower levels of decision-making. Also, secrecy of decision-making facilitated making bargains amongst decision-makers.

Although the recent attention being given to transparency in government is remarkable, it is by no means a new concept. Bentham was one of the early thinkers about government openness, stressing that 'secrecy, being an instrument of conspiracy, ought never to be the system of a regular government' (in: Hood, 2006, p. 9). Bentham (1797/2001, p. 277) further emphasised the idea that 'the more strictly we are watched, the better we behave'. This quote, however, concerns the idea of "surveillance", or transparency of the society. The observation that people behave better if they are strictly watched results from Bentham's treatise about the

panopticon. The panopticon is a prison in which all inmates are visible to the guards who are located in a dome-shaped structure in the centre. Inmates are not sure when they are being watched because they cannot see how many guards are located in the central structure. Because the inmates could be visible to the guards at all times, inmates behave better. This conclusion concerns surveillance, yet it has also shaped our thinking about the positive effects of transparency on government behaviour: the better *they* are watched, the better government officials behave. Also Rousseau acknowledged the importance of an open government: he considered opaqueness of government to be an evil (Hood, 2006, p. 7). Rousseau distinguished between politically helpful and dangerous truths, and he believed that 'dangerous or useless truths' should not be shared (Kelly, 2003). Two major developments in contemporary governance are used to explain how transparency came to be in the limelight more recently. After a outline of these two developments, this chapter aims to bring clarity to the normative debate on transparency by defining and conceptualising government transparency.

3.2 The rise of transparency

3.2.1 New Public Management Doctrine and transparency

Many reforms have been carried out that aim to make governments more transparent (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004, p. 24). One of the most basic ways to become more transparent is by enacting freedom-of-information legislation. Numerous countries have enacted laws that guide the appropriate provision of information (see Relly & Sabharwal, 2009). Freedom of information is said to be a human right for individuals against inefficient, oppressive, or even bullying government (Birkinshaw, 2006). Freedom-of-information regimes predominantly use a passive notion of transparency: government documents are disclosed on demand. This passive form of information freedom might, for instance, be used by journalists to retrieve data about school, food or hospital inspections (Meijer, 2004).

FOIAs mainly concern a passive form of openness: information is available upon request. Since the 1980s and 1990s, attention has shifted towards an active form of transparency. The meaning of transparency is currently understood as an active form of openness: information provision is initiated by government itself. The change from passive to active transparency ran parallel to the broad change from "government" to

"governance". Governance means 'there is no one centre but multiple centres; there is no sovereign authority because networks have considerable autonomy' (Rhodes, 1997, p. 109). The shift to governance is concerned with the loss of capability of government to steer society; instead, capacities are spread to other – decentralised – state actors, supra-national organisations and civil society (Kjaer, 2004).

The emergence of governance partly coincides with the rise of the New Public Management (NPM) doctrine that came into fashion in the 1980s (cf. Hood, 1991; Noordegraaf, 2000; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004). Public sector reforms inspired by NPM were encouraged on a global level by organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. These organisations, among other reforms, urged for a greater degree of transparency of developing countries (Kjaer, 2004; Pina, Torres & Royo, 2007).

The idea behind NPM-like transparency reform is that government should be run more businesslike. In the NPM doctrine transparency is seen as an essential element for a highly performing government. Especially the transparency of quantifiable output indicators has gained prominence in the NPM doctrine. According to Van de Walle and Roberts (2008, p. 211), 'We live in an age of quantified performance'. Quantified performance indicators are easily stored in databases and disclosed to a broad public who can now use this information rather cheaply and conveniently through its availability on the World Wide Web. Transparent performance indicators make government more businesslike: government actions can now be assessed based on results in a similar fashion as in the private sector. This dissertation therefore not only pays attention to traditional forms of transparency - such as transparency of inputs (e.g. budgets) and of policy processes - yet also on outcome transparency. Before elaborating on this distinction, the next section delves into the pivotal role of technology in the emergence of the hype surrounding transparency.

3.2.2 Technology and transparency

Traditionally, transparency was related to direct openness, i.e., making official meetings of parliaments accessible to the public so people could assess the decision-making process. Later, transparency was practiced by the "old" information carrier, ink on paper. The proceedings of official meetings could then be laid down in

minutes allowing a broader public to take notice of government decision-making. Today, government organisations still provide information using leaflets or announcements in (local) newspapers.

With the emergence of mass media, transparency shifted from “direct” to “indirect” transparency. Direct transparency refers to a situation in which citizens can directly witness and scrutinize government decision-making. Indirect transparency indicates that citizens can observe government “from a distance”. For example, also television watchers were able to gain insights in the decision-making and behaviour of government officials and politicians from their homes. A well-known instance is the live-broadcasting of political debates of the American Congress on C-SPAN. Another example of transparency mediated through television is the weekly “question time” in the Dutch Parliament. Parliamentarians are given the opportunity to pose questions to ministers during a live television broadcast.

The emergence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has enabled government to store and disclose large amounts of data at little cost. Besides focusing attention on the increased possibility to accumulate data in registers and archives (Meijer, 2002), a great deal of scholarly attention is also paid to the emergence of the Internet. The rise of the Internet has added a new dimension to the monitoring of an institution. It has greatly increased the amount of government information accessible to the public. Meijer (2009) coined this ‘computer-mediated transparency’. Curtin and Meijer (2006, p. 109) also make clear that it is now possible for citizens to obtain a great deal of information and download a huge variety of documents irrespective of time and place.

Literature on informatisation has stressed the increase of transparency through the use of ICTs right from the beginning of the Internet era (Bekkers, 1993; Nora & Minc, 1980). According to Bekkers (1998), transparency is one of the intrinsic characteristics of ICTs. In addition, Meijer (2002) argues that transparency increases the amount of data that are registered, and the opportunities offered to analyse data in multiple ways. ICTs have increased capacities to carry out calculations and process large amounts of data. As a result, it is possible to perform more complex tasks, computations and extrapolations, making it easier to assess the behaviour of both

government organisations and citizens and thus making it more transparent (Bekkers & Zuurmond, 2005, p. 62).

Thus there are two underlying principles of transparency: intentional transparency and unintentional transparency. The first form of transparency refers to transparency as an intentional action or goal; an organisation consciously chooses to disclose information about its internal workings. Unintentional transparency concerns one of the intrinsic characteristics of ICTs. ICTs enable complex calculations to be carried out and large amounts of data to be stored, which increases transparency by definition, not necessarily because an organisation is more transparent by intent. Hence, because ICTs are used in organisational processes, information about these processes is tracked. This is not done with the idea to make these more transparent, yet the information can be and is stored nevertheless, because data storage and calculations are intrinsic characteristics of ICTs. This dissertation focuses on intentional transparency: government organisations that intentionally disclose information about their internal processes to the public.

ICTs can thus encourage intentional and unintentional transparency. Yet there are critics who argue that ICTs have had a negative effect on government transparency. For example, Heeks (1998) points out that the Internet is mainly being used to disclose detailed information about how to request public services and to what regulations government organisations are subjected. Government uses the Internet to spread all sorts of positive press releases. Heeks stresses that all this information only diverts the attention from the actual problem: government information systems hardly produce any information that can be used to hold government to account.

Having said this, even critics must admit that there is a great deal of information available on the Internet nowadays. The Internet directly affects the opportunities transparency has to offer. This has had three types of effects on the character of transparency (Davenport, 1993). First, ICTs have enabled *geographical* transparency, which means that citizens can now access information from any place at any time. Secondly, *informational* transparency refers to increased capabilities of technologies to record and store information. In other words, the amount of information that is available has enormously increased due to ICTs. Thirdly and finally, Davenport points out that *analytical* transparency means that 'raw' information or data can now be

combined to create new insights and perspectives, which thus creates new forms of information.

Hence, the Internet has the potential to greatly facilitate transparency through the use of government websites, not only for the users of transparency but also for the suppliers, i.e. government. The Internet has lowered the costs of information disclosure. Although there are multiple ways for government to achieve transparency, one could conclude that modern day transparency is mainly computer-mediated transparency. It is therefore logical that the experiments central to this dissertation are focused on this type of transparency.

3.3 The relevance of transparency

The importance of transparency can be perceived in two ways: transparency can be viewed as an intrinsic value of democratic governments. From this perspective, transparency is an end in itself. Transparency can also be viewed as a means to achieve other important goals. Although transparency is generally credited with positive connotations, some scholars warn that transparency might not contribute to these goals and might even be detrimental to goals such as trust (O'Neill, 2002; Bovens, 2003; O'Neill, 2006). In Chapter 4, this debate between transparency 'optimists' and 'pessimists' is outlined in much greater detail, which will also account for the potential drawbacks of transparency. In this section, however, two perspectives which emphasize transparency as 'something good' are outlined.

The first perspective revolves around the idea that transparency is an intrinsic value of government itself. Seen in this way, transparency is a cornerstone of democratic governance, which requires a general openness of governmental organisations. When transparency is perceived as a democratic value, it is both a condition of democratic government and also an end in itself (Northrup & Thorson 2003). From this perspective citizens have an intrinsic 'right to know' about the operations of government organisations. According to Birkinshaw (2006b), the right to know is a very basic human right: it is an argument built upon the idea of citizen protection against inefficient, oppressive, or even bullying government.

Transparency as a human right is not only seen as a weapon against corrupt government, but also as social or economic power, or at least as a start to more equal power between citizens and their institutions (Florini, 2007). From this perspective, government should be as transparent as possible in order to give citizens 'equal weapons' (cf. Brin, 2004). Nevertheless, even transparency champions admit that some issues should be omitted from the transparency doctrine, for example national security issues or individuals' privacy (Florini, 2007, p. 3).

The second perspective is that of transparency as an instrument to attain other policy goals. Central to this dissertation is transparency as an instrument to increase citizen trust in government organizations. However transparency can also be an instrument that is expected to decrease corruption and enhance accountability. For example, information provision is seen as precondition to enable processes of accountability (Bovens, 2007). Transparency is also said to be an important asset of 'good governance' (Addink, 2005) which enables people to have active involvement with the decision-making of public organizations, thus contributing scrutiny and accountability of governments (Curtin & Dekker, 2005, p. 15). In addition, transparency is used as an instrument that might help to discourage corruption, since it violates generally accepted standards of behaviour. Providing greater transparency discourages unaccepted behavior and thus discourages corruption (Gerring & Thacker, 2004, p. 316). In general, transparency is mostly credited with a highly positive reputation and it is not only an important value in itself, yet it is also expected to effectively contribute to important policy goals.

The debate on the merits of transparency is predominantly based on normative claims such as those mentioned above. This dissertation aims to add empirical evidence to this debate. For this purpose a more precise definition and conceptualisation of transparency is needed; this is presented in the next section.

3.4 Defining transparency

3.4.1 What is transparency?

Definitions of transparency are mostly of a very general nature. Further, they are often metaphorical and consist of an inward perspective, meaning that one can monitor an organisation from the outside. Two of such definitions are 'lifting the veil of secrecy'

(Davis, 1998) and 'the ability to look clearly through the windows of an institution' (Den Boer 1998, p. 105). A more descriptive definition is that of Birkinshaw (2006, p. 189-191), who states that 'transparency is the conduct of public affairs in the open or otherwise subject to public scrutiny'. Hood (2001, p. 701) has a more traditional view regarding transparency: 'transparency denotes government according to fixed and published rules on the basis of information and procedures that are accessible to the public and (in some usages) within clearly demarcated fields of activity'. However, transparency in this dissertation is understood in a broader sense than publishing rules and behaving according to them. Graham (2002, p. 11) argues that transparency generally seeks to 'influence activities beyond those that are the targets of government rules'. This is in line with Northrup and Thorson (2003); to them transparency denotes exposing more of the internal workings of government to interested citizens. Comparably, Gerring and Thacker (2004, p. 316) understand transparency as 'the availability and accessibility of relevant information about the functioning of the polity'. This overlaps with the description of Birkinshaw, although he does not distinguish a certain public as Northrup and Thorson do ('interested citizens'), and the object of transparency is specified to public affairs instead of 'internal workings'.

Florini (2007, p. 5) goes one step further as she includes in her definition the consequences of viewing information. She refers to transparency as 'the degree to which information is available to outsiders that enables them to have informed voice in decisions and/or to assess the decisions made by outsiders'. This definition thus includes a participatory element. The possible consequences or actions following transparency are relevant, though not considered to be part of the concept itself. This dissertation therefore opts for a narrower definition of transparency.

In sum, most definitions of transparency recognise the extent to which an entity reveals relevant information about its own decision processes, procedures, functioning and performance (Welch & Wong, 2001; Gerring & Thacker, 2004; Curtin & Meijer, 2006). As such, transparency typically incorporates multiple components, including the availability of information about the internal workings or performance of an organisation. This enables 'inward observability', which refers to the ability of individuals and groups outside of the organisation to monitor activities and decisions undertaken within it.

This leads to the following definition:

Transparency is the availability of information about an organisation or actor allowing external actors to monitor the internal workings or performance of that organisation.

The following five components of the abovementioned definition are discussed in the next few sections.

1. Availability
2. Information
3. Organisation or actor
4. External actors
5. Monitor internal workings or performance

Transparency has now been defined in four components. Before going into detail on each component concerning what transparency is, and how it is used in this dissertation, it is first important to discuss what transparency is *not*.

3.4.2 What transparency is not

Transparency relates to several important concepts in contemporary governance research. The difference between transparency and openness is confusing and will therefore be briefly laid out in this section.

Transparency versus openness

Transparency and openness are often used interchangeably. Often they are even considered to be synonymous (Etzioni, 2010, p. 389). Transparency, instead of openness, might be seen as the 'contemporary term of choice' (Heald, 2006, p. 25). Larsson (1998, p. 40-42) stresses that transparency is broader than the concept of openness. Transparency goes further and embraces the simplicity and comprehensibility of the information made available. This leads Heald (2006, p. 26) to conclude that 'openness might therefore be thought of as a characteristic of the organisation, where transparency also requires external receptors capable of processing information made available'. Meijer et al. (2011) argue that the difference between openness and transparency is less subtle. Contrariwise, they state that 'open government' is the encompassing concept which consists of transparency and participation. In sum, transparency and openness or open government are strongly

related yet conceptually different concepts. The exact difference is still debated, however; for the sake of clarity in this dissertation we will use the term “transparency” rather than the term “openness”.

Transparency versus participation

The previous discussion on the difference between transparency and openness already mentioned participation. Transparency and participation are often linked, and sometimes transparency definitions indeed include a participatory component (O’Neill, 1998, p. 404 Florini, 2007, p. 5). Most scholars do not consider participation to be inherent to transparency, however. Although it might be the case that transparency enables participation of citizens in processes of public decision-making, they are conceptually different (e.g. Meijer et al., 2011).

Transparency versus accountability

Transparency is often seen as an accountability mechanism in itself. The disclosure of relevant information is an important condition in enabling the accountability of governmental bodies, yet it should not be equated to it (Meijer, Brandsma & Grimmelikhuijsen, 2010). The basic idea is that accountability mechanisms include a preceding information phase in which the one held to account transfers information to the forum (the entity that is holding someone to account). This phase is necessary to assess the behaviour and performance of a government organisation (Bovens, 2007). If no information is available it is impossible for the forum to reconstruct facts and details about what events occurred in the past and how these events should be judged. In the accountability debate, transparency is also discussed as a possible mechanism to improve ‘horizontal accountability’. This means citizens themselves can assess the performance and behaviour of government organisations and administrators. This could enhance transparency to contribute to public accountability.

Transparency and e-government

Computer-mediated transparency is considered to be a part of e-government. The e-government literature has focused heavily on the improvement of efficiency and electronic service delivery to citizens (e.g. Layne & Lee, 2001; Moon, 2002). E-government is said to cause a shift in the traditional bureaucratic paradigm, making government work more efficiently and become more customer-oriented (Ho, 2002). According to Moon (2002, p. 425), transparency is merely one aspect of e-

government. In addition, Layne and Lee (2001) regard information provision as only the first stage in e-government development in their four-stage model. In this dissertation it is argued that transparency is much broader than described in the e-government literature. A certain degree of transparency is necessary to achieve an accountable and democratic government, and the Internet is a means to spread information to the public more cheaply, conveniently, and in various formats.

Four concepts (related yet different from transparency) have been discussed. This demarcation makes clear what is not meant with transparency in this dissertation. Further specification of the five components in the definition of transparency is explored in the next section.

3.5 Component 1: Availability

The availability of information is crucial to the definition of transparency: how is information made available? Information can be available in passive or active forms. An example of passive transparency is through FOI-requests (Relly & Sabwarhal, 2009). This means that information is available on request (hence "passive"). Passive transparency is the more traditional form of transparency. On the other hand, debates on modern day transparency tend to focus on active transparency: information is available to people without them having to make a specific request for that information. This has been greatly enabled by ICTs and the Internet in particular. Because of this, the active (computer-mediated) form of transparency has received a great deal of scholarly attention (e.g. Meijer, 2009 and Dawes, 2010), and therefore it will also be the focus of this dissertation.

A stream of transparency literature specifically concerns Internet transparency. La Porte, Demchak, and de Jong (2002) connect their definition of transparency with the availability of information on websites: transparency is 'a laymen's basic map of the organization as depicted in the information on the site [and] reveals the depth of access it allows, the depth of knowledge about processes it is willing to reveal, and the level of attention to citizen response it provides'. And, according to Welch, Hinnant and Moon (2005) transparency also regards the amount of online information available on official government websites.

Overall, information availability can refer to both active and passive transparency. This dissertation focuses on the active form of transparency, which means that information is readily available to external actors without them first having to explicitly request it. Active transparency is ushered to a great extent by technological advancements and will be the focus of this dissertation. The availability of information concern the question *how* information is made transparent (passive or active), however, the character of information that determines the degree of transparency remained unclear thus far. The second component outlined in the next section sheds light on this issue.

3.6 Component 2: Information[4]

'Information' is the second crucial component in the transparency definition. Three dimensions of information are distinguished in this dissertation: 1) information completeness, 2) information colouring and 3) information usability.

Information *completeness* refers to whether the information is disclosed fully (i.e. its comprehensiveness). To what extent is all information laid out and disclosed (Drew & Nyerges, 2004)? Moon and Norris (2005) refer to transparency as the amount of information available on official government websites. Although the amount of information is important, completeness of information should not be equated to amount. For instance, government organisations that overload citizens with a huge number of inaccurate policy reports might be considered less transparent than those with concise yet accurate content. Although important, in this dissertation 'information completeness' is regarded to be only one of the defining elements of information.

The *colour* of information refers to the degree of positiveness of the information. This is considered to be important, because a government website is often used as a means to communicate with the public and spread rose-tinted press-releases about government policies. This trend is also observed on the national level by Roberts (2005a). He argues that since more and more extensive Freedom of Information laws have been implemented in several countries, the amount of spin control over what

[4] Typically 'information' is distinguished from 'data'. Information has meaning for the recipient, whereas data are the bare 'facts and figures'. In this dissertation this distinction between data and information was taken into account in one particular dimension of information, namely 'information usability'.

should and should not be allowed to be published has moved closer toward center stage in the operations of government. Scholars seem to agree that information on government websites tends to be overly positive about government actions or officials (Davis, 1999; Mahler & Regan, 2007; Etzioni, 2010, p. 398). In sum, in this dissertation the extent to which information is coloured by a politically favourable interpretation of the truth is the second central dimension of information.

The third major element in determining the degree of computer-mediated transparency is the *usability* of information on a website. Instead of just divulging more information, the way in which information is offered to the public is also important. For instance, transparency also implies that information is disclosed in a timely matter and presented in an understandable format (Larsson, 1998; Heald, 2006; Karr, 2008; Dawes, 2010).[5]

Heald (2006) emphasises the importance of the temporal dimension for transparency. He mentions the distinction of 'real time' versus 'retrospective' transparency. Real time transparency is characterised by continuous surveillance. This means that the 'transparency window' is always open and that the government organisation can continuously be rendered accountable. This window is only open at periodic intervals in case of retrospective transparency. Transparency in retrospect means that a government organisation carries out its policy without the involvement of others and only afterwards releases information or reports, for example on a yearly basis. An organisation is able to prepare for this moment, and after that the reporting cycle repeats itself. Hence, there is a reporting lag inherent in retrospective transparency, whereas this lag is absent or very small with continuous transparency. Although retrospective versus real-time transparency is not equal to 'old' and 'recent' information per se, the aspect of timeliness is important in determining the usability of transparency.

The importance of the comprehensibility of information is emphasised by several scholars. Larsson (1998, p. 40-42) stresses that transparency embraces the simplicity and comprehensibility of the information made available. This leads Heald (2006, p. 26) to conclude that 'openness might therefore be thought of as a

[5] The limitations of this operationalisation of this dimension is discussed in Chapter 9, section 5.

characteristic of the organization, whereas transparency also requires external receptors capable of processing information made available'. In addition, Drew and Nyerges (2004) state that the clarity of information is an important part of transparency.

Overall, three dimensions of information have been distinguished that are all relevant in determining the *degree* of transparency. These three elements are used in Chapter 5, which discusses the methods in order to further operationalise transparency.

3.7 Component 3: about an organisation or actor

What is meant with 'organisation or actor'? First of all, it may concerns public or private organisations. Secondly, there are two options as to which actor or organization is creating transparency: 1) an organisation or actor discloses the information about another organisation, or 2) the information is disclosed by the same organisation or actor that is being transparent.

First there is the broad distinction between public organisations and private businesses. This dissertation focuses on transparency government organisations instead of transparency of private businesses. Transparency has traditionally been much more interwoven with government practices than with those of privately run organisations. Government organisations are expected to carry out their daily activities properly, just as are private organisations, yet there is always extra pressure put on being transparent about these activities. Being open about decisions, activities and results should be made transparent to ensure that abuse of public money and power is avoided. Of course, since the ENRON case we know that transparency is an important asset for private businesses, too. For example, the literature on 'corporate governance' emphasises the importance of business and financial transparency (Lowenstein, 1996; Bushman, 2003; Pajuste, 2005). Nevertheless, the demands for openness on these organisations are lower and opaqueness is often successfully defended based on the argument of 'secrecy of trade'.

Secondly, what is meant with 'organisation or actor' depends on who is disclosing information about whom. For example, some other actor might disclose information

about *another* public or private organization or organisations or actors can be transparent about their *own* activities.

The first option might be used to correct market failure or to decrease the knowledge deficiencies of citizens so that they are able to make informed choices about products or (public) services. This is called 'targeted transparency' by Fung, Graham, and Weil (2007). For instance, government may oblige car manufacturers to disclose information about the safety of their cars. This enables consumers to make more informed choices, and it might encourage manufacturers to construct safer cars. This type of transparency also includes transparency of inspection reports about the quality of schools or hospitals (Meijer, 2004). Instead, this dissertation focuses on organisations that are transparent about their own activities. More specifically, it focuses on a government organisation being made transparent by that same government organisation.

3.8 Component 4: External actors

The fourth component of transparency concerns the internal workings or performance of government that can now be influenced by external actors. External actors are individuals groups of individuals outside the government organisation that can now look 'inside' due to transparency. Because of this, individuals or groups that previously had not been allowed access to decision-making arenas are now enabled to influence government decision-making and regulations (O'Donnell, 1998). One could think of several types of external actors: journalists, citizens or other intermediaries such as experts, activists or mass media that monitor information about internal workings or performance divulged by public or private organisations. Since this dissertation focuses on *citizen* trust in government, citizens are specified as 'external actors'.

How can we characterise citizens using computer-mediated transparency? Although little is known about the characteristics of individual transparency users, a study by Van Dijk et al. (2008) showed that those who use (local) government websites are relatively young and well-educated. Other studies into the use of *political* websites confirm that users are indeed disproportionally highly educated. This is an image that is confirmed by a survey measuring the use of websites for political communication in

Flanders (Hooghe & Vissers, 2009). In addition, 2009 Pew Internet survey data (N=2,258) shows that 48 percent used the Internet to look for information about a public policy or issue online with their local, state or federal government. Those likely to look for this type of government information online are users with at least college education and are under the age of 65.

In sum, the 'external actors' in this book are considered to be citizens. Other actors can be distinguished, yet since we focus on citizen trust in government this is also central to the definition of transparency. Further, prior research into users of political and government websites shows that citizens who 'use' transparency tend to be highly educated and are, to an extent, relatively young. We will now shift focus from those who are watching (i.e. citizens) to the 'watched': the internal operations of government organisation brought to light by transparency.

3.9 Component 5: Internal workings

What kind of 'internal workings' of government organization can be made transparent? Prior research has shown that transparency occurs as a part of separate stages in the policy cycle of government. These objects correspond to prior research by Heald (2006), who identified different points at which government establishes the level of transparency. He adopts a traditional distinction of events on input, output and outcome on the one hand, contrasted to processes in between these events. How do government organisations get from input to output, and how do they get from output to outcome? Processes are not measureable in the same way as events, but they can be described. Heald's conceptualisation works best with regard to the production of concrete public services. The main focus of this study, however, is the transparency of government policy. Therefore, Heald's distinction of objects of transparency is combined with developmental stages of the traditional policy cycle (Fig. 3.1).

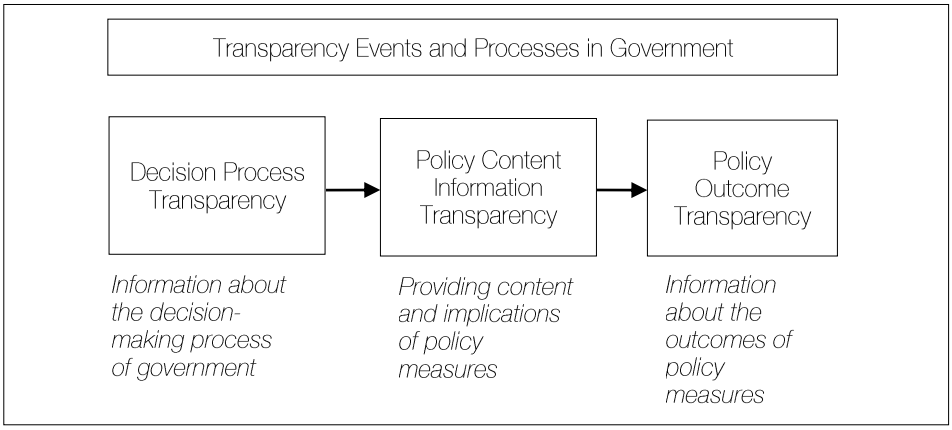

Figure 3.1 – Event and process model adapted from Heald (2006).

Figure 3.1 contains an adaptation of Heald's conceptualisation of transparency based on the policy cycle. It should be noted that the original policy cycle consists of more stages (Parsons, 1995; Hoogerwerf, 2003; Akkers & Fenger, 2005). According to these scholars, agenda setting and policy preparation are also said to be part of the cycle. These are, however, not used in the conceptual scheme of transparency objects, since these phases are pre-phases of actual government policy-making. Myriad individual and social problems exist that only become policy problems when preparing and setting the agenda (Akkers & Fenger, 2005). These pre-phases are therefore less relevant to transparency and are not discussed here.

The policy cycle has been criticised for being too static. For instance, the stages in the cycle are not necessarily sequential. In addition, multiple cycles of a policy problem might exist simultaneously (Sabatier, 1999). Policy-making has even been characterised as 'muddling through' (Lindblom, 1959; Schön, 1979). Without delving too deeply into the criticism concerning the traditional policy cycle, this study acknowledges that these stages cannot always be separated in practice. However, these stages are still useful for the sake of conceptual clarity. In other words, the recognition of certain stages (or so as they might appear from the outside) is helpful as a conceptual tool to be clear about the object of transparency.

Figure 3.1 distinguishes three objects of transparency corresponding with three stages in the policy cycle: 1) transparency of political decision-making processes; 2) policy transparency; and 3) transparency of policy outcomes. As government makes

decisions about policy, it engages in a search process in which problems are presented, potential solutions are identified and choices are made given the constraints and opportunities that exist at that point in time.

Decision-making transparency concerns the degree of openness about the steps taken to reach a decision and the rationale behind the decision. Democratic decision-making transparency has traditionally been a cornerstone of accountability. This provides citizens with relevant information about decisions that affect them, and allows them to check whether these decisions are in line with acceptable norms or election promises. Open meetings and open minutes of parliamentary meetings are examples of forms of decision-making transparency.

Policy transparency refers to the information disclosed by government about the policy itself: what the adopted measures are, how they are supposed to solve a problem, how they will be implemented and what implications they will have for citizens and other affected groups. For example, many government organisations have websites on which they tout their policy plans containing proposed measures to combat pressing problems such as pollution or crime. The actual policy is the outcome of a decision-making process, and hence policy transparency might be considered to follow from decision-making transparency.

Finally, *policy outcome transparency* captures the provision and timeliness of information about policy effects. For example, it could show a city's crime rates or disclose pollution data. The importance of policy outcome transparency has been catalysed by the growing emphasis of NPM-like reforms on policy results (Pollitt, 2003; Bal, 2008). Further, policy outcomes primarily regard the effect of the policy measures that have been carried out. Therefore policy outcome transparency is considered to follow from policy transparency.

This section described the defining components of transparency in detail. The next section will summarize and delve more deeply into how some of these components are conceptualised, in order to use them for our current study.

3.10 Measuring transparency: a multidimensional approach

The previous section made clear that this dissertation focuses on the active transparency of government organisations (components one and three). Transparency has now been conceptualised; however, two of the four elements leave open several options for the further measurement of transparency: dimensions of information mentioned (component two) and the object of transparency (component four). Prior attempts to measure transparency are outlined first.

Traditionally, scholars interested in measuring computer-mediated transparency have focused on the presence of easily measurable content. For example, the Cyberspace Policy Research Group (CyPRG) developed a Website Attribute Evaluation System (La Porte et al., 2002) which has been widely used in adapted form by others such as West (2001) and, more recently, Pina et al. (2007). These authors have sought to capture transparency content in terms of the online availability and the organisation of reports or laws. While technical accessibility is easily measured, it represents only one part of content transparency.

An attempt to develop evaluation criteria for objectives of government transparency is made by Drew and Nyerges (2004). They specifically focus on decision transparency, which they operationalise by identifying seven objectives of transparency: clarity, accessibility, integration, logic/rationale, truth/accuracy, openness, and accountability. However, they focus only on decision transparency in general and not on computer-mediated transparency. The efforts by CyPRG, and Drew and Nyerges to measure transparency focus on the supply of information.

Contrariwise, Tolbert and Mossberger (2006) operationalise transparency from the perspective of end-users by asking them: 'Are you able to get the information and services you are seeking online?' This shift of focus to the user's perspective is valuable but neglects the multiple dimensions of transparency and their subtleties. In other words, these prior efforts to conceptualise and measure transparency have not examined other objects of transparency or dimensions of information.

In this chapter, three objects of transparency (decision-making, policy, and policy outcome) and three dimensions of information (completeness, colour and usability)

have been presented. In order to gain a deeper understanding of transparency, this multidimensionality will be used to measure transparency more accurately (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 – Theoretical objects and dimensions of transparency

		Dimension of transparency		
		Completeness	*Colour*	*Usability*
Object of transparency	*Decision-making*	Complete information (e.g. elaborations and rationale behind decisions) about the decision-making process are available.	Information is reflecting all values and opinions in the process.	Decision-making process made insightful in a timely and understandable. manner.
	Policy information	All relevant policy plans and measures are available.	Reflecting both negative and positive issues about the policy.	Policy plans and measures are made insightful in a timely and understandable manner.
	Policy outcome	All qualitative and quantitative data about relevant policy outcomes are available.	Effects are determined objectively, there is room for dissenting opinions about policy outcome.	Policy outcomes are made insightful in a timely and understandable manner.

Table 3.1 presents a multidimensional conceptualisation of the three dimensions of information for each object of transparency. This means that when trying to assess the degree of transparency, nine combinations are possible. Some dimensions create mutual tensions: usability and completeness of information, for example, are hardly complementary (Karr, 2008; Dawes, 2010). If information is complete, this means that a great deal of information is available; however, this makes it much more difficult for people to actually use this information. Each object of transparency potentially varies on each of the three dimensions of information. Not all combinations of the matrix will be used in this dissertation; instead, the conceptualisation in Table 3.1 should be viewed as an overall framework, of which several elements will be highlighted and

investigated. The combinations to be highlighted will be outlined in the chapter on methodology (Chapter 5).

3.11 Conclusion

Transparency often is used in broad and sweeping statements: for many it is the key to better governance. The rise of the transparency doctrine fits a politico-administrative development towards a more accessible public administration. This could enhance the trust of citizens in government, while the use of Internet possibly contributes to increasing government transparency. Huge amounts of information can be released at a relatively low cost. This information can be read by anyone with access to the Internet, independent of time or place. It is therefore said that the Internet enables transparency (Graham, 2002, p. 5; Curtin & Meijer, 2006). This dissertation therefore focuses on computer-mediated government transparency. The main objective of this chapter was to develop a conceptualisation of transparency that can form a basis for empirical analysis. To be able to use government transparency in research, separate objects and dimension of transparency were discerned in this chapter (Fig 3.2).

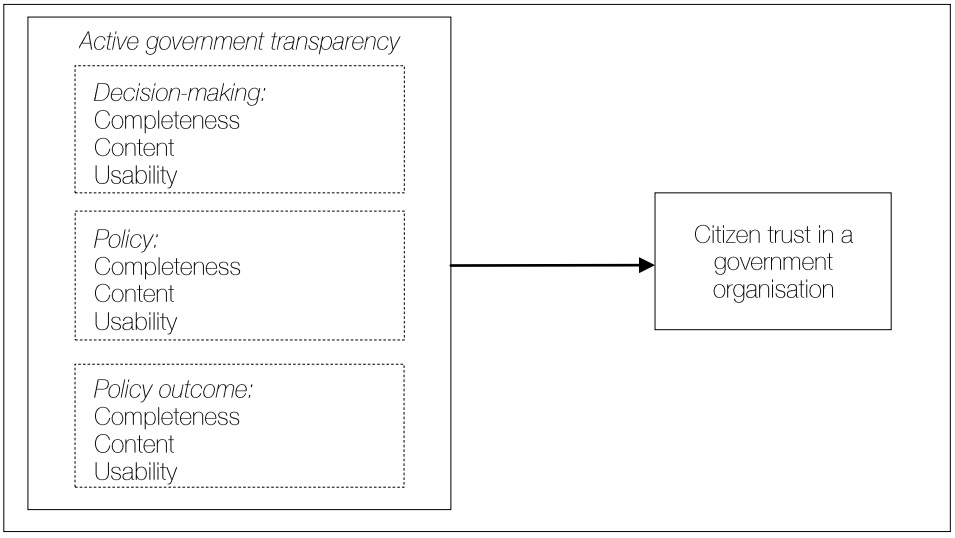

Figure 3.2 – Conceptualisation of transparency in this dissertation

Figure 3.2 makes clear how the five components of our definition of transparency are used. It shows that we focus on active government transparency (components one and three), which is used by citizens (component four). Three objects of transparency have been distinguished (component 5): decision-making transparency, policy transparency and policy outcome transparency. The following dimensions of information have been identified (component 2): completeness, colour, and usability.

In sum, transparency is strongly advocated by citizens, interest groups and some scholars. The main argument of proponents of transparency is that if government practices are held in the limelight it is best for all. It makes government officials perform better, it prevents corruption, and it increases citizen trust in government (e.g. Brin, 1998; Oliver, 2004; Florini, 2007). These claims are countered by scholars who argue that transparency comes with insurmountable negative effects (e.g. O'Neill, 2002; Etzioni, 2010). Whoever is right, the relation between transparency and trust is contested. The next chapter will take a closer look at this relationship.

4. Towards a research model

4.1 What relation? Transparency optimists, pessimists and skeptics

The nature and direction of the relation between transparency and trust is heavily debated. Does more and better information about government actions lead to more trust in government, or does it lead to more politics of scandal, disillusion and less trust? Although some empirical findings exist, results do not exclusively focus on transparency or trust, or evidence is mixed (e.g. West, 2004; Welch, Hinnant, and Moon, 2005; Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006). This third and final theoretical chapter outlines the normative debate on the effect of transparency on trust in government. It specifies the relation between transparency and trust — mapping the mechanism by postulating more precise predictions about the direction and nature of the effect of transparency. This way the relation is made suitable for empirical research.

Throughout this dissertation arguments of the 'optimists' and 'pessimists' have been brought forward; this section will outline the debate in more detail. In addition to the optimistic and pessimistic view, a skeptical view regarding the transparency and trust relation also exists. Skeptics argue that there is no relation between transparency and trust and that, in fact, other factors might determine citizen trust in government.

4.1.1 Transparency optimists: transparency affects trust positively

Arguably the most famous transparency optimist is President Barack Obama, who made a more open government one of his central tenets in the 2008 election campaign. This resulted in the Open Government Directive in his first day in office, which obliged all government agencies to disclose multiple 'high value data sets'. One of the main arguments to be more transparent is, besides political rhetorical reasons, to restore citizen trust in government (White House, 2009). Whether transparency of government leads to higher levels of trust is much discussed throughout the literature. There is a widely shared opinion that transparency ultimately is 'something good' which will eventually increase citizen trust in government (Hood, 2006, p. 3). The point of view that transparency will increase trust is pleaded by transparency advocates like Brin (1998) and Oliver (2004). They ultimately see transparency as something good,

having only a few perverse side effects. These can be eliminated through proper implementation of transparency by governments.
In his book '*The Transparent Society*', Brin (1998) made a strong plea for full transparency of government. The central argument is that government will always have technologies with which to survey citizens. Surveillance might be denoted as 'inverted transparency', since it allows government to check citizen behaviour. This means that while government is not transparent, citizens are. With the emergence of ICTs government will always find ways to track citizens and their behaviour, because ICTs have immensely increased capacities to carry out calculations and process large amounts of data. As a result, it is possible to perform more complex tasks, computations and extrapolations, making it easier to assess the behaviour of both government organisations and citizens, making them both more transparent (Bekkers & Zuurmond, 2005, p. 62). In addition, ICTs have increased the amount of data that are registered, and the opportunities offered to analyse data in multiple ways (Zuboff, 1988; Davenport, 1993). Therefore, Brin argues, transparency should be the general norm. As soon as *all* information is transparent the government will not be able to hide its own secrets. The central idea behind this is that citizens will be able to use the power of transparency to hold government to account.

The latter is argued by many transparency scholars. Increased transparency is said to improve accountability arrangements of government: for example, stakeholder accountability (Meijer, 2007, p. 166). Transparency mediated through the Internet enables third parties (e.g. associations, newspapers, government organisations) to assess, scrutinise and provide feedback on government actions. This in itself might not be necessarily beneficial to trust; yet improved accountability mechanisms should prevent corruption, major errors or abuse of tax payers' money (Florini, 2007). Thus in the end, government misuse of trust is prevented — which increases government legitimacy and public trust in government.

Furthermore, transparency optimists emphasise that transparency is said to stimulate a 'culture of openness' within organisations. They believe the perception of having an open culture also has a positive effect on trust (Hood, 2006, p. 217). According to transparency proponents, 'lifting the veil of secrecy' is beneficial to all of us and that only those who have something to hide oppose transparency. Transparency helps people become more familiar with government and brings them closer and creates

understanding. Nye et al. (1997) emphasise the beneficial effects of the information technology revolution which may help government reach this goal. When people feel a closer connection to government then trust in government tends to be higher. This is based on the basic idea that when citizens do not know government or what it does, they will not come to trust it easily. For example, Campbell (2003) argues that one cause for a lack of trust in government is that citizens are not provided with factual documentation about government processes and performance. In this sense, disclosing information about government activities is crucial to increasing citizen trust.

The increased attention for transparency in recent years is to a large extent inspired by the promise that ICTs brought upon government. Transparency optimists emphasise the positive effects of ICTs on transparency and trust. A study by Innes (1988) into the effects of computerisation in public organisations was rather positive about the effect of data disclosure on the empowerment of underrepresented interests: 'Requirements for agencies to produce and publish data ... encourage public officials to be more responsive to underrepresented interests and broad public concerns' (Innes, 1988, p. 77). This fits with more recent literature of transparency proponents arguing that *computer-mediated* transparency gives people more and better information and thus empowers them to hold government to account (Northrup & Thorson, 2003) or to make better-informed consumer decisions (Fung et al., 2007). According to Meijer (2009), those who argue that ICTs, transparency and trust positively influence each other have a modernistic perspective on societal change: computer-mediated transparency empowers people with better information and thus contributes to the rationalisation of society. This is expected to lead to more democratic and prosperous societies with trustworthy governments.

4.1.2 Transparency pessimists: transparency affects trust negatively

On the other hand, scholars argue that a greater degree of transparency generates the possibility to – justly or unjustly – repeatedly blame the government for mistakes. Three arguments can be identified: 1) transparency leads to misinformation and information overload, 2) transparency leads to increased unjust blaming, and 3) transparency leads to demystification of government.

First, scholars argue that transparency leads to a great deal of information, yet it does not necessarily mean this lead to increased levels of trust. O'Neill (2002, p. 77) argues

that transparency will erode trust. She states that the Internet makes it possible to disclose a great deal of information, which not only leads to a flood of information but also to a flood of misinformation. This causes more uncertainty and results in confusion. Misinformation, according to O'Neill, is inseparable from transparency. Officials who know that information will become public could 'massage' the truth. In short, we will become lost in misinformation which will produce less trust, allowing a 'culture of suspicion' to arise (O'Neill, 2002, p. 77). Other authors, like Bekkers (1993) and Margetts (2006), also point out the risk of an information overload. For example, the number of government websites has increased immensely in recent years. The sheer quantity of information might in fact elicit confusion and, as a result, less appreciation from the public.

Second, transparency pessimists stress that increased transparency could lead to increased blaming of government. According to scholars, a fault by government can always be construed, and if citizens, media and politicians use transparency for their own gain with no restraints, this could result in the 'politics of scandal' (Bovens, 2003; but see also: Roberts, 2005a; Roberts, 2006b and Worthy, 2010, p. 575-576). As a result, transparency could contribute to political cynicism, and citizen trust in government might even decline. By making use of increased transparency it is easier for citizens to audit government; the downside of this is that citizens might – again, justly or unjustly – blame government for small mistakes time and time again (Bovens, 2003). In addition, policy areas are influenced by various factors: responsibility is not solely on the side of government. Making information public on a complex policy issue could give citizens the impression that this is the sole responsibility of this agency, whereas a policy area consists of complex situations and liabilities (Meijer, 2004). This could give rise to the risk of an 'inquisition democracy'.

Third, Bovens (2003) warns about another 'dark side of transparency': when people can see everything behind the scenes of government, they may become disenchanted with it. People notice that behind the scenes, government operations are not as rational as it appears from the outside. It is not a smooth process in which all values and solutions are listed, weighed and then chosen. It is incremental, and it is a process that includes bickering and a lack of resources and information. In addition, increased information might expose limitations of what government can do, thus decreasing trust in politics (Cook, Jacobs & Kim, 2010, p. 398). This reality is

contested, messy and uncertain (e.g. Stone, 1988/2002) and not suitable to strengthen citizen trust. Transparency shines 'sunlight' on this complex reality. The "demystification of government" might be the price that has to be paid for a greater degree of transparency. Exposure of the internal operations behind 'the golden walls of government' can erode its authority and citizen trust

Transparency optimists emphasise the opportunities that ICTs offer for empowering citizens and civil society, as these would be beneficial for trust. In contrast, pessimists argue that ICTs do not really make a difference for transparency and trust because they merely reinforce the power of the existing elites. Kraemer and Dedrick argue that: *'existing elites would use their control over the acquisition and application of computing technologies to maintain their powerful positions'* (1997, p. 106). In other words, computer-mediated transparency will probably not empower citizens to scrutinise government or hold government organisations to account. The use of ICTs is merely a continuation of the old ways of controlling the information streams from the elites to the public, albeit cheaper and available 24/7 (Kraemer & King, 1986). In other words, pessimists argue that old mechanisms of information control are being reinforced, something which will negatively contribute to trust.

4.1.3 Transparency skeptics: transparency has no effect on trust

A third position in the debate on transparency and trust will be called 'transparency skepticism'. Two arguments can be distinguished. First, it is argued that the importance of transparency is much overstated and that other determinants of trust in government are actually more important. Secondly, the very existence of a relation between transparency and trust is disputed. Several scholars argue that transparency probably does not have an effect on trust in government at all.

The first argument is based on the idea that the effect of transparency on a general level is in fact outstripped by other determinants of trust in governments. Roberts (2006b, p. 119) states that more transparency does not necessarily lead to more trust: other factors may be more important for trust in government.

'The determinants of trust are multifactorial, and it is likely that other factors such as the degree of economic uncertainty or physical insecurity felt by citizens [are more important].'

This statement touches on an essential issue: there could be countless determinants of trust in government. Hence, *if* transparency plays any role, this will be one of many determinants and therefore it will be difficult to empirically observe this relation. However, by carrying out an experiment, the effect of extraneous determinants is supposed to be mitigated. Trust in government organisations, in this view, is more likely to be established by larger, exogenous factors such as the economic situation and the policy of the nation's government (Bovens & Wille, 2008) — both of which reflect on the judgment of citizens about individual government organisations.

For example, an important driver for low levels of trust could be economic dissatisfaction (Bovens & Wille, 2008) or a corrupt and inefficient government (Van der Meer, 2009). Another cause is the ongoing individualisation of society. According to Nye et al. (1997), the emphasis and increasing importance of the individual has led to the disintegration of communities and family (cf. Putnam, 2000). Important tasks formerly performed by communities or families are now the responsibility of government. A failed education or upbringing is now blamed on government. Also, declining respect for authority since the 1960s could influence the level of trust in government (Inglehart, 1997). In addition, another development that could affect trust in government in the long term is the emergence of television. Television programmes like to dramatise reality, and this has created what is called the 'mean world syndrome'. Television shows convince viewers that the world is more dangerous than it actually is (Gerbner, Gross & Signorielli, 1994). These are just a few illustrations of broader societal developments that might be more important to trust in government in general. However, this line of argument still leaves room for the existence of a small effect of transparency on trust.

In contrast, the second argument is based on the premise that trust 'may even be entirely unrelated to what government is or does' (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003, p. 333). In his dissertation, Van de Walle (2004) examined the connection between perceived performance of government organisations and trust in government in general. He concluded that general trust in government is not influenced by the performance of a particular government organisation. It is grounded in a more general attitude of people towards government. Van de Walle (2004, p. 166) states that 'perceptions of the public sector may exist independently from the aggregated

evaluation of specific services'. Survey results from this study show that a higher perceived performance of an individual government agency does not increase trust in government in general. Analogous to these findings, a high level of transparency might not influence trust in government in general, which is why this study investigates trust in a specific government organisation. Nonetheless, it is possible that transparency of an individual organisation does not have an effect on the trust people place in this organisation.

After having discussed the normative debate on transparency and trust, the next section presents an overview of the few scholars that have attempted to examine the relation between transparency and trust *empirically*.

4.2 Empirical evidence for a relation?

The results of prior empirical research into transparency and trust are mixed and sometimes even contradictory. Some results show that transparency might have a positive effect, whereas others indicate negative effects. Since only a limited number of studies on transparency and trust exist, studies into the effect of related concepts are also taken into account.

Tolbert and Mossberger (2006) tested whether (local) government website use had any influence on perceived transparency and other perceptions. Next, they tested the effect of these perceptions on trust in government at local, state and federal levels. However, the use of a local government website did not significantly improve the perception of transparency. As a result, the effect of transparency could not be established. However, perceived transparency was measured with the question 'are you able to get information or services you are seeking online?' This focuses on the user-side of transparency, yet it predominantly is a proxy for transparency as it also refers to the ability of people to find information. Hence it partly measures skills of people instead of transparency as such. Nevertheless, the conclusion of Tolbert and Mossberger could point to the non-existence of the relation between transparency and trust in government.

The study by Tolbert and Mossberger (2006) provides several additional interesting insights. Although they did not find evidence for a relation between transparency and

trust, they did find other relations which indicate a positive relation between use of local government websites and positive perceptions of other public values. The use of local government websites was significantly correlated with improved perceived responsiveness which, in turn, was related to a higher level of trust in local government. Although responsiveness is related to the interactions between citizen and government, these results still indicate a positive influence between us of local government websites and the attitudes of citizens towards them. Another result of Tolbert and Mossberger's study is that improved perceptions of local government accessibility actually resulted in reduced trust in local government. Again, a concept like accessibility is not the same as transparency, but is related to it. In sum, Tolbert and Mossberger's study brings out interesting but mixed evidence about the potential effect of transparency on trust.

Another survey study was carried out by Welch et al. (2005), who used survey data from the Council of Excellence in Government to test whether there was a correlation between transparency satisfaction, e-government satisfaction and trust. No direct relation between transparency and trust in government was found. However, results showed a weak but significant correlation between transparency satisfaction and e-government satisfaction. E-government satisfaction strongly predicted trust in government. This provides some evidence for a positive causal relation between transparency and trust. However, as often with survey research, causality can hardly be determined. An opposite direction of causality is not implausible because a higher level of trust could also predict e-government satisfaction. Another survey into the relation between e-government and trust in government was carried out by West (2004). West, however, found no connection between use of government websites and trust in government.

Even if these surveys would have produced significant results on the transparency and trust relation, one can only *assume* causality. Do perceptions of transparency influence trust in government, or do people who already trust government perceive government to be more transparent? Two recent studies offer additional insights in the causal mechanism.

Cook et al. (2010) found evidence that supports the transparency optimists to an extent. Using survey data (N=2,458), they investigated whether people were more

trusting towards the US Social Security Administration after receiving information from it. The results were compared with the evaluations of non-recipients, which thus function as a control group. Results support the idea that citizens' evaluations of government are in part affected by the quantity and quality of the information government sends to citizens. According to Cook et al., the information citizens received about their Social Security statements provided 'clear, factual, nonpartisan, and personally relevant information about Social Security'. Although this might in part support those believing transparency has a positive effect on citizen trust in government, it should be noted that this study might not be a case of actual transparency. The information about Social Security's policies mainly regards the provision of information regarding public service delivery, e.g. one's personal benefits from Social Security. The difference in confidence in Social Security between recipients and non-recipients might be due to the fact that recipients recently received and read a letter informing them about their personal benefits. Nevertheless, these interesting and relevant findings hint at a positive effect of transparency on trust.

De Fine Licht (2011) used an experiment to test whether transparency of decision-making in the health care sector had an effect on trust and acceptance of the decision. She tested several types of decision-making. Participants were asked whether they had trust in Swedish health care after reading a message containing explicit considerations about the decision, whereas other received information containing non-transparent information, i.e. implicit considerations. In contrast to the study by Cook et al. (2010), the main result was that people who encountered the transparent decision-making information had slightly less trust in the health care sector.

In the end these empirical studies are not conclusive regarding the normative debate on transparency and trust. Nevertheless, the next section seeks to formulate three hypotheses regarding the overall effect of transparency.

4.3 Hypothesising the overall effect: does transparency make difference?

In Chapter 2, three dimensions of perceived trustworthiness were distinguished: 1) perceived competence, 2) perceived benevolence and 3) perceived honesty.

However, the debate on transparency and trust is mainly discussed on a general level. No specific pointers were given as to what elements of perceived trustworthiness are affected by transparency. The previous section showed that there was mixed evidence for the relation between transparency and trust. Hence this does not necessarily confirm the 'transparency optimist' literature. However, it seems that in the normative debate mainly positive effects of transparency on trust are emphasised (Blendon et al., 1997; Bok, 1997; Nye et al., 1997; Florini, 1998; Oliver, 2004; Addink, 2005; Birkinshaw, 2006; Hood, 2006; Florini, 2007). Because of the basic assumption of the "goodness" of transparency, three positively formulated hypotheses are put to test:

H1.1: A higher degree of transparency is expected to positively affect perceived competence.
In general, transparent government information brings out information that is not necessarily positive. For example, providing more balanced message content shows the government organisation's shortcomings and uncertainties regarding policy measures. Nevertheless, this hypothesis is formulated positively since transparency more realistically shows what government can and cannot do. This means that people's expectations will be more in accordance to reality because of the information that is disclosed about government decisions, policies and policy outcomes.

H1.2: A higher degree of transparency is expected to positively affect perceived benevolence.
Perceived benevolence is expected to be positively affected by a high level of transparency. Benevolence concerns the intentions of a government organisation, i.e., its willingness to act in the interest of its citizens. If the government organisation is willing to give us transparent policy information, i.e. information that incorporates two sides of the story (positive and negative), or that clearly shows policy outcomes, it may be expected to appear to be more benevolent than will a government organisation which gives us no or non-transparent information.

H1.3: A higher degree of transparency is expected to positively affect perceived honesty.
Perceived honesty is expected to be positively affected by a higher degree of transparency. Such transparency discloses information that gives a more

encompassing image of policy measures taken by local government. Allowing two-sided or more complete information about policies and decision-making of the government organisation increases the perception that the municipality has been fully honest: it gives the impression there is nothing to hide.

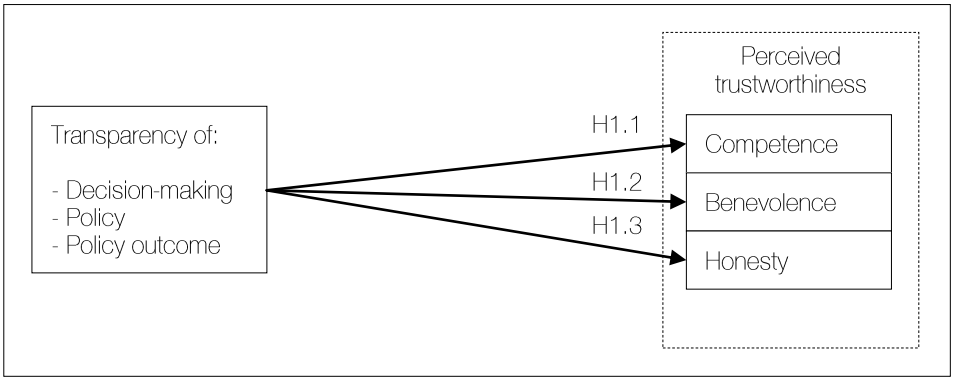

Figure 4.1 –Hypothesised overall effects of transparency

Figure 4.1 sheds light on the overall effects of transparency. It illustrates a list of factors that can be used to test whether transparency makes a difference at all. The exact mechanism through which transparency leads to more trust remains unclear, however.

4.4 Hypothesising the mechanism: a threefold relation?

Thus far, the effect of transparency on trust has been discussed in general terms: does government transparency matter at all? The *mechanism* through which transparency leads to trust has been left unexplored in this chapter. Also in the literature mainly the overall effect of transparency is assessed (e.g. Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006; Cook et al., 2010; De Fine Licht, 2011). This section seeks to open up this "black box" in order to specify the mechanism between transparency and trust: how does transparency lead to trust, given that citizens indeed make use of information about decisions, policies and policy outcomes.

4.4.1 The direct effect of transparency

In contrast to specific knowledge and message credibility, which are to be discussed in the next section, this relation is not mediated, i.e., is a direct effect. What is the nature of this relation and how can we hypothesise it?

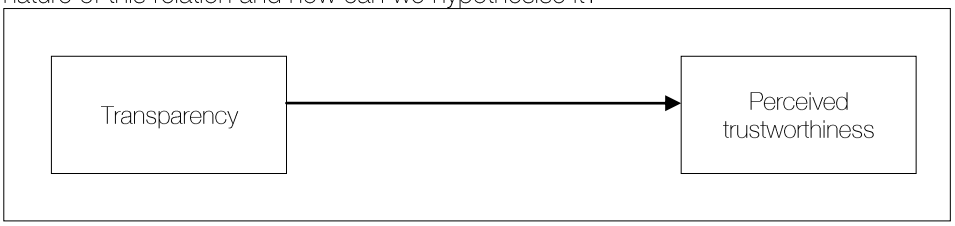

Figure 4.2 –Transparency and perceived trustworthiness

The direct effect entails a judgment based not so much on knowledge or the credibility of the information but on the act of transparency as such. Hence, the organisation might not be necessarily scrutinised on the *precise* content but on more simple cues. This direct effect of transparency on perceived trustworthiness is characterised less by cognitive processes such as rational prediction (knowledge) or conscious assessment of information (message credibility) but merely by simpler and more affective cues such as the general image of the government organisation. Lewis and Weigert (1985, p. 972) argued that 'trust in everyday life is a *mix* of feeling and rational thinking, and so to exclude one or the other from the analysis of trust leads only to misconceptions that conflate trust with faith or prediction'. Thus, on the one hand, having complete knowledge about future behaviour of the government organisation is pure rational predication. On the other hand, trust purely based on feelings (affection) and no proof would be called "faith". Assessment of the act of transparency as such, without specifically assessing the message based on credibility cues or knowledge, is therefore considered to be more based on faith and thus to be the most affection-based relation between transparency and perceived trustworthiness.

Overall, this is considered to be the least rational 'route to trust', without any connection to credibility or knowledge. A positive direct effect is expected since the general judgment of people about the act of transparency itself is thought to be positive: being transparent as such is perceived as a positive value in itself (e.g. Birkinshaw, 2006). For example, it is argued that higher levels of transparency contribute to the perception that an open culture exists within the government

organisation, which contributes to trust (Roberts, 2006b, p. 107). The direct relation between transparency and trust is tested by the following hypothesis:

H2.1: A higher degree of transparency is expected to have a positive direct effect on perceived competence, benevolence and honesty.

4.4.2 Knowledge about government and trust

The second effect of transparency that is discussed here is the effect of specific knowledge about a government organisation (see Fig. 4.3).

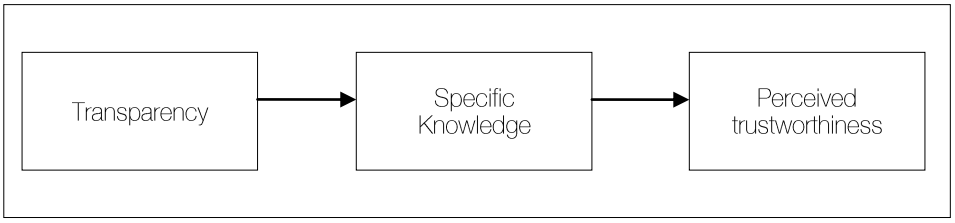

Figure 4.3 – Knowledge and perceived trustworthiness

When people receive information through the use of transparency it supposedly leads to higher levels of knowledge. Transparency might lead to more citizen knowledge and thus influence decisions to trust in a government organisation. Bigley and Pearce (1998, p. 411) state that '*…as people become more acquainted with specific others, their personal knowledge of those others becomes the primary driver of their thoughts and actions'.*

In Chapter 2, we saw that trust in government is mainly regarded as 'cognition-based trust'. This means that trust is based on 'good reasons', and a decision to trust based on knowledge is a rational, cognitive decision. Cognitive trust arises from an accumulated knowledge that allows one to make relatively confident predictions regarding the likelihood that the object of trust is indeed trustworthy. Nevertheless, an incomplete state of knowledge is implied when considering cognition-based trust (McAllister, 1995, p. 25-26; Johnson & Grayson, 2005, p. 501). If people have total knowledge there is no need to trust since the behaviour of the other can be predicted. On the other hand, if people have no knowledge at all, there are no grounds upon which to rationally trust. Available knowledge and 'good reasons' serve as foundations for trust decisions — the platform from which people make leaps of

faith, like those involved in trusting (Luhmann, 1979; McAllister, 1995). However, since complete knowledge about someone's future actions is a fiction, a certain extent of trust is always needed.
In this dissertation we will focus on the role knowledge in the transparency and trust relation. If we first assume that transparency increases citizens' knowledge about government, this increased knowledge could have several effects on citizen trust in government.

The literature is not clear about the direction or nature of this relation, but three points of view can be distinguished:

First, a pessimistic view on knowledge dictates that higher levels of knowledge about government could breed distrust. Well-known scholars who contend this argument are Hibbing & Theiss-Moore (1995, 2001). In their studies they found that those people who know the American Congress the best tend to like it the least. Efforts to increase understanding of government processes and results may lead only to greater cynicism and distrust. Kimball and Patterson (1997) found that increased citizen knowledge can increase expectations, which results in greater disappointment with government performance.

A second point of view in the debate on the role of knowledge and trust states that knowledge about "the other" actually contributes to trust. According to Lewicki and Bunker (1995) 'knowledge-based trust' is a type of trust that forms over time with increased knowledge. In a search to explain low levels of trust in government, a lack of knowledge about government processes and actions is argued to be a cause. People tend to be very critical about government activities if they do not know much about them (Blendon et al., 1997, p. 215). It is assumed that if citizens are better informed the public is more trusting of government. Cook et al. (2010) examined the impact of factual information about a specific government institution on citizens' knowledge of and trust in government. The findings of their study show that the providing people with (objective) information can enhance citizens' knowledge, which causes an increase in trust in government.

Proponents of a third point of view argue that more knowledge does not lead to more or less trust per se. High levels of knowledge simply alter people's judgment criteria.

Differences in knowledge levels change the considerations of citizens when judging a government organisation. According to Mondak, Carmines, Huckfeldt, Mitchell, and Schraufnagel (2007), knowledge helps citizens to develop more specific criteria to make judgments about the object of which they have specific knowledge. For example, by having access to information about public decision making, people judge the organisation based on their knowledge of this process rather than basing their opinion on a general perception of government at the national level.

The following, positively formulated, hypothesis fits with recent results found by Cook et al. (2010) about the effect of information on knowledge and trust:

H2.2: A higher degree of transparency is expected to lead to higher levels of knowledge, which is expected to have an effect on perceived competence, benevolence and honesty.

4.4.3 Message credibility and trust

The second effect identified in the mechanism is expected to run through message credibility (Fig. 4.4).

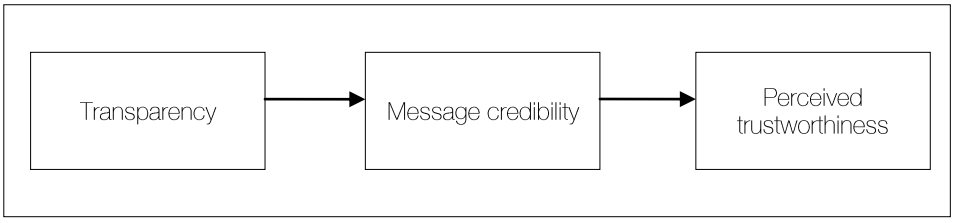

Figure 4.4 – Message credibility and perceived trustworthiness.

Information laid down in a message is a crucial element in transparency, as transparency regards the transmission of information from government to citizens. As such, the credibility of the information itself is a second central element in the transparency and trust relation. A message that is perceived as untrustworthy in the opinion of an individual is a reason to be critical about the organisation that promotes this message (cf. Metaxas & DeStefano, 2005, p. 70; Flanagin & Metzger, 2007).

This dissertation regards *computer-mediated* transparency. Citizens using transparent websites have online interaction with government. Roosenbloom (2000) addresses a

relevant issue regarding trust in online interactions by stressing that 'online interactions represent a complex blend of human actors and technology' (2000, p. 2). It is not immediately clear what or whom people trust in case of online interactions. For example, do people engage in a trusting relation with the information or with the organisations?

This complex blend of trust relations is partly disentangled by Flanagin and Metzger (2007), who distinguish various 'layers' of credibility. Credibility does not equal the concept of trust, yet Flanagin and Metzger include various components that are similar (e.g. integrity, a sincere interest). Three types of credibility are distinguished: message credibility, site credibility and sponsor credibility. 'Message credibility' is dependent on aspects of the message itself. Past research has stressed the importance of completeness and accuracy of online information as dimensions of credible and sound information (Boritz, 2004, p. 21; Nicolaou & McKnight, 2006; Flanagin & Metzger, 2007, p. 327). 'Site credibility' refers to the site features such as the visuals or amount of information used on the website. 'Sponsor credibility' deals with perceptions of the website sponsor, in our case the government organisation. For the purpose of this study the distinction between the first and the latter are especially relevant. 'Sponsor credibility' in this dissertation is referred to as trust in a government organisation. This government organisation is perceived through the message on a website. Hence, to measure the effect of transparency in the organisation behind the website it is equally important to assess the credibility of the information itself. This touches on the nature of the relation between transparency, message credibility and perceived trustworthiness of a government organisation.

The nature of the relation between message credibility and trust has sometimes been interpreted by the way people read messages on websites. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) offers important insights with regard to how people assess information in general. The ELM states that persuasion can take place both through effortful and effortless processing of information. This 'central route' of ELM – also referred to as the Cognitive Response Approach – proposes that individuals who are exposed to a persuasive message relate the message to their existing knowledge about the message topic (Bohner, 2001, p. 253). Persuasion is a process that involves active information-processing in terms of scrutiny of message arguments and other relevant information. In case of

"effortful" processing people assess the message itself, whereas the "effortless" route involves processing simple cues such as the appearance of a message and thus does not closely scrutinise the message itself. It is expected that at least part of the relation between transparency and trust is determined by effortful processing of information.

In sum, there is a difference between trust people place in the information they draw from the website and their trust in the actual government organisation. That is, if a person visits a government website, does one find the information credible, and does this affect trust in the actual government organisation? The latter is the dependent variable in this study, but message credibility is directly observable by people. Visitors try to form a perception of the trustworthiness of a government organisation based on the information they read. This might be done through effortful assessment of the information people read.

H2.3: A higher degree of transparency is expected to lead to higher message credibility, which is expected to have a positive effect on perceived competence, benevolence and honesty.

4.4.4 A research model for the transparency and trust mechanism

In order to develop this study, the mechanism through which transparency leads to trust was mapped in this chapter, which led to a research model depicted in Figure 4.5. This model tests three relations between transparency and trust: a direct effect, knowledge, and message credibility.

Figure 4.5 shows the proposed mechanism through which transparency leads to perceived trustworthiness of a government organisation. In contrast to the hypothesised *overall* effects, the mechanism is enacted only when people actually use transparency. The strength of each relation in the model will be tested in the subsequent empirical chapters.

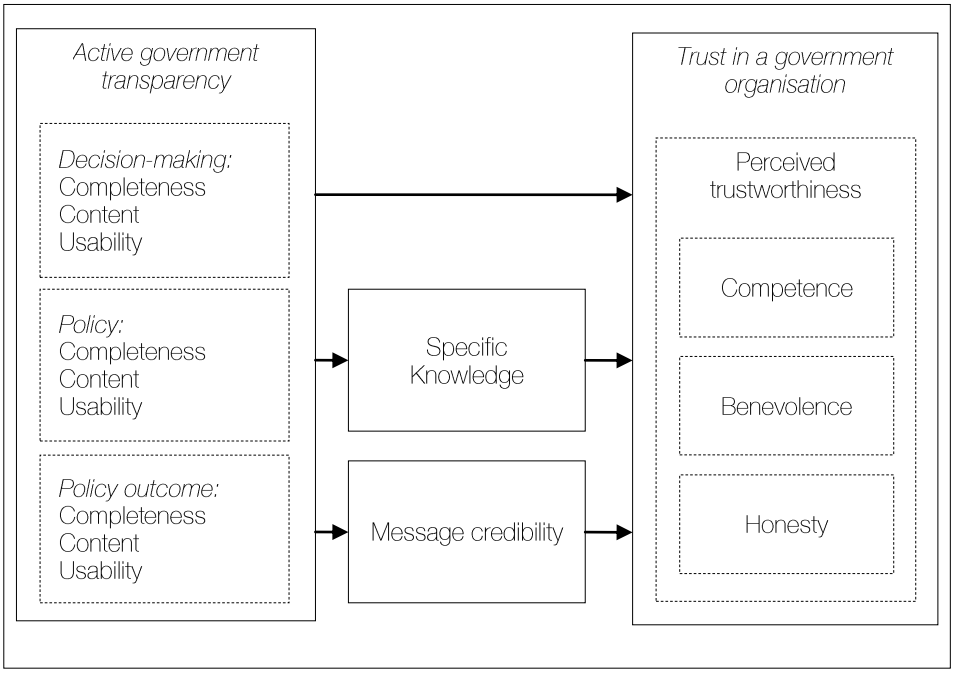

Figure 4.5 – The hypothesised mechanism between transparency and trust

4.5 Conclusion: testing overall effects and specific relations

In this chapter the general and normative debate on transparency and trust has been outlined and several relations have been specified. What consequences does this have for the general research question postulated in the first chapter? In Chapter 1 the following central research question was posed: *Does government transparency have an effect on citizen trust?*

Chapter 2, 3 and 4 have further specified this question, by specifying the core concepts of this question: government transparency, citizen trust and the relation between these two concepts. In the current literature "government transparency" is mainly treated as a holistic concept. In this dissertation a much needed more specified conceptualization has been outlined. In Chapter 3, government transparency was specified by distinguishing three objects: decision-making, policy, and policy outcome. Moreover, completeness, colour and usability were identified as three important dimensions of the disclosed information.

Further, "citizen trust" was narrowed down to the perceived trustworthiness of a specific government organisation. In this dissertation three dimensions of perceived trustworthiness have been distinguished from the literature: 1) perceived competence, 2) perceived benevolence and 3) perceived honesty. This is a much more specific notion of trust than used in the debate on trust and transparency.

This chapter identified two types of relations which fill in the "effect of transparency on trust". The first type tests whether transparency makes a difference at all. This means that the overall effect of transparency is compared to people's general perceived trustworthiness to the government organisation. In contrast, the second type of relation seeks to reveal the largely neglected mechanism through which transparency leads to trust when it is used by people. By combining these two types of tests we gain insights into *what* is the effect of transparency and into what is the *nature* of this effect.

Altogether these three chapters have specified the general research question to a much greater extent so as that it is suitable for further empirical research. Chapter 5 will delve deeper into *how* these relations are going to be tested. It will make clear which research questions, hypotheses, research design and techniques are used in this study.

5. Experimental research design

5.1 Experiments in public administration research

Transparency and trust can be studied empirically in various ways to broaden our understanding of their relationship. This relationship has often been studied using the traditional methods of case studies (Moon, 2003) and surveys (West, 2004; Welch et al., 2005; Tolbert & Mossberger, 2006). Mainstream public administration research aims to study the units of analysis relevant to transparency and trust – individuals, organisations, countries, policies – as they "act" in reality. Each research method has its own merits. Surveys have been used to examine correlations or to assess the extent of a phenomenon's occurrence. Case studies have been carried out to uncover unexplored relationships with a rich reconstruction of reality. However, the surveys and case studies can hardly be used to determine causality.

To determine causality in a relationship we need to be sure what the cause is and what the effect is. John Stuart Mill (2009 [1843]) developed three simple and useful criteria for establishing causality[6]. The first and foremost prerequisite is the aspect of time: did the cause *precede the effect in time*? If not, the "cause" simply cannot be a cause. The second prerequisite for determining causality regards the effect of the cause: cause and effect need to *co-vary*. This means that after cause X appears, effect Y is apparent, too. Thirdly we should be certain that there are *no confounding* extraneous variables in the relationship. Confounding variables could cause us to believe that variable X causes effect Y, while Y is actually caused by another variable, Z. For example, one could determine a relationship between the sales of ice cream and the number of deaths by drowning. Both might be positively correlated; however, inferring a causal relationship would be an error. The confounding variable in this relationship is the rise in temperature, which causes both people to swim more often (and hence drown more frequently) and a rise in ice cream sales.

[6] Although several views on concept of causation exist, these three of J.S. Mill's criteria for causality are widely accepted as being the most central aspects. For a more extensive discussion on causality and causation, see Cook and Campbell (1979: 1-36).

This research has the specific aim of determining causality in the relation between transparency and trust. When testing causal effects, few of the methods in the social sciences can live up to this rigor and level of control of an experimental design (Scott, 1997). Experiments as a basis for scientific discovery have a long history. Francis Bacon (1561-1626) is called the 'father of experimentation' or the 'father of empiricism'. His method of research was the first to be based on observations. He believed that all available information should be gathered and listed. After that, one should add what is discovered by new experiments. All information is then listed and tabulated. Next, based on these collections and discussions about them, there are 'new experiments of a higher light, more penetrating into nature than the former', and finally, these latest discoveries by experiments are formulated 'into greater observations, axioms, and aphorisms'[7]. This might not be experimentation in the modern scientific sense, yet it is the basis of the modern method of science.

Because of its suitability to investigating causality, an experiment is the design of choice for this study. The experiment was designed to let participants experience different objects and dimensions of transparency, after which they were asked about their trust in the government organisation under study. This meets the first criterion of causality: the cause (transparency) precedes the potential effect (trust) in time. The principle of covariance, the second criterion of J.S. Mill, is carried out by measuring both transparency and trust and analysing them on covariance in a statistical analysis. This dissertation aims to investigate the causal effect of transparency on trust while applying the third criterion: holding other factors constant and randomly attributing participants to experimental manipulations.

This chapter will present information about three experiments that have been conducted. First, however, we will look at how a realistic context was designed in this experiment. This outlines how the experiment was made realistic and relevant to participants. Next, the experiments in this dissertation are explained further: what is their design and which procedures were followed? The subsequent part of this

[7] Information obtained from a biography of Francis Bacon by J. Max Patrick, Part V 'Reason and Logic', available online: http://www.ourcivilisation.com/smartboard/shop/patrickm/bacon/chap4.htm, accessed October 18, 2010. Ironically Francis Bacon's wanted to know whether stuffing chicken with snow would slow down the tainting. However, the snow did not help much and, given his following death from food poisening, his hypothesis should be rejected.

chapter deals with the sample and sample selection. After that we will look into how transparency, trust and other relevant variables in this study have been measured. The final part of this chapter consists of an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the experiments in this dissertation.

5.2 The topic: air pollution policies in municipalities

5.2.1 Experiments in public administration: a realistic context

If experiments are ideal for investigating causal effect, why then are experiments so seldom used in public administration research? Bozeman and Scott (1992: 294) argue that internal validity of public administration research is often bargained away in exchange for "realism" and external validity so as to be able to prescribe actions for practitioners. There seems to be a 'need for findings that speak to local conditions rather than [to] seek generalizations across time and space' (Bozeman & Scott, 1992: 295). The implications of the emphasis on external validity at a given point in time in a certain situation are that actual causality cannot be determined and theoretical generalisations about the causal effect cannot be postulated. The specific strength of experiments is that they are strong on internal validity: experiments are preeminently useful in controlling for other, extraneous variables in a relationship.

A second reason why experiments play a limited role concerns their feasibility. The units of analysis of scholars in public administration are often countries or organisations, while experiments are mostly suitable at the individual level. Individual citizens can participate in experiments. In addition, individual decisionmakers within government organisations are a suitable unit of analysis in experiments (e.g., Bozeman & McAlpine, 1977; Scott, 1997). However, when the level of aggregation rises, the feasibility of experiments starts to decline. One could imagine experiments with teams within (public) organisations. For example, does working in teams encourage sound public decisionmaking? Theoretically it might be possible to carry out large-scale experiments with organisations, but in order to carry out such an experiment a great deal of cooperation would be needed. In addition, this would come at the cost of experimental control, even though it is this high level of control which made experiments such an attractive alternative in the first place. Researchers might be able to theoretically simulate an organisational setting, yet one could rightly raise the question in this case as to whether realism is not bargained away for internal

validity too much. If the units of analysis are one or multiple countries, experiments with at least a hunch of realism are simply not feasible. The need for local and contextual realism and the unfeasible units of analysis have thus caused experiments to be rarely used in public administration research.

The unit of analysis in this dissertation – citizens – does not restrain us from doing experiments. However, does the use of experiments as a research method mean that external validity and realism are bargained away completely in order to determine causality? Social psychologists often experiment with concepts abstracted from reality. One can question whether this abstract method works for public administration research. Bozeman and Scott (1992: 309) argue that laboratory experiments in public administration research should require attention to 'mundane reality'. This means there should be sufficient levels of contextual realism in experiments in order to be able to use the results in public administration practice. As a result, public administration experiments are likely to be more complex than the elegant social psychological experiments. Therefore, in this dissertation an experimental design is used which preserves a degree of realism. The situation in which a citizen wants to obtain information about how his/her municipality deals with air pollution was chosen as the context for the experiments. Hence, the realistic context is comprised by a policy topic (air pollution) and a governmental context (municipality). Why was this context selected for the three experiments in this dissertation?

5.2.2 Why municipalities?

All citizens can be expected to be familiar with municipalities. By selecting a specific government organisation instead of trust in government in general, the relationship between transparency *of* this government organisation and trust *in this* government organisation is isolated from exogenous factors that might play a prominent role concerning trust in government in general (cf. Nye, 1997; Bovens & Wille, 2008; see also Chapter 2). So we need to look at the meso-level; this still means that myriad government organisations could possibly be selected. However, municipalities are selected here because these are also thought to be a 'most-likely' case design. Since the effect of transparency on trust is far from proven, we need to search for a case where this connection is most probable.

First, municipalities have the ties closest to citizens, and citizens also have a more direct stake in local issues such as the local environment (Pina et al., 2007; Piotrowski & Van Ryzin, 2007). They live a in a municipality and are regularly dependent on it for public service delivery such as extending passports, administering welfare policies, developing construction plans and protecting the local environment. This makes citizens dependent on their municipality, while at the same time we can be sure that people have ties with it.

The second argument for selecting local government regards the extent of government website use. Compared to other government websites, local government websites are the ones visited most. Van Dijk et al. (2008) present representative survey results of 1,225 respondents, which show that if people make use of government websites they mostly visit *local* government websites. 23.7% of the population who used Internet visited local government websites, whereas 11.8% visited national government websites.

In sum, municipalities are well-known to most citizens; they are the most-contacted type of government organisation on the Internet and have ties closest to citizens. Hence, if transparency is to have any effect, this effect should be the most profound in transparency of local government.

5.2.3 Why air pollution policy?

The previous section specified why municipalities are investigated. Transparency, however, always involves a substantial policy theme. In other words, if a municipality wants to be more transparent it needs to be transparent regarding some policy issue. The topic of transparency in this dissertation focuses on local air pollution. This practical filling-in of transparency was chosen because air pollution is an important issue affecting many citizens. In addition, environmental issues are important to transparency, as it is codified in treaties and legislation. Transparency and air-pollution policy are thus intertwined and here to stay.

First, air pollution is of special interest in that it affects several public interests: public health, environment and economic interests. The topic of air pollution in Dutch cities receives a considerable amount of local and national media coverage in the Netherlands, including reports about municipalities that are failing to meet standards

and the dangers of bad air pollution. The relevance of air pollution is highlighted by the high car density in the Netherlands: on average there were 214 cars per square kilometre in 2008, compared to 55 per square kilometre in Europe (Statistics Netherlands, *CBS*). This is the highest car density in the world. Although cars are not the only cause of bad air pollution, they are one of the main producers of fine dust and nitrogen dioxide in the air.

Governments in Europe are obliged to meet EU directives about air pollution[8], and local governments in the Netherlands are obligated to develop plans to combat air pollution. Municipalities have to report on air pollution regarding the levels of nitrogen dioxide, fine dust particles, benzene and carbon monoxide. Important decisions about air pollution plans and reports take place in the local council; according to local law transcripts of the meetings in which these are discussed must be disclosed to the public. Also, it is a topic that is widely debated locally, although most citizens are not very knowledgeable about air pollution.

Second, transparency of local air pollution policy was selected for this study because issues of air pollution and the environment have been prominent for many years in government transparency. The environmental field is full of examples of transparency aiming to supplement or replace standard regulations to combat pollution. This is thought to be more efficient to keep companies committed to meeting environmental standards instead of traditionally enforcing environmental laws and regulations (Florini, 1998). Disclosure of data about air pollution in cities in the EU and the US is current common practice; nonetheless the extent of disclosure and usability of data varies widely (Grimmelikhuijsen & Welch, 2012).

Third, transparency of environmental issues is backed by recent legal developments. Transparency of environmental information is now regulated by the Aarhus Treaty, which now totals a number of forty countries such as The Netherlands, Belgium, the UK, Germany, France and also institutions such as the European Community. This treaty concerns access to information, public participation and access to justice regarding environmental matters. The Aarhus Treaty does not have any binding effect in itself, but countries who signed it are compelled to ratify the treaty into binding

[8] For more details on the standards these directives have set out: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/air/usability/standards.htm (accessed Feb 24, 2010).

national legislation. This happened in the Netherlands in 2005 and has led to a special regime for transparency of environmental information which prescribes higher levels of transparency compared to other policy areas[9]. In sum, the codification of transparency about environmental and air pollution policy in treaties and legal provision indicates that transparency is not a trivial topic of transparency. Moreover, it shows that this specific topic of transparency is here to stay.

This section outlined the topic selection of this study: municipalities dealing with air pollution. This is thought to be a sound choice because transparency is an enduring and important issue, especially at the municipal level. Municipalities are thought to be the governmental organisation which citizens have the closest ties with. In addition, the selected topic provides a degree of realism and context to the experiment that was carried out. To fully cover the issue of local air pollution three experiments were conducted. Each experiment dealt with a different sets of air pollution policy: what did the decision-making process look like, what measures have been taken to combat air pollution, and what has been the degree of pollution in the municipality? How these choices are reflected in the experiment is explained in the next two sections which concern the design of the experiments and the procedures that were followed.

5.3 Three experiments

This section will explain which three experiments were found to be most useful to understand the effects of transparency on trust. How were the choices mentioned in the previous section incorporated in the overall design, and which research questions followed from that? In Chapter 3, three objects of transparency were distinguished: decision-making transparency, policy transparency and policy outcome transparency. Further three dimensions were discerned: information completeness, colour and usability. To investigate this dissertation's main question empirically, three research questions were developed. Each research question follows from a combination of a transparency object and a transparency dimension. The following three combinations of transparency objects and dimensions are investigated: the completeness of decision-making transparency, the colouring of policy transparency and the usability

[9] See: Aarhus Treaty, art. 4 and 5. Government Information Act (*Wet Openbaarheid van Bestuur*), art. 1, sub a, Environmental Act, art. 19.

of policy outcome transparency. All research questions were answered by conducting an experiment.

1. *What is the effect of the completeness of transparent information about decision-making on citizen trust in a government organisation?*

This question investigated the effect of completeness of decision-making information. Decision-making information in the form of legally obliged public minutes of a decision-making body is pre-eminently suitable for checking the effect of information completeness. Publishing council minutes is required by law, yet municipalities have leeway to publishing minutes in more or less complete forms. Full elaborations on decisions might be disclosed, or only a summary of the decision itself might be provided.

In this experiment citizens were provided with transparency of municipal decision-making. The effect of complete information was compared to a situation of restricted, non-complete information. The decision-making process consisted of several contributions from people within the council. For example, in the situation of complete information, the rationale of a certain question or criticism by a councilor was provided. In the non-complete situation, the rationale was omitted and only a summary was displayed to participants. Full details about the design of the experiment are provided in the related empirical chapter (Chapter 6).

2. *What is the effect of varying degrees of 'colouring' of transparent information about policies on citizen trust in a government organisation?*

The second question concerns the colour of policy information and its effect on trust. This object of transparency leaves room for a government organisation to provide its own interpretation to proposed and implemented policy measures. Government officials might also try to banish all negative content and show a "polished" version of their policy.

This resulted in an experiment with four groups varying by colour of policy transparency. One group of participants read a message on a government website presenting a full picture of its policies, allowing negative content. Two other groups received more positive information about policy measures, varying from slightly positive to information extremely favourable to the government organization. For

example, the balanced policy message would state: *'This approach contributes to a slight improvement of the air quality of the most polluted areas in the city.'* The highly positive policy message leaves no room for negative interpretations: *'This approach makes the city … one of the cleanest cities of the country.'* The fourth group of participants acted as a control group and did not read any policy information. Full details about the design of the experiment are provided in the related empirical chapter (Chapter 7).

3. *What is the effect of the usability of transparent information about policy outcomes on citizen trust in a government organisation?*

The third and final research question investigates the aspect of the usability of transparent information about policy outcomes on trust. Usability here refers to the comprehensibility and timeliness of the information. Outcome data can be published online in real-time in comprehensible formats. There is no need to wait for lengthy reports full of jargon which might already be outdated once they are finished. The way the data about policy effects are presented on a website is of particular interest, since results are often enclosed in incomprehensible reports. Moreover, a policy outcome is not static, but perpetually subject to change. Old data about air pollution disclosed on a website is much less meaningful than recently updated figures about toxic pollutants currently in the air.

The third experiment consisted of five groups. Besides a control group that received no information, four groups were given information varying on the usability of the information (low or high) and the outcome of the policy (good or bad). Hence, one group received information with low usability showing a negative policy outcome, in this case highly polluted air. The second group received information with the same level of usability; however, they were shown a positive outcome (i.e., clean air). The third and fourth group got to see highly usable – up-to-date and comprehensible – information with either a positive or a negative policy outcome. Full details about the design of the experiment are provided in the related empirical chapter (Chapter 8).

5.4 The experimental procedure

Roughly similar procedures were followed for all three experiments. The procedure consisted of four elements: (1) an introduction of the experiment, (2) an instruction, (3)

the experiment itself, and (4) a post-test questionnaire. Each of these elements will be explained. The empirical chapters (Chapter 6, 7, and 8) provide a specific description of each experiment separately.

The introduction of the experiment consisted of an explanation of what would follow, i.e., an instruction for the experiment itself and the approximate duration of the whole procedure. Before the start of the experiment participants were told a "cover-up" story that distracted people from the actual goal of the experiment. Participants were told they would participate in a usability research study regarding government websites. The start of the instruction told people: *'This study investigates the user-friendliness of the website of the municipality of [city]'*. Hence, people did not receive clues about transparency and trust in government before reading the website.

Second, the experiment was carried out by letting participants look at municipal websites guided by an instruction. This instruction stated precisely what information participants had to read on the website that would follow. For example, in the case of policy outcome transparency people were told to look at a map with stations measuring air pollution. In this case the instruction told participants the following:

'You will be looking at a webpage containing a map, which depicts three air pollution measurement stations. Read the short text at the top of the website and click on the stations on the map to receive more information about it."[10]

Each experiment had its own instruction which clearly and precisely stated what participants had to do and read. This is discussed more in depth in the empirical chapter related to that instruction. A point of clarification: participants were not allowed to roam freely among the government's website to search for information because they had to follow the instruction. At first glance, this could have made the experiment more realistic and more externally valid. However, this would have severely threatened internal validity, as other and unknown factors might have played a role in website searching behaviour (which was not an object of study). In addition, it would have been impossible to identify which pages were exactly visited and read, and even more difficult to compare groups with different people who searched for and read different information.

[10] N.B.: Translated from Dutch instructional text.

The third element of the procedure was the experiment itself, which will be described in detail in the subsequent chapters. In the first experiment participants were shown a website with minutes of local council decisionmaking that varied by the completeness of this information. The second experiment showed a website with a policy message to participants. This message varied in its colour from highly positive to a balanced message that also contained negative information about the municipality's policy. Finally, a third experiment investigated the effect of the usability of policy outcome transparency. Varying degrees of usability and policy outcomes were presented to the participants in this experiment.

Fourth, after completing the experiment, participants filled out the same questionnaire, containing items about their perceptions of the government organisation under scrutiny, the information they read and how they would assess their knowledge about air pollution after reading the information on the website. All three experiments used only a post-test questionnaire; hence no pre-test questionnaire was done in the experiments. This needs some clarification, as it potentially affects the internal validity of the experiments. By having only a post-test measurement, actual changes in trust in government could not be measured. This was a deliberate choice, however, to prevent people from completing the same questionnaire twice. This severely increased the risk of test-effects. In other words, people adjusted their answers in the post-test questionnaire because they had answered the same question before. In addition, participants might have read the website differently because they had been primed towards the subject of this study prior to the experiment. To still be able to make a comparison regarding the effect of transparency this study opted to compare results with a control group who received no information. Although this group comparison does indeed not measure actual changes caused by transparency, the aforementioned drawbacks of a pre-test are thought to outweigh its advantages.

5.5 A representative sample?

The exact composition of the samples is discussed in the related empirical chapters of this dissertation. Here one important overarching issue is discussed because in two of the three samples, the same number of students was recruited to participate in these experiments. This section discusses to what extent the sample is representative for the Dutch population and, if not, whether this is a problem.

Both the experiment regarding decision-making transparency (N=156) and the experiment regarding policy transparency (N=96) to some extent incorporated students in their samples. Approximately two-thirds of the participants in the decision-making sample were students, while the policy sample consisted fully of students attending university. About one-third of the participants in the decision-making sample were randomly approached citizens at the Public Affairs Departments of a municipality. The students participating were mostly, though not all, students attending the Bachelor programme 'Public administration and organisational science' at the Utrecht School of Governance. The third experiment regarding policy outcome transparency (N=834) recruited participants in a different way and therefore did not have a bias towards students. Hence, two of the three experiments had a bias towards young and highly educated people.

What issues could be raised against this bias? Some general issues could be raised about the external validity of results of the first two samples. The most important background variables that might affect trust in government are sex, political preference, education and age (King, 1997; Putnam, 2000; Norris, 2001; Dalton, 2004; Cook & Gronke, 2005). Especially the latter two (education and age) might be problematic since in two samples there is a bias towards highly educated young people. Age is also thought to have a negative effect on trust in government, whereas the level of education has a positive effect. People with higher levels of education tend to be more trusting towards government. [11]

Does this mean that the experiment might have produced overly positive results regarding trust in government? In other words, to what extent is this bias a problem? First of all, this is not inevitable with respect to external validity, as Van Dijk, Peters, and Ebbers (2008) showed that people who use government websites are relatively young and highly educated compared to the total population. This means the sample bias is less than what one might initially think: the estimated goal population (users of government agency websites) is relatively young and highly educated — two major

[11] An additional OLS-regression analysis for each type of transparency was carried out to test the effects of background variables (age, education, sex and political preference, being a student or not) on the outcome variable 'perceived trustworthiness', which is the mean score of the three separate dimensions of trustworthiness: competence, benevolence, honesty. Full regression tables can be found in Appendix D. One important general result from these regression tables is that the student dummy variable had no significant effect on perceived trustworthiness in any case of transparency.

concerns of bias in this sample[12]. Second, the main goal of this study, being an experiment, is not to achieve a perfect external validity but to examine a *causal effect* by comparing relatively homogeneous groups. The internal comparability of homogeneous groups is not affected by using mainly students; moreover this might even be enhanced by it. Third, in contrast to the effect of these background variables on the absolute level of trust in government it is uncertain whether they also have an influence on the transparency and trust *relation*.

What does this teach us about the external validity of the experiments? The participants in two samples were relatively young and highly educated. This is not necessarily problematic: users of local government website are citizens who are well-educated and slightly younger than the average population. In addition, the goal of an experiment is not external validity per se; yet more important is determining a causal effect by comparing homogeneous groups.

5.6 From concepts to indicators

5.6.1 Selected dimensions and objects of transparency

In Chapter 3 three objects of transparency (decisionmaking, policy, and policy outcome) and three characteristics of transparency (completeness, colour and usability) have been presented. In order to gain a deeper understanding of computer-mediated transparency, this multidimensionality was used to operationalise transparency more accurately. The numbers indicate which configurations of transparency objects and dimensions were investigated empirically.

Table 5.1 shows that the completeness of information decisionmaking, the colour of policy information and the usability of policy outcome transparency were investigated empirically.

[12] N.B.: There might still be a bias on a higher level of analysis. This dissertation specifically focuses on computer-mediated transparency instead of on other forms of transparency. Information provided through the Internet is likely to attract relatively highly educated citizens. Although this is true for government information in general, it is important to note this bias.

Table 5.1 – Selected objects and dimensions of transparency

Object of transparency		*Dimension of transparency*		
		Completeness	*Colour*	*Usability*
	Decisionmaking	1		
	Policy information		2	
	Policy outcome			3

An approach was chosen that tested as diverse a range of combinations of dimensions and objects of transparency as possible. Although there are practical and theoretical considerations to select these combinations, these are not exhaustive regarding other combinations. Other combinations might be operationalised and tested in further research, yet it was not feasible to incorporate such research in this dissertation. A more specific operationalisation of each combination of object and dimension of transparency is outlined in the empirical chapter belonging to that particular combination. In this chapter the dependent and mediating variables in the model are operationalised.

5.6.2 Measuring perceived trustworthiness

First, the dependent variable in our research model is operationalised: perceived trustworthiness of a government organisation. Perceived trustworthiness in this dissertation consists of three dimensions: benevolence, competence and honesty. All dimensions were measured by multiple items with a five-point scale. These items are adapted from past research of McKnight et al., (2002) regarding trust in online organisations. Their study provides a valuable, valid and reliable measurement instrument. However, the items needed to be translated and adapted to the subject of online transparency and trust in government. In Chapter 2, the perceived trustworthiness dimensions were defined as follows:

- *Competence:* 'Competency involves the knowledge and skills necessary for effective operations with the aim of maintaining or increasing organisational productivity.' (Kim, 2005)
- *Benevolence*: 'One cares about the welfare of the other and is therefore motivated to act in the other person's interest.' (Mayer et al., 1995)

- *Honesty*: 'One makes good-faith agreements, tells the truth, and fulfills any promises made.' (Mayer et al., 1995)

These three dimensions are all measured by multiple items. Competence was measured by five items which measure the extent to which the government organisation was perceived to be capable, effective, skilful, and professional.[13]

Table 5.2 – Perceived competence items (adapted from McKnight et al., 2002)

	Item wording: *'I believe that, when it concerns air pollution policy…'*
C1	The [trust object]* is capable.
C2	The [trust object]* is effective.
C3	In general, the [trust object]* is skilful.
C4	The [trust object]* is professional.
C5	The [trust object]* carries out its duty very well.
	Cronbach's alpha = 0.88

** [Trust object]: exact wording depends on experiment.*

Second, (perceived) benevolence was measured. This was done by noting the extent to which the government organisation was perceived to be doing its best to help citizens, to be acting in the interest of citizens and to be sincerely interested in the well-being of citizens.

The third dimension of perceived trustworthiness was considered to be perceived honesty. Honesty was measured on the basis of perceived sincerity, perceived honesty and the extent to which the government organisation was thought to keep its commitments.

[13] N.B.: A Principle Component Analysis can be found in Appendix A (Table 1 and 2) with the three dimensions of perceived trustworthiness and two other related dimensions (message credibility and trust in government in general). This appendix shows how the dimensions are empirically different.

Table 5.3 – Perceived benevolence items (adapted from McKnight et al., 2002)

	Item wording *'I believe that, when it concerns air pollution policy...'*
B1	If citizens need help, the [trust object]* will do its best to help them.
B2	The [trust object]* acts in the interest of citizens.
B3	The [trust object]* is genuinely interested in the well-being of citizens, not only in its own.
B4	The [trust object]* approaches citizens in a sincere way**.
	Cronbach's alpha = 0.85

** [Trust object]: exact wording depends on experiment.*

*** This item was eventually omitted from the scale because a Principle Component Analysis showed that it had no sufficient fit empirically with the perceived benevolence dimension (see Appendix A, table 1 for details).*

Table 5.4 – Perceived honesty items (adapted from McKnight et al., 2002)

	Item wording: *'I believe that, when it concerns air pollution policy...'*
H1	The [trust object]* is honest.
H2	The [trust object]* keeps its commitments.
H3	The [trust object]* is sincere.
	Cronbach's alpha = 0.84

** [Trust object]: exact wording depends on experiment.*

These items stem from literature on trust and trust in government (Chapter 2); however, we should test whether these dimensions are actually different dimensions *in practice*. In order to do so, a principal component analysis (PCA) was carried out with all perceived trustworthiness items, which indeed showed that they were empirically separate dimensions. The results of this analysis are found in Appendix A.

The next step is to test the reliability of the scales; this sheds light onto what extent the items belong together in a dimension. In order to do so, the Cronbach's alpha (a measure of scale reliability) was calculated for each dimension. The five items of perceived competence had an alpha of 0.85. The ethical dimensions of benevolence (without item B4) and honesty had alphas of 0.79 and 0.84, respectively. As a rule of thumb Cronbach's alpha should be at least 0.6. All dimensions are well above both thresholds. In sum, this analysis shows that the theoretical dimensions of perceived trustworthiness are empirically reliable and distinct from one another.

In addition to these three dimensions of perceived trustworthiness, two mediating variables in the model were tested: specific knowledge about the municipality and message credibility.

5.6.3 Measuring specific knowledge

The research model identified three potential relations. One of the three relations through which transparency could lead to trust in a government organisation is through knowledge (see Chapter 4 for a detailed explanation). In the questionnaire subsequent to the experiment people were asked to assess their level of knowledge about air pollution policy in the municipality. On a five-point scale (1=very little knowledge, 5=very much knowledge) they assessed their own knowledge about several aspects of the municipality and the transparency object under scrutiny. Because a different object was being made transparent, the items differed slightly in each experiment. As a result, separate Cronbach's alphas are reported to indicate the reliability of the knowledge variable (see Table 5.5)

In the decision-making experiment and its subsequent questionnaire, participants were asked about their knowledge of the air pollution policy plan, the council minutes regarding the realisation of the air pollution policy, and their insight in the decision-making regarding the municipal air pollution policy (Cronbach's alpha = 0.82). The policy information experiment questioned the following two aspects of knowledge: knowledge about the air pollution policy and their insight into the plans regarding municipal air pollution policy (Cronbach's alpha = 0.71). The policy outcome experiment asked for the following two aspects of self-assessed knowledge: people's knowledge about the government organisation's air pollution policy in general and their insight in current level of air pollution in the municipality (Cronbach's alpha = 0.67). The alphas were all sufficiently high enough that it was possible to consider the knowledge variables in each experiment to be reliable.

Table 5.5 – Specific knowledge items

	Decision-making transparency items
SK1	I have knowledge about the air pollution policy plan.
SK2	I have knowledge about the council minutes regarding the realisation of the air pollution policy.
SK3	I have insight in the decision-making process regarding the municipal air pollution policy.
	Cronbach's alpha = 0.82
	Policy transparency items
SK1	I have great deal of knowledge about the air pollution policy of this municipality.
SK2	I have a great deal of knowledge about the measures carried out by the municipality regarding the air pollution policy.
	Cronbach's alpha = 0.71
	Policy outcome transparency items
SK1	Currently I have knowledge about [trust object]* air pollution policy in general.
SK2	I have knowledge about current levels of air pollution in several places in the municipality.
	Cronbach's alpha = 0.67

5.6.4 Measuring perceived message credibility

The second relation that is assumed to affect trust in a government organisation is message credibility. Past research showed that completeness and accuracy of online information are important in constituting its credibility (Boritz, 2004, p. 21; Nicolaou & McKnight, 2006; Flanagin & Metzger, 2007, p. 327). Likewise, *perceived* completeness and accuracy are important to *perceived* credibility, which is what is studied here. After the experiment participants were questioned on a five-point scale how they assessed the reliability of several aspects of the online message they had read (see Table 5.6).

Table 5.6 – Message credibility items

	Item wording
MC1	I believe that the information on the website of *[trust object]** is complete.
MC2	I believe that the information on the website of *[trust object]** is highly accurate.
	Cronbach's alpha = 0.66

** [Trust object]: exact wording depends on experiment.*

With regard to decision-making transparency, message credibility was measured by asking the participants about their perceptions regarding the extent to which they perceived the information they had read to be complete and accurate (see Boritz, 2004, p. 21; Nicolaou & McKnight, 2006; Flanagin & Metzger, 2007, p. 327). Cronbach's alpha for this measure was 0.65. This is only slightly above the 0.6 threshold although the fact that the dimension was only measured by two items partly explains the rather low figure. Overall, the message credibility variable was considered to be reliable.

5.6.5 Control variables

To meet one of the criteria of causality mentioned in the first section of this chapter – no confounding variables – we need to have information about potential confounding variables.

The literature on trust identifies several variables that could affect trust in a specific government organisation besides the effect of transparency itself. These variables were taken into account in the analyses to be able to control for them if necessary. First of all, trust in government *in general* is an obvious factor that might influence trust in a specific organisation. This could be seen as a person's predisposition to trust a specific government organisation. For example, Van de Walle (2004) argues trust in government institutions is rooted in people's predispositions towards it. Also, McKnight et al. (1998; 2002; McKnight & Chervany, 2006) have developed a 'trust-building model' in which predisposition to trust is an important determinant of trust. This is based on the approach of Mayer et al., (1995: 715), who view it as a trait 'that leads to generalized expectation about the trustworthiness of others.'

People's predisposition to trust government in general is a stable factor within a person that affects the probability that he or she will trust someone or something. Trust in government in general is seen as a relatively stable factor predicting trust in specific government organisations. This variable is measured by four terms of its perceived competence (two items), benevolence and honesty (both one item). In other words, does one believe the government in general to be competent, benevolent and honest?[14] The 'trust in government in general control variable'

[14] Item wordings: TG1: 'In general government cares about the well-being of citizens.' TG2: 'In general government keeps its promises.' TG3: 'In general government carries out its duties

consisted of four items which had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81. This value means that the items correlate sufficiently among one another to consider them to be part of one underlying construct.

Second, trust in government is influenced by a person's experiences and traits of character. It is known that age, gender, education and political preference of a person contribute to one's propensity to trust government (in general). Age is said to affect trust negatively (King, 1997; Dalton, 2004): as people get older they tend to be more critical of government. However, this relationship is not very clear, as other scholars argue that age does not influence trust or that it might even have a positive effect (Bovens & Wille, 2008). Gender differences exist regarding trust. In general, women tend to be more trusting than men (Norris, 2001). The level of education of citizens is said to positively affect trust in government and trust in people (King, 1997; Cook & Gronke, 2005). Thus, people with higher levels of education tend to be more favourable toward government. Fourthly, trust in government in general is supposedly influenced by political variables (e.g., Orren, 1997). Someone's political preference for either a left-wing or right-wing party is said to be a strong predictor of trust in institutions (Cook & Gronke, 2005).

Although it is not clear whether all these variables feature prominently with regard to trust in a *specific* government organisation or in the relationship with transparency, they are taken into account to check whether randomisation of participants was successful and, if not, to be able to control for them the statistical analyses.

5.7 Value of this approach

How should we assess the overall value of the experimental design? The experiments in this dissertation are designed to be robust and rigorous without bargaining away the necessary contextual realism. Contextual realism is needed strike a balance between the internal and external validity of this study. Moreover, realism is important in order for participants to have some 'real-life' connection to the topic and object of transparency. Nevertheless, some potential challenges to the experimental design and how these challenges have been countered are discussed in this section.

effectively.' TG4: 'In general government is capable in carrying out its duties.' See Appendix A for original items (in Dutch) and Principle Component Analysis of these items.

One of the advantages of the realistic context design for the experiments is that it enhances the meaningfulness of the information to participants. Yet it might also decrease the ability to generalise the results to other contexts. Municipal air pollution policy was selected as the realistic context of the experiments. Political views of participants might have had an effect on their appreciation of this policy. People with left-wing political preferences tend to find environmental issues more important than do people with right-wing sympathies (cf. Klingemann, Volkens, Budge, Bara & McDonalds, 2006). Hence, people with left-wing political preference might perceive it as positive if government transparency indicates that the organisation is making an effort to reduce air pollution. People with right-wing sympathies on the political spectrum tend to regard other topics important and might therefore assess the same information negatively. To what extent does this threaten the validity of the experiments? This threat is countered by proper randomisation. By randomly attributing people to experimental groups, right- or left-wing views are distributed equally to each group by chance. An equal distribution cancels out particular effects of political preference since these effects would occur in other groups, too. Nevertheless, the issue cannot be solved completely: this study cannot predict the effects other policy issues would have had on perceived trustworthiness. Still, there is no particular reason to assume different effects *a priori*. Future research into effects of other policy issues on perceived trustworthiness could shed more light on this.

Second, test effects could weaken the internal validity of experimental designs in general (Campbell, 1957; Cook & Campbell, 1979). The measurement used (a questionnaire) is a reactive instrument, which means participants adapt their behaviour because they are being measured. Participants tend to show cooperative behaviour by conforming to implicit researcher expectation if they know what is being measured. The Hawthorne experiments are famous in this respect. In a factory outside Chicago, Hawthorne Works started an investigation to see whether employees were more productive with higher or lower intensities of light. The finding was able to conclude that people were more effective regardless of the intensity of the light; they just worked harder because they wanted to comply with the researchers' implicit hypothesis. In response, the transparency experiments used a 'cover-up', saying this was a study about website usability. The actual goal (investigating the relationship between transparency and trust) was only revealed after people completed the experiment. In addition, no pre-test was carried out to prevent people from completing

the same questionnaire twice. This would severely increase the risk of compromising test-effects. Furthermore, there were no reasons for participants to answer in a particular way: no social desirability or performance element was involved in this study. Therefore, there are no signs that people may want to "look good" in the research.

Overall, few methods in public administration research require the same amount of rigor and control as the testing of causality. This makes experiments as a method an attractive alternative when investigating causal effects. Three criteria were postulated at the start of this chapter: precedence of cause in time, covariance of cause and effect, and absence of confounding extraneous variables in the relationship. By first letting people read municipal information and then questioning their attitudes toward the municipality and this information afterwards the first criterion is met. Further, several groups of transparency are identified in each experiment that vary in their degree of transparency. This should determine potential covariance of transparency with the dependent variable: perceived trustworthiness. The third criterion is met by identifying various potential confounding variables in a post-test questionnaire and by dealing with this issue by randomisation. Moreover, the experimental design proposed in this chapter does not bargain away realism for internal validity. This chapter therefore showed the context of the experiment: air pollution at the municipal level. In specifying this topic the design combines both the practical orientation of public administration research and the methodological rigor needed for contributing to theory-building.

We now turn to the actual testing of the experiments. The next three chapters comprise the empirical part of this dissertation. The following chapter deals with the first experiment, which investigates the effect of decision-making transparency on perceived trustworthiness.

6. Decision-making transparency: Clumsy but honest government

6.1 A basic form of transparency

Athenian citizens were allowed to attend and vote on public decisionmaking in the Assembly, which had important responsibilities regarding laws and treaties with other city-states. Although only Athenian males who completed a military training were qualified as "citizens", no further restrictions regarding property were placed on those attending the Assembly. Citizens were thus allowed to witness, scrutinise and influence public decisionmaking. This might be regarded as one of the first pre-modern forms of decision-making transparency. Through the years decision-making transparency has come to be regarded as the cornerstone of democratic accountability. Providing information is essential to establishing mechanisms of accountability: information is needed to discuss decisions and to pass judgment upon the decisionmakers (Bovens, 2007).

By contributing to accountability arrangements, transparency can provide checks and balances which prevent abuse of political power or public money. Decision-making transparency enables participatory politics by citizens and pressure groups. Transparency of decisionmaking provides citizens with the opportunity to seek relevant information about decisions that affect them and whether these decisions are in line with election promises. Pressure groups use this information about decisionmaking to mobilise support for their actions. Further, they can track which political parties are on their side on certain issues and who are opponents. This supports the functioning of civil society and might contribute to a "strong democracy". Benjamin Barber's (1984/2003) original idea about 'strong democracy' was opposed to mere representative or 'thin' democracy, where the dominant perspective on individualistic rights mitigates the role of citizens in politics. Individuals or groups that previously have not been able to participate in democratic decisionmaking are now allowed access to decision-making arenas to influence decisionmaking and to hold government organisations and politicians to account (O'Donnell, 1998).

In order to enable a "strong democracy", information (and thus transparency) is pivotal. Most important institutions in developed democracies provide some kind of decision-making transparency to their citizens. For example, meetings of national parliaments are open to the public and discussions and decisions are laid down in minutes. At the local level, municipal councils adhere to the same types of transparency standards. Local councils in the Netherlands have an important role, as they are formally the most important decision-making and controlling body of a municipality.

The completeness of decision-making information of these political bodies is crucial. For example, local councils are obliged by law to have open meetings and to lay these meetings down in minutes. Within this legal regime, municipalities have leeway as to how to design these minutes: they need not be literal transcriptions. This means that local minutes vary in their degree of completeness: some minutes only contain short summaries of what has been discussed, whereas other minutes are nearly literal transcriptions of meetings.

The spread of these council minutes has been facilitated by the emergence of the Internet. This has greatly increased the geographical transparency (cf. Davenport, 1993) of decisionmaking. In other words, the Internet has caused decision-making information to be available on government websites 24/7. In addition, this information is accessible from virtually every place on earth. As a result, transparency of decisionmaking has permeated many democratic institutions, and minutes and other decision-making information is now disclosed more easily than ever.

To examine whether this widespread and essential form of transparency contributes to trust in government, the following research question was formulated: *What is the effect of the completeness of transparent information about decision-making on citizen trust in a government organisation?*

The research question was answered by carrying out an experiment (N=156). This experiment contained three groups, varying with regard to information completeness: ranging from no information (control group), to a message with incomplete information, through a message with complete information. This method will be fully explained in Section 6.3, where the design, procedure, sample and manipulation check of the

experiment are presented. First, however, three particular features of the experiment are outlined. The first part of the analysis is presented in Section 6.4, which presents the results regarding the overall effect of decision-making information. This provides insight into whether transparent decisionmaking makes any difference at all. The second part of the analysis is presented in Section 6.5, which will shed light on the effects of specific knowledge and message credibility on perceived trustworthiness. This chapter finishes with an overarching conclusion and discussion combining both parts of the analysis and shows the relations between the overall effect and the specific relations tested in the mechanism.

6.2 A focus on decisionmaking, the local council and information completeness

The first experiment concerns the decision-making efforts regarding a policy to combat air pollution in a large Dutch municipality. This is an important responsibility of municipalities. Decisions relating to air pollution at the local government level include, among other things, whether they should impose traffic restrictions or build more roads to improve traffic flows. Although most citizens are not very knowledgeable about air pollution, many pressure groups comprised by worried citizens address air pollution issues at the local level. For example, a pressure group called 'Don't let *Lunetten* suffocate' tries to combat municipal policy measures that, according to them, will have detrimental effects on air quality in the neighbourhood "Lunetten" located in Utrecht. Amongst other sources, they use transparency and openness of local council meetings to participate and create public pressure. This directly relates to the importance of decision-making transparency for a strong and participative democracy (Barber, 1984/2003).

In the previous chapter it was argued that municipalities were selected as the context of the experiments. In this experiment, the local council is selected more specifically because in the Netherlands the local council is the only and thus most important democratic body at the municipal level. They are formally the leading bodies of local government. Further, all important decisions are proposed to and are deliberated in meetings of local councils. Hence, on the local level, councils are regarded to be the object of trust when it concerns transparency of public decisionmaking (Fig. 6.1).

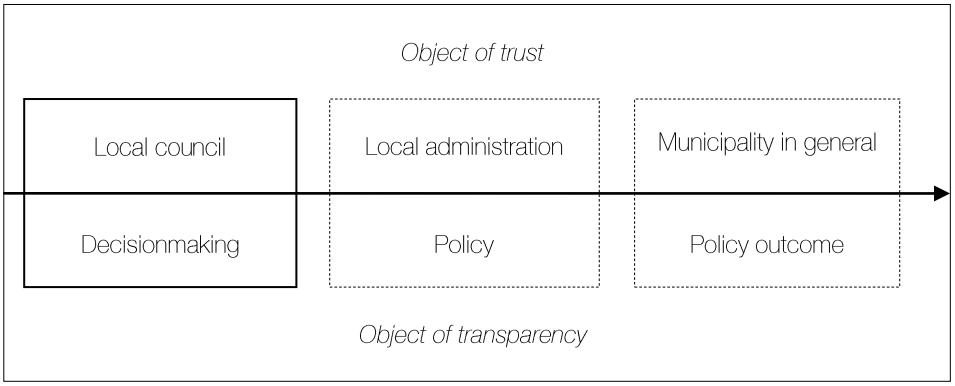

Figure 6.1 – Object of trust and object of transparency

The third feature of the experiment regards the particular dimension of information: completeness of information. Why should we pay attention to specifically this dimension in this chapter? As mentioned in the previous section, the completeness of decision-making information varies among municipalities: the minutes of a meeting might be near-literal transcriptions, a summary of the main discussion points or just a list of the decisions that have been taken. The completeness of information can be considered a typical characteristic of transparency of decisionmaking itself (see for example Brandsma, Curtin & Meijer, 2008). In addition, completeness of decision-making information is often discussed in terms of its effects on decisionmaking. For example, Prat (2005) and Stasavage (2006) argue that disclosing complete information actually hinders the quality of decisionmaking. Hence, completeness of decision-making transparency is an important element, as it potentially affects the quality of the process itself. Further, this section makes clear that experimental variation on the degree of completeness occurs is in the "real world" of decision-making information disclosure.

6.3 The decision-making transparency experiment: Method and sample

6.3.1 Two stages of analysis

Two stages of analysis have been distinguished to fully answer the question regarding the effect of decision-making transparency on citizen trust. First, we assess whether decision-making transparency has any effect at all. This will be called the *overall* effect

of transparency and entails a comparison between a group of participants who did not receive decision-making information and a group of participants who received transparent (i.e. complete) information. The second step contains a *separate* analysis: the experiment will compare only the experimental groups with each other, i.e., those that used a degree of completeness of decision-making information. In other words, this compares the effect of different degrees of completeness with each other. The control group is not included in this analysis because this separate analysis is needed to understand *how* decision-making transparency leads to trust. This assesses the potential mediating effects of specific knowledge and message credibility. The test of the mechanism aims to broaden our understanding of the effect, whereas the overall test is needed to assess the strength and existence of the general effect of transparency on perceived trustworthiness.

6.3.2 Design and measures

An experiment was designed to examine the relation between decision-making transparency and trust. This study used an independent, one-way experimental design. Three groups of participants each encountered different levels of information completeness about decisionmaking: a high level of transparency revealing complete information (N=55), a low level of transparency revealing incomplete information (N=57), and no information (N=43). The selection procedure of the participants is explained in the next section.

One of the specific features of the experiment was the *completeness* of decision-making information. Drew and Nyerges (2004), who extensively evaluated decision transparency, mentioned completeness of decision-making information as an important asset of decision transparency. This raises the question of how 'completeness' was operationalised in this dissertation. Transparency about the municipal council's decisionmaking was operationalised as the extent of information that was revealed about the decisionmaking. Within the current legal regime, municipalities have leeway regarding how to vary the completeness of decision-making information: the minutes of a meeting might be 1) a literal transcription, 2) a summary of the main discussion points or 3) simply a list of the decisions that have been taken. Since this study focuses on decision*making* and not on the decisional outcome as such, it will only focus on options 1) complete information and 2)

summarised, incomplete information. How this was done exactly is shown in the example in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 – Operationalisation of information completeness

Completeness	*What*	*Example* [15]
Complete (near-literal transcription)	Full elaboration on decisions and arguments.	*Mrs [name]* argues that the Air Quality Action Plan indicates that the municipality wants to improve air quality. On several points this must be made more realistic. What is the status of this document? Will this lead to a decision regarding the realisation of the plans, or will they be developed within the projects? […] The ambition of the plan is disappointing in some aspects, for example regarding the fleet of cars. Concerning the environment, natural gas for our party is not the best option: why was hybrid energy not considered? The same applies to buses: why were alternative energy sources not considered?
Incomplete (short summary of discussion)	Only summarised statements about decisionmaking, not underlying arguments or rationale.	*Mrs [name]* argues that the Air Quality Action Plan indicates that the municipality wants to improve air quality. On several points this must be made more feasible.

The table shows an example of complete and incomplete information.[16] The first gives a view of a full elaboration: why is the policy plan thought to be disappointing and on

[15] Translated from original Dutch text, some parts are left out to make it less lengthy. The sentences are kept as close to the original format as possible, including those that are a bit awkward in the original.

[16] A caveat of the current measurement is the overlap between the operationalisation of message credibility and the operationalisation of one dimension of transparency. Information completeness is part of message credibility and of transparency itself. One of the two items of message credibility asks whether people perceive the information as complete.

what points should the plan be made more feasible. The incomplete information does mention the plan should be more feasible on several points but no arguments are given.

Transparency of the decisionmaking of the local council was measured with regard to the extent of the information that was revealed. The decision-making process consists of several contributions from people within the council. The incomplete information group was only shown the first two lines of five paragraphs, consisting of contributions from people from different political parties. Participants in the complete information group were shown the full contribution. Incompleteness of the information in this research thus means that the rationales of arguments in the decision-making process are not made available to the public (cf. Drew & Nyerges, 2004; Grimmelikhuijsen & Welch, 2012). This resembles the "real world" situation in which some municipalities disclose mere summaries and others provide near-literal transcriptions.

6.3.3 Procedure

The procedure of the decision-making transparency experiment consisted of four elements: 1) an introduction of the experiment, 2) an instruction, 3) the experiment itself, and 4) a post-test questionnaire. Each of these elements will now be explained.

First, before the experiment started, all participants were instructed orally about what they could expect. They were told they were participating in a study to examine the user-friendliness of government websites rather than being told the real goal of the study (i.e. investigating the effect of transparency on trust). Also, participants were told that they first had to follow written instructions to complete the experiment and then fill out a questionnaire.

Second, the written instructions specified exactly what participants should read within the website, to ensure that everyone within each group read the same sections during their visit and to increase comparability between the groups. For instance, the instructions told participants the following:

- You are now looking at the homepage of the local council's website. Read the text on this page.
- Click on "council meetings" in the menu on the left side of the page.

...
- Read page 2, lines 18-49 of the council minutes. Next, read the contribution of the council members on page 3 (lines 4-25). After reading these you can close the minutes.

The excerpt of the instructions shown here exemplifies the level of detail of the instructions. By being very clear about what participants had to read, the comparability of the results between participants was increased. For example, if the instruction had been unclear at some points, this could have elicited confusion, which would have led participants to different parts of the minutes. As a result, this would have diminished the comparability and thus the validity of the results of the experiment.

Third, every participant was randomly assigned to one of the groups by a link to a website on their written instruction form (for the 'no transparency group' there was no link at all). Group 0 was assigned to fill out a questionnaire without visiting a government website, i.e., not using the available transparency. The incomplete information group and the complete information group were assigned to visit the website that showed the council's minutes. The two different websites used in this experiment contained a short explanation about how the municipal council makes decisions and a selection from the council minutes about the decisionmaking regarding a plan to reduce air pollution in the city. The website visited by group 1 was adapted for the sake of the experiment and showed the incomplete information; the unadapted high-transparency website with the full council minutes was visited by group 2. Both websites look exactly like a real municipal website. Also, the layout of each website was exactly the same. Only the completeness of the information was adapted. Figure 6.2 shows the website with complete information (i.e., full elaboration on decisions).

Participants in both experimental groups had to read four excerpts of the minutes. Each excerpt regarded a contribution to the council's decisionmaking on the local air quality policy plan. After they had completed the experiment participants were instructed to close their web browser.

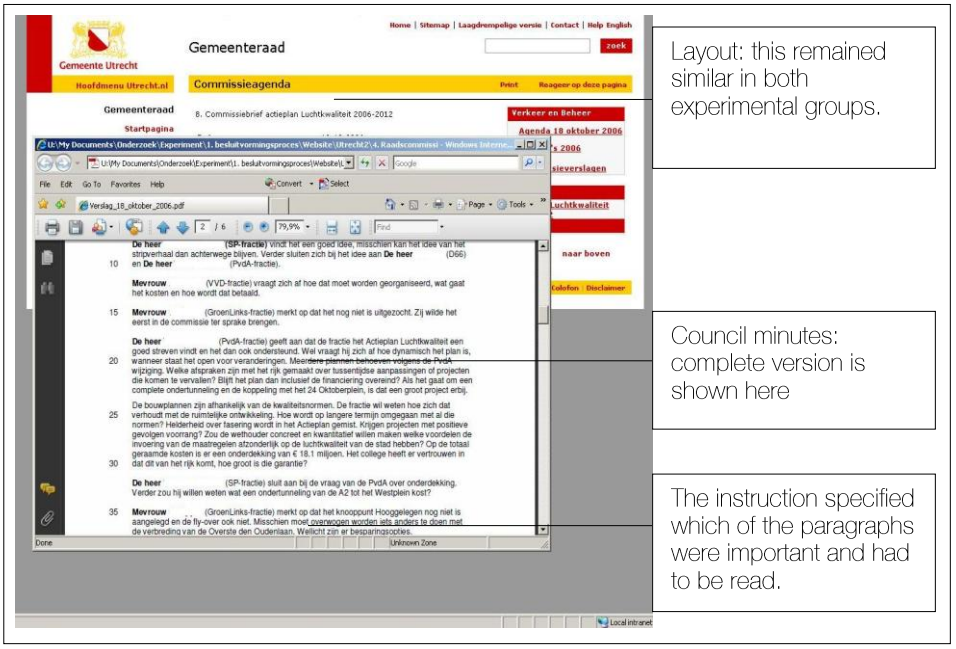

Figure 6.2 – Example of the website with complete decision-making information

The fourth element of the procedure consisted of a post-test questionnaire. This questionnaire contained multiple questions about participants' trust, their self-assessed knowledge, perceived message credibility and background characteristics. These items have been outlined in detail in Chapter 5. After completing this questionnaire the participants were debriefed and instructed about the real goal of the study.

6.3.4 Selection and sample

The sample consisted of a total of 156 respondents, including students (N=99) and 57 randomly approached visitors at the Population Affairs Department of the municipality of Utrecht. The latter participants were enticed to participate in the experiment by being offered a voucher. The students were in their first and second year of the programme 'Public administration and organisational sciences' at the Utrecht School of Governance. Because most students were at the start of their programme, their particular knowledge about government and municipal policies was still limited, resulting in less bias.

Table 6.2 – Sample composition experiment one

	% male	*Av. Age*	*% highly educated*	*Pol. Pref (% l.w.)*
0 – Control group N = 44	38.6	25.6	79.5	50.0
1- Incomplete information N = 57	43.9	32.6	93.0	50.9
2 – Complete information N = 55	50.9	29.9	85.5	41.8
Total N=156	*44.9*	*29.7*	*86.5*	*47.3*

Pol. Pref (% l.w.) = Percentage of participants that indicated a preference to vote for a left-wing political party. "Left-wing political parties"=D66, PvdA, GL, SP, PvdD. According to manifesto research by Klingemann et al. (2006) these parties give relatively much attention to environmental issues.

At first sight the sample shows some slight biases. For example, a relatively low percentage of highly educated participants was attributed to the "no transparency" group. A Pearson chi-square test using crosstabs was carried out to test whether these differences in the distribution were actually large enough to be statistically significant. These tests showed no evidence for an unequal distribution of gender, age, education or political preferences amongst the groups[17]. This means that the randomisation of participants in the experiment was successful and that differences between groups probably have occurred by chance. Therefore, none of these background variables have been taken into account as covariates in the analysis.
Further, trust in government in general was taken into account in the analysis; it indicates one's predisposition to trust government. This covariate was taken into account in order to increase the explained variance, hence increasing the overall explanatory power of the experiment.

[17] Gender (Pearson chi^2=1.53, df=2, p = 0.466), Age (Pearson chi^2=86.52, df=86, p = 0.464), Education (Pearson chi^2=3.93, df=2, p = 0.140), Political preference (Pearson chi^2=4.03, df=6, p = 0.673).
Further, these background characteristic have been analysed for interaction effects with the independent variable. However, no significant interactions were found (Fs ≤ 1.76, ps ≥ .107).

6.3.5 Manipulation check

One final question is left to be answered before discussing the results of this experiment: did the manipulation of the experiment actually work? In other words, did participants perceive the experimental treatment in the way the researcher intended? The manipulation in this experiment was the (degree of) completeness of information displayed to participants. This analysis showed that participants perceived the highly transparent website as the one that contained the greatest amount of information. It differed significantly from the website with limited information ($F(1,109)=5.56$, $p = .003$). The incomplete information group had a mean score of 3.5 on items stating whether participants thought a great deal of information about decisionmaking was available. The complete information group (group 2) had of 3.9 on a five-point scale. In absolute figures this difference is not that large, yet this also reflects the subtlety in experimental manipulation: if too much information was omitted the difference would have been more obvious yet less realistic and thus less meaningful. Nevertheless, the significant difference means that the supply of more complete information in the experiment also meant more information to participants.

6.4 Does decision-making transparency make a difference?

6.4.1 Research model and hypotheses

Figure 6.3 presents the research model for the overall effects of decision-making transparency on perceived trustworthiness. Each arrow represents a hypothesis (H1.1, H1.2, and H1.3); these are explained below.

Despite the general consensus that trust is a multidimensional concept, the debate on transparency and trust is mainly discussed on a general level. No specific cues are given as to what elements of perceived trustworthiness are affected by decision-making transparency. A large body of literature states that mainly positive effects of transparency (on trust) are expected (Blendon et al., 1997; Bok, 1997; Nye et al., 1997; Florini, 1998; Birkinshaw, 2006b; Hood, 2006b; Florini, 2007).

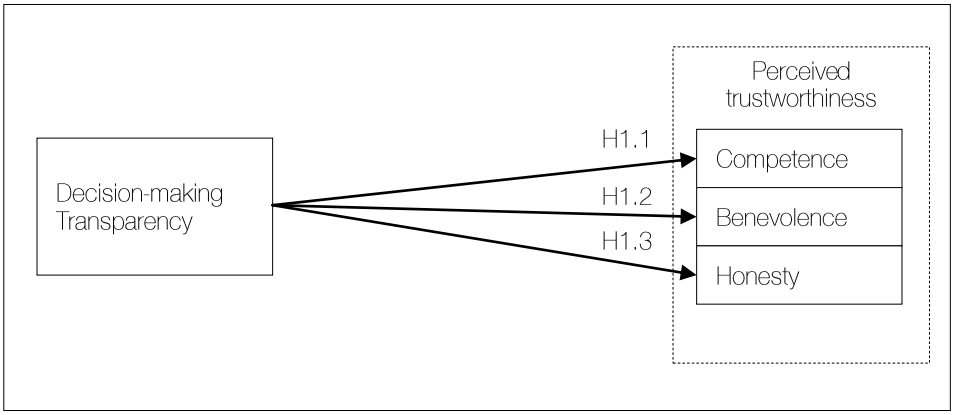

Figure 6.3 – Decision-making transparency research model concerning overall effects

On the other hand, there are scholars who emphasise the negative effects of transparency (e.g., O'Neill, 2002; Bovens, 2003; O'Neill, 2006 and Etzioni, 2010). Since the discourse on transparency tends to be positive we will put this view to the test by postulating positive hypotheses regarding the effect of decision-making transparency on perceived trustworthiness. The "transparency pessimist" literature will be discussed in the 'Discussion' section of this chapter.

Translated to the potential effects of complete decision-making information, the following effects are hypothesised. Perceived competence is thought to be positively affected if people encounter complete decision-making information. If citizens take notice of decision-making transparency it may increase their understanding of political decision-making processes. From a distance it is easy to criticise decisionmakers for being slow or ineffective; a look "behind the curtain" may cause people to realise that with such understanding it is not that easy to come to a decision, with so many different stakes and goals all claiming to be in the public interest. Thus, decision-making transparency is thought to increase people's understanding in the workings of the decision-making body (i.e. local council). The following hypothesis is offered:

H1.1: A high degree of decision-making transparency is expected to have a positive overall effect on perceived competence.

Perceived benevolence is also expected to be affected in a positive manner. Decision-making transparency shows that in the political debate very different issues

are discussed but that all politicians somehow claim to be acting in the interest of 'the public'. Politicians surely have their own private interests, yet in the public debate they discuss about how to spend public money on stakes that are relevant to citizens. In other words, decision-making transparency tends to show the decision-making process is about discussions and decisions that are in the citizens' interest, which is thought to have positive consequences for the perceived benevolence of the council:

H1.2: A high degree of decision-making transparency is expected to have a positive overall effect on perceived benevolence.

The main claim of transparency optimists is that transparency fosters a culture of openness and honesty (cf. Hood, 2006) within government organisations. Decision-making transparency which shows complete information is expected to do so; at least the impression is given to citizens that the local council has been fully honest since they have nothing to hide. In contrast to the two prior hypotheses, the honesty hypothesis does not so much concern the content that is made transparent: the mere fact that complete information is available is expected to enhance perceptions of honesty. The following hypothesis is therefore postulated:

H1.3: A high degree of decision-making transparency is expected to have a positive overall effect on perceived honesty.

6.4.2 Testing the overall effect of decision-making transparency

Will people who read decision-making information think differently about the municipality than those who do not read this information? In this section Hypotheses 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 are tested to assess the strength and existence of the overall effect of decision-making transparency by focusing on the differences between the control group and the experimental group with complete information. First, the analysis assesses both a significant overall multivariate effect of transparency and significant univariate effects on the separate dimensions of perceived trustworthiness. The overall multivariate effect indicates whether *some* significant difference occurs in the data without specifying the effect. Univariate significance proves an effect in a particular dimension: for example, perceived honesty. A significant finding in one of these tests indicates that probably there is at least one experimental group that differs from another in the subsequent group comparison. This chapter uses an alpha-level of 0.1.

This was considered to be appropriate because of the relatively low number of participants in each experimental group. It should be noted that at this significance level there is a probability of 10 percent that these results occurred by chance[18].

The analysis shows that significant differences are detected between the complete information group and the control group[19]. This analysis shows that significant univariate effects of transparency on perceived competence ($F(1,95)=2.66$, $p = 0.088$, $eta^2=0.032$) and perceived honesty ($F(1,95)=2.88$, $p = 0.093$, $eta^2=0.031$) are found.

We now turn to carrying out pair-wise group comparisons. The results are displayed in Table 6.3 below. If means have a superscript in common within rows, no statistical difference was found between those groups. Means within rows with deviating superscripts are statistically different from each other. The letters 'a' and 'b' in the superscript indicate a significant difference between those means. Equal letters in superscript indicate that the difference was not significant.

Table 6.3 – Group comparisons of perceived competence, benevolence and honesty for overall effect

Dependent Variable	*Control group*	*Complete information*
Perceived Competence	3.39(.08)[a]	3.21(.07)[b]
Perceived Benevolence	3.38(.09)[a]	3.44(.08)[a]
Perceived Honesty	3.14(.08)[a]	3.33(.08)[b]

No multiple comparison correction since only one comparison per dimension was carried out. Means displayed, standard errors in parentheses. N = 96. Rows with unequal superscripts differ significantly at $p < 0.1$.[20]

[18] A p-value of 0.1 is frequently reported in the public administration literature. For example, a widely cited study by Welch et al. (2005) (N=806) also mentioned $p < 0.1$.
[19] Further, Box's M was not significant, which indicates that the assumption of equality of co-variances has not been violated.
[20] An additional ANOVA-analysis in which all three dimensions were added to one 'general perceived trustworthiness dimension' shows no effect of transparency, however ($F(1,96)=0.14$, $p = 0.714$). Nevertheless, the current results are thought to be sound since the general dimension is a sum of both negative and positive overall effects of transparency. Hence, altogether we might detect no effect yet only because the effect on perceived competence (-0.18) is compensated by a positive effect (0.19) on perceived honesty.

Which specific effects of decision-making transparency can be observed from the table? As Table 6.3 shows, differences are found when comparing no transparency (control) versus full levels of information within the competence and honesty dimension. The dimension of perceived benevolence is not significantly affected by providing complete decision-making information to participants.

The first important observation is that perceived competence levels are lower within the full transparency groups than in the no transparency (control) group. This means that the participants who read about the decision-making process of the local council on the website perceive the council to be less competent than did the participants who did not read the information. The competence dimension consisted of items concerning whether the municipality was perceived to be efficient and skilful. Hypothesis 1.1 stated that transparency would positively affect the perceived competence of a local council. This is not confirmed by the results. In contrast, the results indicate a negative causal effect of decision-making transparency on perceived competence.

The results shown in Table 6.3 do not provide evidence for effects of transparency on perceived benevolence. It was hypothesised that transparency would have a positive effect on perceived benevolence. Therefore hypothesis (H1.2) should be rejected, as no significant difference was found for this variable.

Does more transparent information about policy outcomes then help strengthen perceived honesty? Table 6.3 shows that providing full information to participants indeed has a positive effect on its perceived honesty. This means that a perception of whether people thought the municipality was telling the truth reaches higher levels when people actually read information on decisionmaking. Thus Hypothesis 1.3 is confirmed.

In sum, the group comparison shows a heterogeneous effect of providing complete decision-making information: no effect on perceived benevolence, a negative effect on perceived competence and a positive effect on perceived honesty.

6.4.3 Conclusion: The irrationalism of decisionmaking exposed

Three hypotheses were formulated to test the difference of decision-making transparency compared to the control group that received no information; their results are summarised in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4 – Summary of overall effect hypotheses of decision-making transparency

Overall effect hypotheses	*Result*	
H1.1: A high degree of decision-making transparency is expected to have a positive overall effect on perceived competence.	A negative overall effect of decision-making transparency on perceived competence was found.	Not supported
H1.2: A high degree of decision-making transparency is expected to have a positive overall effect on perceived benevolence.	No overall effect of decision-making transparency on perceived benevolence was found.	Not supported
H1.3: A high degree of decision-making transparency is expected to have a positive overall effect on perceived honesty.	A positive overall effect of decision-making transparency on perceived honesty was found.	Supported

Showing people information has a negative effect on the perceived competence of the council (H1.1). In line with expectations, perceived honesty was affected positively. People who encountered decision-making information were more positive about the council's honesty compared to those who did not see information (H1.3). In contrast, no effect was found regarding perceived benevolence (H1.2). Thus, on the one hand a negative effect on perceived competence was found, whereas perceived honesty was positively affected. Further, no effect on perceived benevolence was found. How can we explain this remarkable result?

The negative effect on perceived competence could be explained by the fact that people are allowed to take a peek behind the scenes of government: this is where the neatly presented policy plans are prepared, discussed and bargained. A decision-making process is often portrayed as a rational, step-wise process, whereas in reality it is not (Stone, 1988/2002). The incrementalism and irrationalism are revealed to citizens once they take notice of decision-making transparency. This eventually

contributes to a decrease in the perceived competence of the local council. Two of the items measuring the perceived competence construct asked participants whether they thought the local council was effective and efficient: especially this image might be "damaged" by decision-making transparency.

Perceived honesty, however, was affected positively if participants read the council's minutes. It was expected that showing more information about a government organisation increases the perception that the municipality has been fully honest and that an open culture exists: this gives the impression there is nothing to hide.

The hypothesis regarding perceived benevolence argued that by disclosing information the local council might be perceived to show its good intention to act in citizens' interests. In contrast, no effect was proved. This might be explained by the fact that disclosing information about a decision-making process is an obligatory process regulated by law. By reading the council minutes people might realise that the disclosure of decision-making information is not related to intentions since it is simply obligatory. As a consequence, decision-making transparency is perceived to be only loosely connected to the intentions of a government organisation. Since benevolence concerns these intentions of a government organisation – i.e., its willingness to act in the interest of its citizens – this might have been the cause of there being no effect.

In sum, the assessment of the overall effect of decision-making transparency on perceived trustworthiness showed that three types of judgments occurred. First, people could hardly assess the council's benevolence by the disclosure of decision-making information. Second, the act of providing complete decision-making information as such is appreciated (hence the positive effect on perceived honesty). Third, the content of decision-making transparency is judged negatively if out in the open: it reveals the utterly political character of local decisionmaking which might not be as efficient as observed from a distance.

The results provided a surprising outcome. Not only did transparency have a positive effect on honesty, a negative effect on perceived competence was also revealed. This first analysis regarded a comparison of a situation in which people had not seen any information within a situation of a high degree of transparency (i.e. complete

information). However, this overall comparison only shows whether decision-making transparency has an overall effect; it does not reveal through what mechanism transparency might lead to more (or to less) trust.

6.5 Does decision-making transparency have direct and mediated effects?

6.5.1 Research model and hypotheses

The second analysis, presented in this section, tests the mechanism proposed in Chapter 4. In other words, which relations play a role in the effect of transparency on trust? To understand the mechanism of decision-making transparency on perceived trustworthiness, three relations have been distinguished (Fig. 6.4). It should be noted, however, that this test does not result in an explanation for the results found in the previous section, since different experimental groups have been tested to assess the mechanism. In the first analysis the control group (no information) was compared to the group with a high degree of transparency (complete information) to check whether transparency makes a difference at all. In this second analysis, only the groups that actually used (complete or incomplete) decision-making transparency were included to test the mechanism, since only they can assess their specific knowledge and the credibility of the message.

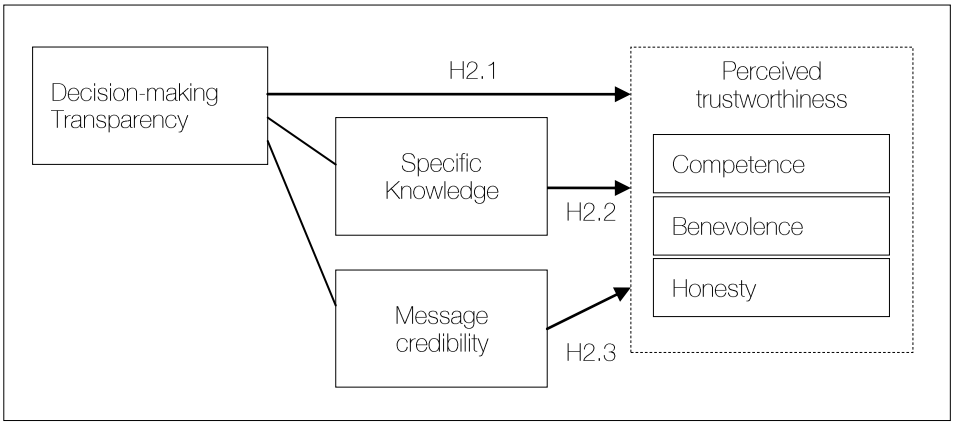

Figure 6.4 – Decision-making transparency research model concerning mechanism

First, the act of transparency is expected to be perceived as something positive in itself. If people are allowed a behind-the-scenes glimpse at government decisionmaking, this gives a feeling of openness, which is expected to positively affect the dimensions of perceived trustworthiness of the local council.

H2.1: A higher degree of decision-making transparency is expected to have a positive direct effect on perceived competence, benevolence and honesty.

Second, decision-making transparency is thought to increase participants' knowledge about the transparent object, since complete (thus more) information is available to them. The increased knowledge might affect perceived trustworthiness, yet the direction of it is debated in the literature (cf. Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995; Blendon et al., 1997; Bok, 1997; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2001; Cook et al., 2010). It is expected that increased knowledge leads to a more rational and realistic view of what the local council can and cannot do concerning political decisionmaking. Whether this more rational view contributes to more or less appreciation of perceived trustworthiness will be tested by the following hypothesis:

H2.2: A higher degree of decision-making transparency is expected to lead to higher levels of knowledge, which, in turn, is expected to have an effect on perceived competence, benevolence and honesty.

The third effect is mediated by message credibility (cf. Metaxas & DeStefano, 2005, p. 70; Flanagin & Metzger, 2007). If full information is available to people about the decision-making process, the information is expected to be perceived as more credible. It is thought that when information is perceived to be more credible, the source sending this information will be perceived to be more trustworthy:

H2.3: A higher degree of decision-making transparency is expected to lead to higher message credibility, which is expected to have a positive effect on perceived competence, benevolence and honesty.

6.5.2 Testing the mechanism

The empirical evidence for the hypotheses is presented in this section. First, the results regarding the direct effect hypothesis (H2.1) is presented, and then the data for knowledge (H2.2) and the message credibility hypotheses (H2.3) are presented.

Testing the direct effect

The direct effect of transparency is tested by a paired-group comparison. However, the overall multivariate effect of transparency on all three dependent variables – perceived benevolence, competence and honesty – was not significant[21]. The subsequent analysis tests the effects of transparency on the three dimensions of perceived trustworthiness and separately confirmed this non-significant result.

Table 6.5 – Group comparisons of perceived competence, benevolence and honesty for mechanism

Dependent Variable	*1. Incomplete*	*2. Complete*
Perceived Competence	3.24 (.07)[a]	3.21 (.07)[a]
Perceived Benevolence	3.47 (.08)[a]	3.43 (.08)[a]
Perceived Honesty	3.22 (.07)[a]	3.24 (.08)[a]

Means are displayed, standard errors in parentheses. N = 112. Rows with unequal superscripts differ significantly at p < 0.1

Table 6.4 confirms the non-significance of the multivariate and univariate results of the direct effect mentioned earlier. The differences between the experimental group with incomplete and complete information are negligible. This means that no direct effect of transparency can be determined and that Hypothesis 2.1 should thus be rejected.

Testing the effects of specific knowledge and message credibility

The results regarding the knowledge and message credibility hypotheses (H2.2 and H2.3) will be presented simultaneously. This entails a mediation effect (cf. Baron & Kenny, 1986). Therefore, the analysis of these relations has been is tested in two parts. First, the effect of transparency on specific knowledge and message credibility

[21] $F(3,101)=0.15$, $p = 0.928$. Further, Box's M was not significant, no problems with multicollinearity were detected and no outliers were evident.

is determined. Second, the effect of these two variables on perceived trustworthiness is assessed.

Table 6.6 shows the results of the first part of the analysis: the effects of decision-making transparency on people's specific knowledge and on message credibility.

Table 6.6 – Group comparisons of specific knowledge and message credibility

Dependent Variable	*1. Incomplete information*	*2. Complete information*
Specific Knowledge Df=1, 94 F = 28.26*** R^2 = .026 Adj. R^2 = .008	1.86(.11)[a]	2.00(.11)[a]
Message Credibility Df=1, 94 F = 21.76*** R^2 = .162 Adj. R^2 = .146	3.65(.08)[a]	3.99(.09)[b]

Means displayed, standard errors in parentheses. N = 96.

Table 6.6 makes clear that transparency has a significant effect on message credibility but not on a participant's specific knowledge. The level of self-assessed knowledge increases with 0.14, although this is a slight increase and is not statistically significant. Furthermore, the adjusted *R*-square is only 0.008. This equals an explained variance of 0.08 percent, which is negligible. "Explained variance" indicates the extent to which the variables in the model are able to explain changes in specific knowledge and message credibility. In other words, increased levels of decision-making transparency do not lead to higher levels of specific knowledge about the council's decisionmaking regarding air pollution.

The adjusted R-square in the message credibility column indicates that a proportion of 14.6 percent of the variability in message credibility is explained by the effect of decision-making transparency. In addition, the effect of the completeness of transparency on the credibility of the message is much stronger. The experimental group that received restricted information gave the credibility of the message a mean score of 3.65. Group 2, who received full information on decisionmaking, gave a

credibility rating of 3.99. This is a significant increase of information credibility due to the completeness of decision-making information.

Overall, Table 6.6 teaches us that the first part of the mediated effect is only partly confirmed by the analysis. Indeed, more complete decision-making transparency contributes to high levels of perceived message credibility, whereas more information does not seem to lead to significantly higher levels of knowledge.
The second part of the analysis assesses the effect of specific knowledge and message credibility on perceived trustworthiness: to what extent do transparency, message credibility and specific knowledge affect perceived trustworthiness? The results are presented in Table 6.7.

Table 6.7 – Univariate effects on dependent variables

	Perceived competence		*Perceived benevolence*		*Perceived honesty*	
Variables	*F*-value	Eta^2	*F*-ratio	Eta^2	*F*-ratio	Eta^2
Transparency	.14	.001	.14	.001	.04	.000
Mediators						
Message credibility	15.76**	.133	4.58*	.043	15.95**	.134
Specific knowledge	1.85	.018	.006	.000	.165	.002
Covariate						
Trust in gov. general	25.54**	.199	28.09**	.214	32.68**	.241
Intercept	4.12*	.038	7.22**	.101	.73	.007
Df1, df2	4,107		4,107		4,107	
Total Model F	16.91**		11.95**		19.18**	
R^2	.396		.317		.427	
Adjusted R^2	.373		.290		.405	

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$. N=108.[22]

Table 6.7 again shows that decision-making transparency does not have significant direct effect on perceived trustworthiness. This means that there is no statistical

[22] An additional ANCOVA-analysis in which all three dimensions were added to one 'general perceived trustworthiness dimension' confirms the results shown in table 6.7: no effects of transparency ($F(2,109)=0.019$, $p=0.892$) or specific knowledge ($F(1,109)=0.42$, $p=0.519$) were found. Further, also in this analysis an effect of message credibility ($F(1,109)=17.67$, $p=0.016$) and trust in government in general were found ($F(1,109)=44.24$, $p=0.000$).

difference between the two groups that received incomplete or complete decision-making information.

Furthermore, participants' knowledge about the local council appears to have no significant effect on any of the dimensions of perceived trustworthiness. Transparency apparently does not lead to more knowledge, and there is no independent effect of knowledge on perceived trustworthiness. The mediating effect of transparency through knowledge (H2.2) is thus not confirmed by the results.

The effect of message credibility on perceived trustworthiness is confirmed, however (H2.3). The parameter estimates (not displayed in a table) are positive, which means that higher levels of perceived message credibility reinforce perceived competence of the council. Thus although no direct effect of transparency on competence, benevolence or honesty occurs, there is an effect of transparency mediated by message credibility. Overall, the total variance explained in perceived competence is rather high, as it totals 37.3 percent.

What other effects can be observed from the table? Perceived benevolence is affected indirectly through message credibility. In other words, transparency has some effect on benevolence, yet this effect is mediated by the credibility of the information people read. Further, benevolence is only determined by trust in government in general. Overall, perceived benevolence is explained slightly less than the other dimensions of perceived trustworthiness: 29.0 percent of the variance is explained by the variables mentioned in Table 6.7.

The effect of message credibility on perceived honesty and perceived competence is much stronger than on perceived competence and benevolence. A credible message especially influences the perceived honesty of the local council. What can also be observed is the strong effect of trust in government in general on the perceived honesty of the council. In addition, message credibility and trust in government in general are the only significant variables for perceived honesty but are still able to explain a rather great deal of variance (40.5 percent). Message credibility explains the variance in the dimensions of perceived trustworthiness from 4.3 to 13.4 percent.
As mentioned in the section 'Selection and sample' (6.3.3), the covariate 'trust in government in general' was added to the analysis to increase the power and

explained variance of the experiment. The effect of trust in government in general is indeed rather strong, as it explains 19.9 percent of the variance in perceived competence, 21.4 percent of perceived benevolence and 24.1 percent in the variance in perceived honesty. This means that a part of the research model is confirmed and that trust in the local council is to a great extent explained by existing predispositions towards government.
In sum, Table 6.7 provides relevant evidence about the mechanism between transparency and perceived trustworthiness. The first mediated relation, the mediation effect of knowledge, is not supported by the results. However, the results do provide evidence for the existence of a mediated effect of message credibility. Further, the overall explained variances of each dimension are reasonably high, ranging from 29.0 percent for perceived benevolence to 40.5 percent for perceived honesty.

6.5.3 Conclusion: Message credibility as a basis for trustworthiness judgments

The second stage of the analysis is concluded by an overview and discussion of the results of each of the hypotheses. These are shown in Table 6.8.

The mechanism through which transparency leads to perceived trustworthiness could only partly be confirmed: specific knowledge had no effect, whereas message credibility did have an effect. How can this partly confirmed mechanism of the research model be explained?

The first variable in the model is specific knowledge, which appeared to have no significant effect. People reported to know more about the local council under scrutiny; however, this led to neither more nor to less trust in the council. This seems to be in contrast to the idea that more knowledge about a government organisation leads to more or less trust. Blendon et al. (1997) and Bok (1997) argue that people tend to be very critical about government activities they do not know much about. This appears not to hold with regard to the relation investigated in this chapter. However, the negative effect of knowledge (Hibbing & Theiss-Moore, 1995; Kimball & Petterson, 1997; Hibbing & Theiss-Moore, 2001) does not hold, either. This might be related to the character of knowledge in the transparency and trust relation. According to Lewicki and Bunker (1995), 'knowledge-based trust' is a type of trust that forms over time with increased knowledge. 'Over time' might be a crucial element in understanding the lack of effect of knowledge. This experiment only regarded a single

encounter of people with, in this case, the local council. This might not be enough to develop a solid base of knowledge in order to build trust. Knowledge might be built over time in order be a basis for trust. If not, other determinants of trust are important.

Table 6.8 – Summary of mechanism hypotheses of decision-making transparency

Overall effect hypotheses	*Result*	
H2.1: A higher degree of decision-making transparency is expected to have a positive direct effect on perceived competence, benevolence and honesty.	No positive direct effect of a high degree of decision-making transparency was found.	Not supported
H2.2: A higher degree of decision-making transparency is expected to lead to higher levels of knowledge, which is expected to have an effect on perceived competence, benevolence and honesty.	No mediating effects of knowledge were found.	Not supported
H2.3: A higher degree of decision-making transparency is expected to lead to higher message credibility, which is expected to have a positive effect on perceived competence, benevolence and honesty.	A positive mediation effect of message credibility was found: it is positively affected by decision-making transparency, and message credibility is positively associated with perceived trustworthiness.	Supported

Further, prior research has shown that knowledge has a positive effect on trust in a government organisation when people are provided with factual information (Cook et al., 2010). It seems the knowledge obtained by transparency of decisionmaking has a different nature than that in the study of Cook et al. The nature of knowledge in this study is political: who is in favour of a decision and why? This means that the decision-making information concerns the opinion and arguments of politicians. Of course, facts are used during debate in a decision-making process, yet they are used in a strategic manner in order to demonstrate a certain point in the political debate (Stone, 1988/2002). Hence, the nature of the knowledge gained by decision-making transparency might not contribute to trust, as it does not have a factual but a political character. This means that experiments that provide more factual information might

produce different results towards the effect of knowledge (see for example Chapter 8).

The results demonstrated that message credibility was the most important of each of the three relations predicted in the research model. A higher level of completeness of decision-making information leads to an increase in message credibility, which is related to more positive perceptions of the council's benevolence, competence and honesty. This means that participants that received complete information thought this was more credible, and as a consequence the perceived trustworthiness increased.

How can we explain this particular effect of message credibility while no direct and effects of knowledge were found? In the hypotheses section it was argued that the nature of the relation between message credibility and trust might be interpreted by the way people read messages on websites. So to an extent people make a conscious judgment about the online information: this is called the central route to persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Freeman & Spyridakis, 2004). In case of central processing, people assess the message itself, whereas the peripheral route involves processing simple cues such as the source of a message and thus does not closely scrutinise the message itself. People are more likely to "use" the central route when the message has personal relevance and are motivated to process the information in a message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Freeman & Spyridakis, 2004).

This is thought to partly be the case. On the one hand, people are asked by the researcher to specifically read information about a topic in which they are not necessarily interested. On the other hand, participants are expected to always have some ties with the local community since it concerns the city in which they live. In addition, in the experiment's instructions participants were asked to closely read the information on the website. This encouraged participants to use the central route of persuasion. In doing so, the "real" situation was simulated more closely since normally only citizens interested in air pollution would read such information and read it closely. Because they were encouraged to read the decision-making information thoroughly, participants made a more conscious assessment of the information. This way of processing information might be similar to that of citizens intrinsically interested in the topic.

Specific knowledge of the local council and direct effects are not supported by the results in chapter. This means that the effects on perceived trustworthiness with both a rational cognitive character (knowledge) and the more affective character (direct effect) are not supported by the results in this chapter. On the other hand, results did confirm that perceived trustworthiness is predicted by considerations as expressed by the mediated effect of message credibility. Message credibility might not be as rational and cognitively determined as knowledge, yet it still entails a conscious assessment of the information people read.

We have now discussed both parts of the analysis. First, the overall difference in perceived trustworthiness between the highly transparent experimental group and the control group was discussed. Secondly, this section delved into the results of the analysis concerning how transparency contributes to higher or lower levels of perceived trustworthiness. The next section will draw a combined conclusion of the findings and discussions of both analyses.

6.6 Decision-making transparency: A clumsy yet honest government

This chapter reviewed the following research question: *What is the effect of the completeness of decision-making transparency on citizen trust in a government organisation?* In order to answer this research question a research model and subsequent hypotheses were developed. To examine the model and hypotheses, an experiment was designed that varied the completeness of information about the decision-making process. One experimental group received full information; another group read restricted information, while the control group did not read any information at all.

To give an answer to the research question, the completeness of information of public decision-making transparency certainly has an effect on trust in the government organisation under scrutiny. The overall effect of transparency is partly negative, as it negatively affects perceived competence of the council. However, participants who were shown the decision-making minutes on the web also expressed higher levels of perceived honesty. In addition, the mechanism through which decision-making transparency affects trust is heterogeneous. Although the level of knowledge appeared to be no reason for higher levels of perceived trustworthiness, transparency

indirectly affects perceived trustworthiness mediated through message credibility. In sum, the assessment of the trustworthiness of the council is, in case of transparency of decisionmaking, strongly based on the way in which people judge the message (credible or not), instead of a more rational way of putting trust in someone (through knowledge) and an effective manner of judgment (direct effect).
What does this result mean for the debate on transparency and trust? The general discourse on transparency argues that mainly positive effects of transparency on trust are expected (Blendon et al., 1997; Bok, 1997; Nye et al., 1997; Brin, 1998; Florini, 1998; Oliver, 2004; Addink, 2005; Birkinshaw, 2006b; Hood, 2006b; Florini, 2007). This positive effect can only partly be confirmed by the empirical data presented in this chapter. We have seen that the local council was perceived to be less competent after people had read its minutes. How can this negative effect be explained? We already discussed that transparency of local council minutes shows decisionmaking not as a smooth rational process but rather as the bickering and the ultimately political character of this process. Public decisionmaking is not as rational as it is portrayed to the public (Stone, 1988/2002). It is not a process in which all values and solutions are listed, weighed and then chosen. It is incremental, and it is a process that comes along with bickering and a lack of resources and information: the “optimal” solution cannot be determined objectively. These cognitive limitations of our politicians are exposed by transparency.

The negative effect on perceived competence in the first analysis might be connected to the lack of effect mediated by specific knowledge shown in the second analysis. One of the arguments of transparency proponents is that transparency shows to citizens what government realistically can or cannot do (Cook et al., 2010), which affects the expectations regarding the competence of a government organisation. This indicates that transparency might contribute to a learning process which leads to a greater degree of awareness of political processes. However, no proof for learning effects of transparency could be found since people’s knowledge levels did not increase. The analysis of the mechanism already showed this might be due to the nature of the information which was political; hence it regarded the discussion about the decision itself. More factual information about the political process as such was not provided. This could have contributed to higher levels of knowledge about the process and thus to learning and maybe even to a better understanding for the limitations in political decisionmaking.

The first analysis showed that perceived honesty, however, was affected positively if participants read the council's minutes. It was expected that showing more information about a government organisation increases the perception that the municipality has been fully honest and that an open culture exists. It this gives the impression there is nothing to hide, and this directly relates to the effect of message credibility found in the second analysis. The completeness of information has a positive effect on the credibility of this information. This means that there is an actual assessment of the message, which indeed plays an important role in assessing the perceived honesty of the local council: higher levels of message credibility proved to have a particularly strong effect on perceived honesty.

Overall, decision-making transparency appears to raise the image of "clumsy yet honest" government. If we look into the mechanism, thus how transparency leads to either more or less trust, we see that message credibility is important. This means the central route of persuasion in which information is consciously assessed eventually leads to the predicament: "clumsy but honest". Government decisionmaking might become "too normal" if we actually see what is happening. The reality shown through transparency, i.e., that the local council is much more chaotic and that public decisionmaking is, in Lindblom's words, often a process of 'muddling through' (Lindblom, 1959). In spite of this, people feel the council is more honest after taking notice of decision-making transparency. So, on the one hand, people are more negative about the government organisation's effectiveness, while on the other hand they are more optimistic about its honesty. The image of a "clumsy but honest" government might be the result of this widespread form of transparency.

The long history of decision-making transparency was already discussed in the Introduction of the chapter. But what does the future hold for decision-making transparency and how could this affect trust in the local council? Most recently, technological developments have given rise to a new type of disclosure of decision-making information: the disclosure of audio and video files on the Web. More and more municipalities replace online disclosure of written minutes with video files of decision-making meetings. This might have serious implications for the democratic accountability of political bodies as information becomes harder to search for or scan through. On the other hand, decision-making transparency will become even more complete. Things that once could be omitted from the written minutes more easily are

now visible to everyone. Every argument, every clumsiness, every slip of the tongue, every cough, is now recorded and broadcasted. Because of this, people realise that virtually nothing in the decision-making process is hidden. Hence, this development could enlarge the effects found in this experiment. By being extremely complete about municipal meetings by providing a database with videos of every meeting, the council looks even clumsier yet also more honest.

7. Policy transparency: some image-building is accepted

7.1 What pays off: transparency or image-building?

Many government websites scream for attention to tell citizens what good work they do and what policy measures are carried out. Some argue that government organisations only pay lip service to transparency, and it is acknowledged that in general government websites are often used as a means to communicate with the public at large and spread rose-tinted press releases about government policies (Mahler & Regan, 2007). According to Davis (1999), the Internet is often used as a public relations rather than a public participation tool. Overall, it appears that image-building through websites is seen as more important than using them for transparency practices.

In the 20th century, television broadcasting and more recently the emergence of the Internet have immensely increased the possibilities for spreading information in societies (Davenport, 1993; Curtin & Meijer, 2006). The increased spread of information has ironically made it more important for government to control that information or to counterbalance negative information. For instance, Roberts (2005a) argues that since more and more extensive Freedom of Information Laws have been implemented in several countries the amount of spin control over what should and should not be allowed to be published has moved closer toward center stage in the operations of government.

Since policy transparency (the object of transparency central to this chapter) is not specified by laws and regulations and is thus subject to a large degree of discretion, large differences exist between municipalities in the degree of policy transparency (Meijer et al., 2010; Grimmelikhuijsen & Welch, 2012). Counterbalancing negative information can easily be accomplished by disclosing favorable information on government websites. A government organisation can easily ignore certain facts and emphasise others that are more in line with its policy. This means that the actual content of information that is disclosed is crucial. In other words, transparency does

not only entail the mere fact that some information is present; it also entails the extent to which this online message allows dissenting information.

In this chapter it is argued that if a policy message allows more balanced information it is likely to be more transparent. However, a policy message on a government website tends to propagate a particular, favourable, interpretation of the government's policy (Davis, 1999; Mahler & Regan, 2007). Negative and dissenting opinions on the policy are often not allowed, and as a result the degree of policy transparency is lower.

Central to this chapter is the question whether a more "honest" policy message actually pays off regarding trust in a government organisation. One could argue that if more balanced information about a policy is provided to citizens, a government organisation is perceived to be more open and hence is more trusted. On the other hand, if also negative features of a policy are present on a website, this might damage a positive image. Therefore the following central question is investigated here: *What is the effect of varying degrees of 'colouring' of transparent information about policies on citizen trust in a government organisation?*

This chapter will first outline three particular features of the experiment that are central to it: policy transparency, the local administration and message content. Next, the design, procedure, sample and manipulation check of the experiment are presented in Section 7.3. This will provide information as to how the experiment central to this chapter has been carried out. The experiment was designed with four groups (N=91). These consisted of one control group and three groups varying by the extent to which they allowed negative information. The first part of the results is presented in Section 7.4, which also outlines the research model, hypotheses, results and conclusions regarding the overall effect of policy information. That section provides insights into whether policy transparency has any effect at all. The presentation of the results is continued by the second part of the analysis in Section 7.5, which follows a structure similar to that of the previous section. That second part will shed light on the mechanism through which policy transparency affects trust in government. This chapter concludes with an overarching conclusion and discussion regarding both parts of the analysis.

7.2 A focus on policy transparency, local administration and message colour

In the context of air pollution, policy transparency refers to the information disclosed by government about the policy itself: what the adopted measures are, how they are supposed to solve a problem, how they will be implemented and what implications they will have for citizens and other affected groups. A municipality might indicate which policy measures are taken with which purpose, for example by stating the following on a municipality's website: *'By making considerable investments in public transportation and bicycle lanes, we aim to encourage drivers to leave their cars at home and travel by bicycle or train.'* Hence the experiment explicitly focuses on the policy measures taken by municipalities to combat air pollution. The corresponding object of trust is the municipality's administration — particularly the department that designs air pollution policy plans (Fig. 7.1).

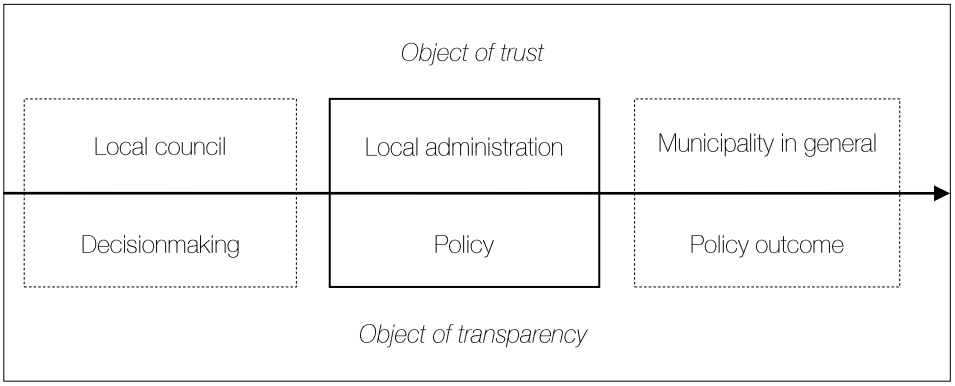

Figure 7.1 — Object of trust and object of transparency

A municipal department exists specifically to combat air pollution within the municipality's jurisdiction. After the decision-making procedure, air pollution policy is designed by this department. This is therefore considered to be the specific object of trust that 'matches' policy transparency[23].

[23] N.B.: Citizens probably do not place their trust in particular departments of a municipality, since they probably have not even heard of them. Therefore, rather than asking the participants in the experiment about the department itself, we asked them: 'Do you think the municipality is competent/benevolent/honest when it concerns their air pollution policy?'

So far we have discussed two specific features of the experiment: the object of transparency and the object of trust. The third element central to this chapter is the colour of the message that is being disclosed. In the introduction it was argued that this is a central dimension of policy information, since government organisations tend to be overly positive about policies on their websites (Davis, 1999; Mahler & Regan, 2007; Etzioni, 2010). The colour of information raises the issue about how this can be assessed. In other words, when is information about a policy less 'coloured', or in other words, balanced?

The abovementioned touches on a problem in assessing the content of (policy) transparency: we need to know what happened "in reality". Moreover, in the public realm this often entails a political reality in which facts are ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations (Stone, 1988/2002). One and the same issue can be portrayed in very different ways. For example, a government organisation could state: *'Extensive measurement by an independent research bureau shows that by 2015 our city will be one of cleanest in the country.'* On the other hand the abovementioned message could be represented by providing balanced, and thus more nuanced, information: *'Although no definitive conclusions can be drawn concerning the exact benefits of the policy-, measurements by an independent research bureau make clear that our policy might lead to slight improvements in the air quality of our city.'*

Hence, "truth" is hard to define, especially in a political context. Yet the degree of balance can be assessed and does probably (though not necessarily) relate to the degree of veracity of a policy message. Scholars seem to agree that information on government websites tends to be overly positive about government policies, actions or officials (Davis, 1999; Mahler & Regan, 2007; Etzioni, 2010) and that presenting messages with overly positive interpretations to compensate negative messages is a common form of spin (Gaber, 2000; Snell, 2002).

This means that the extent to which the content of a message is balanced depends on the extent to which negative content and dissenting views are allowed, instead of presenting only highly positive stories. The experiment in this chapter will vary in the degree to which the policy message is balanced. Prior work in advertisement studies provides an interesting perspective on this issue. This research has shown that a moderate amount of negative information can contribute to message credibility (Etgar

& Goodwin, 1982; Kamins, Brand, Hoeke & Moe, 1989). Overall, a more balanced policy picture might be achieved if it also allows for the presence of negative content on this policy.

In sum, message colour is an important aspect of policy transparency. Further, the administration plays a central role in policy transparency and is the object of trust in this chapter. Now that these three elements have been introduced, the research model and hypotheses regarding the effect of the colour of policy transparency will be outlined.

7.3 The policy transparency experiment: method and sample

7.3.1 Two stages of analysis

Two stages have been distinguished to fully answer the question regarding the effect of policy transparency on citizen trust. First, it was assessed whether policy transparency has any effect at all. This will be called the 'overall effect' of transparency and entails a comparison between a group of participants that did not receive policy information (i.e. control group) and a group of participants that did. The second step contains a separate analysis: the experiment will compare only those experimental groups that used policy transparency. In other words, this compares the effect of different degrees of policy transparency with each other. This separate analysis is needed in order to understand how policy transparency leads to trust. In sum, the test of the mechanism aims to broaden our understanding of the effect, whereas the overall test is needed to assess the strength and existence of the overall effect of transparency on perceived trustworthiness.

7.3.2 Design and transparency measures

An independent one-way experiment (N=91) was set up to investigate the relation between policy transparency and trust. Four groups were distinguished, varying on message colour. Three groups varied on the degree of the colour of transparency, ranging from a message with negative (N=21), positive (N=18) and highly positive (N=21) information. The control group (N=30) did not receive any information.

In the experiment presented in this chapter, a transparent message showed a balanced message of the municipality's air pollution policy measures. This means that

ineffectiveness and the uncertainty of the effects of policy measures were mentioned. In addition to the group that received only this negative information, there were two groups that were shown positive messages. One group received slightly positive information and another group received very positive information. How this was operationalised in the experiment is shown in Table 7.1 below.

Table 7.1 – Operationalisation of 'message colour'

Message	*What*	*Example*
Balanced	The balanced message contains both positive and negative information. Negative information on government policy allowed.	*'Unfortunately, these policy measures have not yet led to the desired improvement of the air quality in* [city name]*.'*
Slightly positive	Information is generally positive on government policy. However, it leaves room for a negative interpretation of the text ('substantial improvement') yet is represented so as that it is optimistic towards the policy problem in the municipality.	*'These policy measures have already led to a substantial improvement in the air quality of* [city name]*.'*
Very positive	The very positive message leaves no room for a negative interpretation of the text since the policy measures are said to be very effective and have led to a very clean air.	*'These policy measures have led to very clean air in* [city name] *and have solved nearly all problems with air quality in the most polluted areas in* [city name]*.'*

An existing text about policy measures on a municipal website was the point of departure for this study's message. This text already contained subtly positive message content, so the existing message remained unaffected for this group. To create a balanced message, negative arguments were added to the text, whereas to create the overly positive message the existing message was embellished.

The procedure to create these three messages was as follows. As mentioned, an existing policy text was used as the point of departure. This text was adjusted by the researcher for the purposes of this study. The messages were all discussed with several other researchers regarding whether they fit their descriptions (balanced/slightly positive/very positive message) and whether they could realistically

exist on a government website. In other words, the message should be convincing, i.e., participants should believe that these message are actually available on a municipal website. Every message was discussed multiple times with several colleagues and adjusted if necessary until agreement was reached. The operationalisation and exemplifying excerpts are shown in Table 7.1. Finally, this manipulation was checked with the participants in the experiment by asking in the questionnaire to what extent the information was perceived to be positive about air pollution policy (see Section 7.3.4).

The structure of each message followed a similar pattern to make sure they were comparable. The full text of a message consists of three paragraphs, but since it would take up too much text to display the full texts of each experimental group in this chapter, they are not displayed here[24].

7.3.3 Procedure

The procedure of the policy transparency experiment consisted of four elements: (1) an introduction of the experiment, (2) an instruction, (3) the experiment itself, and (4) a post-test questionnaire. Each of these elements will be explained.

First, before the experiment started, all participants were instructed about what they could expect. They were told that they were participating in a study to investigate the user-friendliness of government websites, instead of the real goal of the study (i.e. investigating the effect of policy transparency on trust). Participants were also told that they first had to follow written instructions to complete the experiment and then fill out a questionnaire.

Second, the instruction told participants exactly what they should read on the website, to ensure that everyone within each group read the same sections during their visit and to increase comparability between the groups. The instructions told participants the following:

1) First, you will face the introductory page of this study; please read this page.

[24] The messages presented to participants were originally in Dutch. The original or translated messages are available upon request.

2) Next, you will be asked to click on a link to the website of the municipality. This website is similar to the real municipal website, yet is placed on a server in a controlled environment. Some links and references to other pages are therefore deleted. I would like to ask you to carefully read the text on this page.
3) After reading this text click on 'proceed' to go to the questionnaire. The password and username to enter the questionnaire are XXX and XXX. Part of the questionnaire contains questions about the text you just read.
4) This is the link to the questionnaire: [link]

The excerpt of the instruction shown here exemplifies the level of detail of the instruction. By being very clear about what participants had to read, the comparability of the results between participants was increased.

Third, every participant was randomly assigned to one of the groups by a link to a website on their written instruction form[25]. Group 0 was assigned to fill out a questionnaire without visiting a government website, i.e., not using the available transparency. The experimental groups (1, 2 and 3) were assigned to visit the website that showed information about policy measures. Three different websites were used in this experiment and contained a short text on about how the municipality's administration tries to combat air pollution in the city. All three websites look exactly like a real municipal website. Also, the layout of each website was exactly the same. Only the "balancedness" of the policy message was adapted, as shown in Figure 7.2.

The fourth element of the procedure consisted of a post-test questionnaire. This questionnaire contained multiple questions about participant's trust, their self-assessed knowledge, perceived message credibility and background characteristics. These items have been outlined in detail in Chapter 5. After completing this questionnaire, the participants were debriefed and instructed about the real goal of the study.

[25] N.B.: for the "no transparency" group there was no link at all.

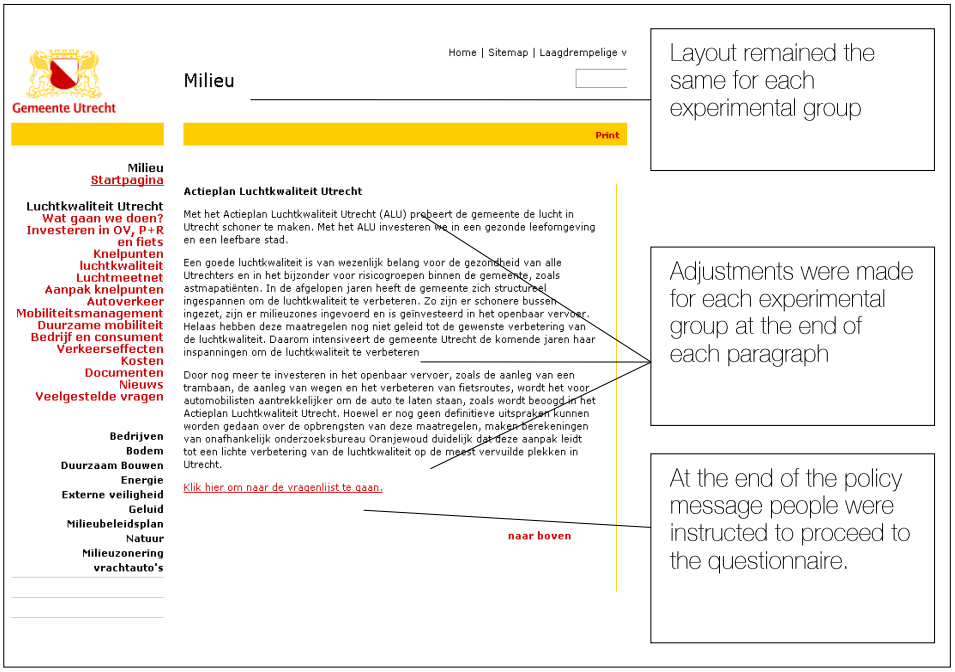

Figure 7.2 – Example of the website with both negative and positive policy information

7.3.4 Selection and sample

The sample consisted of a total of 91 participants, including first-year college students and a group of graduate students. The design and group distribution is shown in Table 7.2. Since only students were selected in the sample, there is no variance on both the level of education and hardly any variance in the age of the participants. The three variables mentioned in Table 7.2 are those which might influence trust in a specific government organisation and which might hence distort the relationship between transparency and trust.

Political preference and gender are distributed equally amongst the groups. Males are underrepresented in group 2, whereas participants with a left-wing political preference are underrepresented in group 1. To see whether these apparent differences in distribution are large enough to be significant, a Pearson chi-square test using crosstabs was carried out. These tests showed no evidence for an unequal distribution of gender, age, education or political preferences amongst the groups[26].

[26] Gender (Pearson chi^2=2.76, df=3, p = 0.430), Age (Pearson chi^2=20.38, df=21, p = 0.497),

This means that the randomisation of participants in the experiment was successful and that this should cancel out confounding effects of these background variables on perceived trustworthiness. Further, trust in government in general was taken into account in the analysis; it indicates one's predisposition to trust government. This covariate was taken into account to increase the explained variance, hence increasing the overall power of the experiment.

Table 7.2 – Sample composition experiment two

	% male	*Av. Age*	*Pol. Pref (% l.w.)*
0 – Control group N=30	48.4	19.6	29.0
1 –Balanced message N=22	52.4	19.9	31.8
2 - Slightly positive message N=18	27.8	19.9	38.9
3 – Highly positive message N=21	45.5	20.1	23.8
Total N=91	*42.6*	*20.0*	*30.4*

Pol. Pref (% l.w.) = Percentage of participants that indicated a preference to vote for a left-wing political party. "Left-wing political parties"=D66, PvdA, GL, SP, PvdD. According to manifesto research by Klingemann et al. (2006) these parties give relatively much attention to environmental issues.

7.3.5 Checking the experimental manipulation

Before attempting any further analysis the experimental set-up was checked. In other words, do participants perceive the experimental treatment in the way the researcher intended? This analysis showed that participants perceived the website similarly as the researcher did. The item 'the website of the municipality contained highly positive information' had a mean score of 2.95 on a five-point scale, running from one (totally disagree) to five (totally agree). The participants in the slightly positive experimental

Political preference (Pearson chi^2=2.19, df=6, p = 0.902).
Further, these background characteristic have been analysed for interaction effects with the independent variable. However, no significant interactions were found (Fs ≤ 1.60, ps ≥ .117).

group gave this item a 3.78 on average. The highly positive group agreed even more with this item 4.17. A one-way ANOVA analysis showed that the differences in means are both significant ($F(2,59)=10.94$, $p < 0.01$). This means that the negative, slightly positive, and very positive messages were indeed perceived as such by the participants in the experiment.

7.4 Does policy transparency make a difference?

7.4.1 Research model and hypotheses

The first stage of the analysis compares the control group with the "most transparent" experimental group. In this case the website with balanced information is considered to be the most transparent. This section outlines the research model and the hypotheses of the expectations regarding this "overall" effect of policy transparency on perceived trustworthiness (see Fig. 7.3).

Each arrow in the model represents a hypothesis regarding the overall effect of policy transparency on perceived trustworthiness. This means that three main hypotheses are distinguished.

As already argued in Chapter 6 many authors attribute positive effects to transparency (Blendon et al., 1997; Bok, 1997; Nye et al., 1997; Florini, 1998; Birkinshaw, 2006b; Hood, 2006b; Florini, 2007). On the other hand, there are scholars who point out the negative effects of transparency (e.g., O'Neill, 2002; Bovens, 2003; O'Neill, 2006; Etzioni, 2010). Positive effects on perceived trustworthiness are also expected with policy transparency.

First, perceived competence may be positively affected. Although more balanced information will also bring out negative aspects of the municipality's policy, this may also increase understanding for government policies. In the end, this will therefore lead to more positive perceptions of its competence.

H1.1: A high degree of policy transparency is expected to have a positive overall effect on perceived competence.

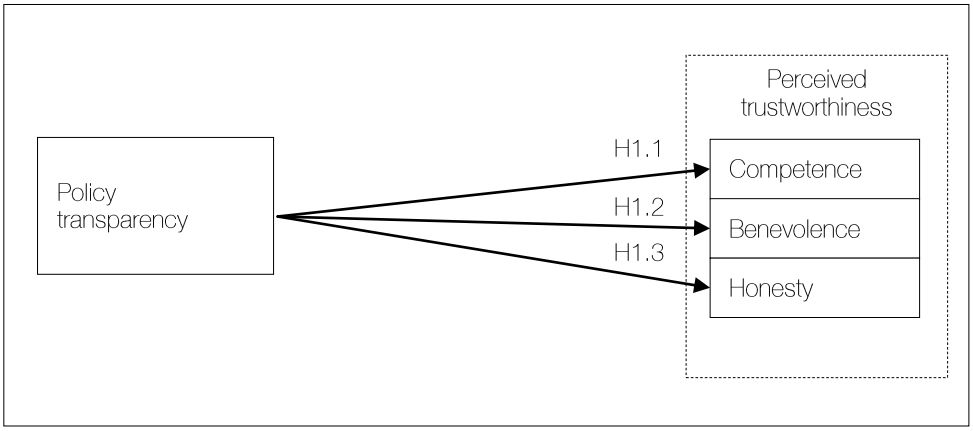

Figure 7.3 – Policy transparency research model concerning overall effects

Because balanced information about air pollution policy is provided to citizens, this is expected to foster the idea that the municipality truly acts in the citizens' interests. After all, the government organisation shows that although things might not go as initially planned, it is trying hard to solve a societal problem. Balanced information more convincingly shows that the government organisation makes an effort to solve citizen problems, while a government organisation could so easily present only positive information to the public. Showing balanced information to the public will therefore increase perceived benevolence:

H1.2: A high degree of policy transparency is expected to have a positive overall effect on perceived benevolence.

Balanced policy information provides a more complete image of government policies: both positive and negative elements are presented to citizens. It is expected that citizens think a municipality has nothing to hide if a fuller picture of local government air pollution policy is disclosed. Therefore, the following hypothesis is postulated:

H1.3: A high degree of policy transparency is expected to have a positive overall effect on perceived honesty.

7.4.2 Testing the overall effect of policy transparency

Do people who read transparent policy information think differently about the municipality than those who do not read this information? This section assesses the

strength and existence of the effect of policy transparency by focusing on the differences between the control group and the experimental group which is considered to be most transparent (i.e. with balanced content). Before carrying out a pair-wise group comparison, both overall multivariate effects and univariate effects of transparency on the separate dimensions of perceived trustworthiness were assessed. The overall multivariate effect indicates whether *some* significant difference occurs in the data without specifying the effect. Univariate significance proves an effect in a particular dimension, for example perceived honesty. A significant effect in one of these tests indicates that probably there is at least one experimental group that differs from another with regard to that particular dimension. In this experiment an alpha-level of 0.1 was set. This was considered to be appropriate due to the relatively low number of participants in each experimental group. It should be noted that at this significance level there is a probability of 10 percent that these results occurred by chance alone.

However, even at the 0.1-level no overall multivariate effect of transparency was found ($F(1,47)=1.97$, $p=0.131$)[27]. This is illustrated by the means of each group in Table 7.3. If means have a superscript in common within rows, no statistical difference was found between those groups. Means within rows with deviating superscripts are statistically different from each other.

Table 7.3 – Group comparisons of perceived competence, benevolence and honesty for overall effect

Dependent Variable	*Control (No information)*	*Balanced message*
Perceived Competence	3.22(.11)[a]	3.02(.13)[a]
Perceived Benevolence	3.60(.10)[a]	3.83(.12)[a]
Perceived Honesty	3.22(.11)[a]	3.31(.13)[a]

No multiple comparison correction since only one comparison per dimension was carried out. Means displayed, standard errors in parentheses. N = 52.[28]

[27] Box's M was not significant, which means that the assumption of equality of covariances has not been violated.

[28] An additional ANOVA-analysis in which all three dimensions were added to one 'general perceived trustworthiness dimension' confirms the results shown in table 7.3: no significant effect of transparency on perceived trustworthiness was found ($F(1,51)=0.10$, $p=0.75$).

The superscripts displayed in Table 7.3 indicate that the results of the control group and the transparent ("balanced message") group do not differ significantly from each other. Nevertheless, some descriptive patterns can be discerned. The group that received balanced content was somewhat more negative about the competence of the municipality's administration (0.2 lower). However, this group was slightly more positive about the administration's benevolence (0.23 higher). Compared with perceived competence and benevolence, the differences within the honesty dimension are much smaller (0.09). In spite of these descriptive results we cannot infer any hard conclusions about these differences, since they were not significant. This might be due a lack of power of the experiment; this will be discussed in the next section.

7.4.3 Conclusion: no positive effects of transparency

Three hypotheses were formulated to test the effect of transparency compared to the control group that received no information. We have seen that no statistical differences have been found; this is summarised in Table 7.4.

There are two potential causes for this lack of effect: either transparency does not cause a difference in perceived trustworthiness or the experiment has not been powerful enough to detect these differences. Both explanations are explored in this section.

Table 7.4 – Summary of overall effect hypotheses of policy transparency

Overall effect of hypotheses	*Result*	*Accepted?*
H1.1: A high degree of policy transparency is expected to have a positive overall effect on perceived competence.	No overall effect of policy transparency on perceived competence was found.	Not supported
H1.2: A high degree of policy transparency is expected to have a positive overall effect on perceived benevolence.	No overall effect of policy transparency on perceived benevolence was found.	Not supported
H1.3: A high degree of policy transparency is expected to have a positive overall effect on perceived honesty.	No overall effect of policy transparency on perceived honesty was found.	Not supported

First, the small sample size causes the experiment to have low power to detect significant differences. We have seen differences between groups of 0.20 and 0.23, yet these were not large enough to establish significance. In the prior experiment concerning decision-making transparency we saw that differences of a similar magnitude were significant. Nevertheless, "significance" is not just a meaningless label: it indicates the possibility that differences occur by chance. Because of the small sample size, the odds are that this difference is indeed just a coincidence.

Assuming that these differences are truly based on mere coincidence, the following conclusion can be drawn. A balanced policy message does not cause a positive effect on perceived trustworthiness. This indicates that transparency optimists' overall expectations about its potential effect might be too high. The results presented in this section did not confirm the hypotheses, which means the outcome of the first stage of the analysis was unexpected. This first analysis regarded a comparison of a situation in which people had not seen any information containing a high degree of transparency (i.e. balanced message). However, this does not show us through what relations transparency could lead to more (or to less) trust. In order to test this, the three groups that read some policy information on the government website were tested. The question then was not 'does policy transparency have an effect at all?' but: 'if policy transparency is used, how does it affect trust?'

7.5 Does policy transparency have mediated and direct relations with trust?

7.5.1 Research model and hypotheses

The second analysis tests the mechanism through which transparency and trust are supposed to be related to each other. Three relations have been distinguished to understand the mechanism between policy transparency and perceived trustworthiness (Fig. 7.4). It should be noted, however, that this test does not result in an explanation of the results found in the previous section, because different experimental groups have been tested to assess the mechanism. In the first analysis the control group (no message) was compared to the group with a high degree of transparency (balanced message) to check whether transparency makes a difference at all. In this second analysis, only the groups that actually used some level of policy

transparency were included to test the mechanism, since only they can assess their specific knowledge and the credibility of the message.

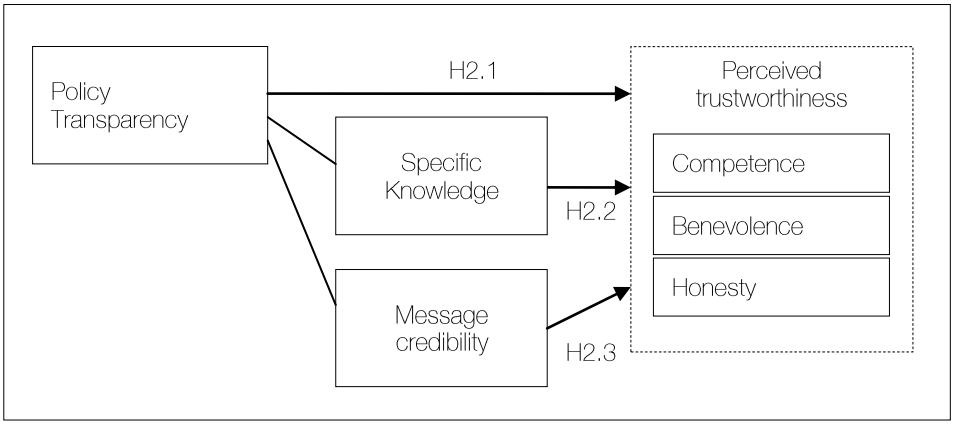

Figure 7.4 – Policy transparency research model concerning mechanism

Perceived trustworthiness of the local administration is affected by policy transparency in the multiple ways displayed in Figure 7.4. First, the act of transparency is expected to be perceived as something positive in itself. If people are allowed to see both sides of a policy instead of only the positive story this gives a feeling of openness which is expected to positively affect the dimensions of perceived trustworthiness:

H2.1: A higher degree of policy transparency is expected to have a positive direct effect on perceived competence, benevolence and honesty.

Second, policy transparency may increase participants' knowledge about the policy, since both positive and negative information is available. It is expected that increased knowledge leads to a more rational and realistic view of what the municipality can and cannot do concerning political decisionmaking. Whether this more rational view leads to more or less appreciation of perceived trustworthiness will be tested by the following hypothesis:

H2.2: A higher degree of policy transparency is expected to lead to higher levels of knowledge, which is expected to have an effect on perceived competence, benevolence and honesty.

The third effect is mediated by message credibility. If balanced policy information is available the information is expected to be perceived as more credible. It is thought that when information is perceived to be more credible, the source sending this information will be perceived to be more trustworthy as well, which thus leads to the following hypothesis:

H2.3: A higher degree of policy transparency is expected to lead to higher message credibility, which is expected to have a positive effect on perceived competence, benevolence and honesty.

7.5.2 Testing the mechanism

The empirical evidence for the three hypotheses is presented in this section. First, the results regarding the direct effect hypothesis (H2.1) are presented; next the data for knowledge (H2.2) and the message credibility hypotheses (H2.3) are presented.

Testing the direct effect

The overall multivariate effect of policy transparency on all three dependent variables – perceived benevolence, competence and honesty – was significant ($F(2,57)=2.14$, $p = 0.055$). The subsequent analysis tests the effects of transparency on the three dimensions of perceived trustworthiness separately. This analysis shows that only a significant univariate effect of transparency is found on perceived competence ($F(2,57)=1.78$, $p = 0.079$).

The next step in the analysis is to test specific group differences in perceived trustworthiness. The results are displayed in Table 7.5 below. If means have a superscript in common within rows then no statistical difference was found between those groups. Means within rows with deviating superscripts are statistically different from each other at a level of $p < 0.1$.

No group differences were found regarding perceived benevolence and honesty. This was expected, since the prior test already taught us that there were no significant overall differences found within these two dimensions. This means that the colour of policy transparency does not significantly affect the perceived honesty and benevolence of the council.

Table 7.5 – Group comparisons of perceived competence, benevolence and honesty for mechanism

Dependent Variable	*1. Balanced*	*2. Slightly Positive*	*3. Highly Positive*
Perceived Competence	2.93 (.13)[a]	3.34 (.14)[b]	3.26 (.13)[a,b]
Perceived Benevolence	3.83 (.12)[a]	3.46 (.13)[a]	3.61 (.12)[a]
Perceived Honesty	3.20 (.11)[a]	3.03 (.12)[a]	3.05 (.11)[a]

Means are displayed, standard errors in parentheses. N = 60. Rows with unequal superscripts differ significantly at p < 0.1 with Sidak-correction for multiple comparisons.

Nevertheless, the magnitude of the group differences concerning perceived benevolence is rather large. Especially the 0.37 in perceived benevolence between balanced content and slightly positive content is striking. The relatively low number of participants in this experiment, however, might cause a lack of power to detect these differences as significant.

A more important observation from Table 7.5 regards the group difference concerning perceived competence. People who read a message containing balanced content about policy measures gave a lower evaluation of government competence than those who read a message with a slightly positive content. The average score on competence given by group 1 (balanced content) is even slightly below 3.0, which on a five-point scale is considered to be a neutral score. The two groups with slightly positive to highly positive content have considerably higher mean scores on perceived competence. However, only group 2 (slightly positive) differs sufficiently to result in a statistically significant effect. It is remarkable that a more positive effect for group 3 (highly positive information) was not found, since this experimental group received information that left no room for a negative interpretation of the competence of the municipality.

In this section we explored group differences between the groups that visited a website containing more or less positive policy information. Probably partly because of the small sample size not all differences between groups can be actually flagged as significant. This seems to be true especially with regard to perceived benevolence. However, no conclusions can be drawn with regard to this dimension of perceived trustworthiness. The differences between the experimental groups concerning the perceived honesty dimension were not significant either. A significant difference was

found with regard to perceived competence. This was affected negatively by a policy message containing balanced content. The slightly positive message had the highest score for perceived competence. The highly optimistic message in that sense was counterproductive, as participants perceived the administration as slightly less competent compared to when it had a slightly less positive message. These results concern the *direct* effect of transparency. This is only one of the ways through which transparency might lead to perceived trustworthiness. Does the colour of policy transparency also affect people's specific knowledge about air pollution policy and the credibility of the message? And does this affect perceived trustworthiness?

Testing the effects of specific knowledge and message credibility

The results regarding the knowledge and message credibility hypotheses (H2.2 and H2.3) are presented simultaneously. Because this entails a mediation analysis, these two relations were tested in two parts. First, the effect of transparency on specific knowledge and message credibility was determined. Second, the effect of these two variables on perceived trustworthiness was assessed. Table 7.6 shows the effects of policy transparency on people's specific knowledge of the local council and the perceived credibility of the online information they read.

Table 7.6 – Group comparisons of specific knowledge and message credibility

Dependent Variable[29]	*1. Balanced*	*2. Slightly positive*	*3. Highly positive*
Specific Knowledge Df=2, 57 Total Model F = 0.96 R^2 = .049 Adj. R^2 = .000	2.36 (.18)[a]	2.04 (.19)[a]	2.16 (.18)[a]
Message Credibility Df=2, 57 Total Model F = 1.84 R^2 = .090 Adj. R^2 = .041	3.26 (.15)[a]	3.13(.17)[a]	3.00(.15)[a]

Means displayed, standard errors in parentheses. N = 60. Rows with unequal superscripts differ significantly at p < 0.1 with Bonferroni-correction for multiple comparisons.

[29] N.B.: Only the treatment groups were included in this test, because only the transparency groups were questioned about information credibility. Group 0 (no transparency) did not get to read any information at all. Therefore, this group of participants was not asked about how they perceived the information they read.

The results of the MANOVA-analysis shown in Table 7.6 demonstrate that the colour of policy transparency does not predict people's specific knowledge or perceived message credibility. In other words, whether people feel they are informed or feel a message is believed credible does not depend on the balance of the message. Although some interesting descriptive differences can be found in the table, these are not large enough to be significant.

In addition, the variances explained by policy transparency are very low. Explained variance indicates the extent to which variability in the data in dependent variables can be explained by changes in the independent variable (i.e. colour of policy transparency). Specific knowledge does not have any explained variance (adj. R-square is 0.0). Message credibility's explained variance is slightly higher, yet still only 0.041, which equals 4.1 percent.

The second part of the mediation analysis determines the effects of specific knowledge and message credibility on perceived trustworthiness. Table 7.7 shows the direct effect of transparency on perceived competence, which was also presented in Table 7.5. It should be noted that the direct effect of transparency explains the rather large proportion of the variance of perceived competence of nine percent (indicated in the eta-squared colon)[30]. Nevertheless, here we will focus on the effects mediated by specific knowledge and message credibility as shown in the table.

The first mediating variable in the model is specific knowledge. However, specific knowledge does not have any effect in this model. Part one of the analysis showed that providing a more balanced message did not affect the amount of specific knowledge. Overall, it is fair to conclude that specific knowledge has no role in the relationship between policy transparency and perceived trustworthiness. Hypothesis 2.2 should thus be rejected.

[30] Eta-squared indicates the proportion of variance that is explained by a particular variable in the model (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

Table 7.7 – Univariate effects on dependent variables

	Perceived competence		*Perceived benevolence*		*Perceived honesty*	
Factor	*F*-value	Eta^2	*F*-ratio	Eta^2	*F*-ratio	Eta^2
Transparency	2.66+	.090	2.16	.074	0.75	.027
Mediators						
Message credibility	9.86**	.154	1.44	.026	20.39**	.274
Specific knowledge	.42	.008	.774	.002	.240	.025
Covariate						
Trust in gov. general	6.32*	.105	22.27**	.292	23.24**	.301
Intercept	3.29+	.057	8.43**	.135	.01	.000
Df1, df2	2, 57		2, 57		2, 57	
Total Model	5.02**		6.65**		12.40**	
R^2	.317		.381		.534	
Adjusted R^2	.254		.324		.491	

F-ratios and partial eta^2 are displayed. N=61.[31] + $p < 0.1$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$.

The second mediating variable in the model, message credibility, affects only perceived competence and honesty ($p < 0.01$). The table shows a particularly strong connection between message credibility and perceived honesty. The eta-squared of .274 indicates that message credibility explains a proportion of 27.4 percent of the variance in perceived honesty. Nevertheless, the first part of the test already showed that policy transparency does not significantly affect perceived message credibility. This means that the hypothesis regarding message credibility (H2.3) should be rejected.

The overall adjusted R-squared values for each of the dimensions are rather high. This means, for example, that the variables mentioned in the perceived competence column of the table together explain 25.4 percent of the variability in perceived

[31] An additional ANCOVA-analysis in which all three dimensions were added to one 'general perceived trustworthiness dimension' confirms the effect of message credibility ($F(1,59)=15.81$, $p=0.00$), trust in government in general ($F(1,59)=29.32$, $p=0.00$), and it also provides evidence for the absence of effect of knowledge ($F(1,59)=0.89$, $p=0.35$). The slight effect of transparency found in the more sophisticated analysis (i.e. with three separate dimensions) is too small to be detected by the additional analysis which treats trustworthiness as one general dimension.

competence. Perceived benevolence is explained for 32.4 percent, whereas perceived honesty is predicted for even 49.1 percent.

Trust in government in general indicates one's predisposition to trust government. This covariate was taken into account to increase the explained variance, hence increasing the overall power of the experiment. This was an important predictor for all dimensions of perceived trustworthiness of this specific government organisation. The strength of this determinant varies among the dimensions of perceived trustworthiness: its effect on perceived benevolence and perceived honesty is rather strong. On the other hand, perceived competence is only slightly affected by trust in government in general. For example, it explains 10.5 percent of the variance of competence, whereas trust in government in general explains about 30 percent of the variances of perceived benevolence and honesty.

7.5.3 Conclusion: a limited and negative direct effect

The second stage of the analysis is concluded by an overview and discussion of the results of each of the hypotheses. These are shown in Table 7.8 below.

Table 7.8 – Summary of mechanism hypotheses of policy transparency

Mechanism hypotheses	*Result*	
H2.1: A higher degree of policy transparency is expected to have a positive direct effect on perceived competence, benevolence and honesty.	A negative direct effect was found in the case of presenting balanced content.	Not supported
H2.2: A higher degree of policy transparency is expected to lead to higher levels of knowledge, which is expected to have an effect on perceived competence, benevolence and honesty.	No effect of policy transparency on perceived benevolence was found.	Not supported
H2.3: A higher degree of policy transparency is expected to lead to higher message credibility, which is expected to have a positive effect on perceived competence, benevolence and honesty.	No effect of policy transparency on perceived honesty was found.	Not supported

It is striking that again none of the hypotheses can be accepted. The lack of effect could be due to the experiment itself. The experiment's sample size might have been too small to detect significant differences. Nevertheless, the H2.1 yields an interesting counterintuitive outcome. Balanced message content about the municipality's policy actually had a negative outcome compared to providing slightly positive information. Providing highly positive information had a weaker effect on perceived competence and was in that sense less effective. Further, in the analysis of the direct effect of transparency, perceived honesty and benevolence remained unaffected.

It should be noted that the effect of a balanced policy message on perceived competence is not merely negative; it is more nuanced than that. The slightly positive message gave rise to higher levels of perceived competence than the highly positive message, although one might expect better results with the latter. How could we interpret these results? The slightly positive colour emphasised optimism about the policy measure implemented by the municipality and left space for a negative interpretation about their effectiveness. For example, it stated that 'substantial improvement' of the air quality has been attained by policy measures. The highly positive policy message did not leave this room and boldly stated that the air was clean already. Apparently, being too bold about the municipality's own policy leads to slightly less positive perceptions of the municipality's competence.

In addition, no mediation effects of specific knowledge and message credibility were supported by the results. The results concerning knowledge are comparable with the results of the decision-making experiment: the increased level of knowledge did not have an effect on perceived trustworthiness. Message credibility is related to perceptions of the trustworthiness of the municipality's administration, yet providing more or less negative policy information appeared not be related to the perceived credibility of the message. In other words, the extent to which the online message was found credible did not depend on the colour of the message (being positive or negative). This is remarkable, especially compared to the strong relationship between decision-making transparency and message credibility found in the previous experiment and because prior studies on balanced messages in advertisement showed positive effects on credibility (Etgar & Goodwin, 1982; Kamins et al., 1989). The policy message itself might not be balanced enough. Consumer research shows that a "moderate amount" of negative information in a message has these positive

effects. In constructing the policy message there might not be enough negative information to cause these effects. However, because the policy message had to be presented on a government website in a convincing manner, the information could not be stated too negatively.

In the end it is remarkable that the very positive message did not lead to lower levels of, for example, perceived honesty. This might be explained by the way in which policy transparency is judged. We have seen that there is hardly any effect of the "routes" to trust that entail more rational considerations: message credibility entails a conscious and critical judgement of cues in the message. Specific knowledge is an even more cognitive and rational route to trust, as it is based on what people know about air pollution policy. A more conscious judgement by assessing message credibility and knowledge might lead to more critical considerations of the optimistic online policy information. This touches upon an important topic which will be discussed in more detail in the overall conclusion.

7.6 Policy transparency: some image-building is accepted

To answer the research question posed in the introduction of this paper, we conclude that this study found limited yet significant evidence for a negative effect of policy transparency on perceived trustworthiness. Only perceived competence was affected, whereas other dimensions of perceived trustworthiness remained unaffected. Based on these results it remains questionable whether transparency will contribute to trust in government.

The current experiment showed a negative effect on perceived competence. A balanced message paints a more realistic picture of the multiple viewpoints on the political reality in which a government agency operates. For example, the message explicitly states that current policy measures did not have the expected effects. Also, this message states that the exact benefits of policy measures on local air quality are uncertain. This is closer to reality than the message that trumpeted government's very effective policy measures. However, in the second analysis it was also made clear that the slightly positive message gave rise to higher levels of perceived competence than did the highly positive message. This means that although some boasting by

government about its policies is accepted, being too positive about itself is less effective.

What have we learned concerning the question about the effect of the colour of policy transparency on perceived trustworthiness of the municipality's administration? In the first analysis, a comparison between the control group and the balanced message transparent experimental group, no significant effect was detected. In the second analysis, when different degrees of transparency were compared, a direct effect of transparency on perceived competence was demonstrated. This, however, demonstrated a negative effect of the balanced message on perceived competence. Thus in the short term, being more transparent does not seem to pay off on the level of individual government organisations. Further, it is remarkable that perceived trustworthiness is mainly determined by the direct route: this means that people express trust based on simple cues, and not on thorough scrutiny of, for example, positive messages. No effects of knowledge and message credibility were present, which might explain the non-critical stance of participants towards the positive policy messages. If people would more consciously assess the message and base their judgment on specific knowledge about the policy, the overly optimistic exposure would probably be assessed in a more critical manner.

The idea of lacking critical judgment is supported by the results found in the second analysis: there was no assessment of the credibility of the message and no effect of specific knowledge. In this sense people are not very critical of government information and could be considered "naïve". For transparency to work, critical citizens are needed. However, this experiment points out there is no real assessment of the message (hence no appreciation for providing complexities), nor is it influenced by knowledge and expertise. This cognitive route to trust would have recognised the "deceit" in the overly positive message and would have been critical about it[32].

Do people then just expect success stories from government? On the one hand it seems that people in a way do not want to know about complexities and uncertainties in policymaking. Results offer some evidence that people might prefer to be appeased by a false image that government knows what it is doing and where it is

[32] N.B.: This also means that people cannot know whether the information corresponds with the truth. High levels of prior knowledge are needed to recognise this.

heading. This fits with an argument posed by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995, 2001). Their central argument is that people who know most about government like it the least. Citizens prefer a "stealth democracy": people do not want to be involved in decisionmaking and they do not want to know about all the details of policymaking.

On the other hand, government should not boast too much about its accomplishments. This study showed that leaving some space for a negative interpretation about the effectiveness of government's policies was more effective than stating that policy measures are extremely effective and have attained their goals. Apparently its being too bold about its own policy leads to somewhat less positive perceptions about the government organisation. This means that merely publishing policy success stories does not pay off, yet more subtle forms of image-building are accepted and maybe even expected.

Overall, this study suggests that policy transparency might not meet the hopes of its advocates when it comes to increasing trust in government. The hype surrounding transparency from this perspective is not justified. Everybody wants government to be transparent. Yet government still seems to get away with messages that slightly "boast" about policies while actual transparent message give rise to more critical evaluations of a government organisation's competence. In the long run, however, especially perceived honesty might be affected if governments extensively use highly positive policy messages. In this experiment only a single encounter with government transparency was simulated, but when a government organisation repeatedly engages in serious forms of overly positive information disclosure this might lead to an eventual decrease in perceived honesty.

In a country with a long tradition of democracy and an absence of serious forms of propaganda, an overly positive policy message might not be expected by citizens and could thus be read with suspicion. Hence, continuous policy transparency with balanced content might have positive effect in the long term, whereas continuous positive coverage might have negative effects on the perceived honesty of government.

8. Policy outcome transparency: a lack of transparency as a dissatisfier

8.1 NPM and the rise of transparency of policy outcomes

Declining citizen trust in government, be it real or perceived, is argued to be a main driver behind New Public Management reforms (McNabb, 2009; Van de Walle, 2011). The NPM-like reforms emphasise that government should be run in a more like a for-profit business, attain more tangible results, and should focus less on budget (inputs) (Hood, 1991; Pollitt, 2003; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004). An important goal of these reforms is their focus on policy results and making these results more transparent in order to strengthen citizen trust (Kjaer, 2004; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004: 24; Pina et al., 2007).

Transparency and policy outcome are thus two "natural" NPM-components. Quantified performance indicators or reports are stored easily in databases and disclosed to a broad public who can now use this information rather cheaply and conveniently through its availability on the World Wide Web. An example of this focus on results and openness on the Web is the disclosure of school inspection results in the Netherlands. Inspection reports were previously used as means for government to check the quality of schools; however, since pressures for more openness and policy results have increased, these reports are now also published on the Internet (Meijer, 2007).

In addition, the Internet has enormous potential to provide citizens with understandable and timely information about government performance. Performance data can now be published in online realtime and in comprehensible formats. This means that the Internet has enormous potential to increase the analytical transparency of policy outcomes. According to Davenport (1993) analytical transparency involves the possibilities to analyse databases from different perspectives and levels. A well-known example of increased options for analytical transparency stemming from the United States (US) is the Toxic Release Inventory (TRI). This was instigated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). A US environmental group used the publicly

available raw TRI data and disclosed it in an easily understandable format on a website[33] (Florini, 1998). The latter is a typical example of analytical transparency; raw data was aggregated in a format that was comprehensible for ordinary citizens.

Does transparency of policy outcomes contribute to citizen trust in government? Transparency might help people to become more familiar with government and create understanding (Nye et al., 1997). This is based on the idea that when citizens do not know government or what it does, they will not come to trust it easily. Therefore, several authors argue that one cause for a lack of trust in government is if citizens are not provided with factual documentation about government performance (Blendon et al., 1997; Bok, 1997; Cook et al., 2010). In this sense, transparency of policy outcomes can be crucial to increasing citizen trust.

Further, information disclosure of policy outcomes is a type of transparency that is arguably most interesting for a broader public compared to other forms of transparency. It essentially shows what results are attained from the money that was invested in government programmes. Therefore transparency of policy outcomes might be the most promising type of transparency for government to increase citizen trust. Does this type of transparency also have a positive effect on trust? To investigate this puzzle, this chapter seeks to answer the following research question: *What is the effect of the usability of transparent information about policy outcomes on citizen trust in a government organisation?*

The experiment designed to answer this question consisted of five groups: one control group that received no information and four groups with information varying on the degree of information usability and the outcome of the policy (i.e., a negative or positive outcome). The experiment contained three specific features: policy outcome transparency, a government organisation and usability of information. These three features are explained in Section 8.2. Section 8.3 discusses the research design, measurement, and procedure used in this chapter. The results of the two analyses are presented in Sections 8.4 and 8.5. Both contain separate conclusions and discussions. The final section of this chapter brings the two analyses together and connects overall effects with the mechanism through which transparency and perceived trustworthiness are linked.

[33] www.scorecard.org, accessed May 25th, 2010

8.2 Focus on policy outcome, a municipality and information usability

First, we will examine how the feature 'policy outcome' relates to the first element of the realistic context: air pollution. This will make clear how the second element of this context, municipalities, relates to policy outcome transparency. Yet what is a 'policy outcome' in the context of air pollution policy? In this dissertation the actual amount of toxic pollutants in the air is considered to be a policy outcome. Although air pollution cannot be fully solved solely at the local level, municipalities are able to reduce air pollution by designing and carrying out effective policy measures.

Further, municipalities in the Netherlands play a pivotal role in gathering, reporting and disclosing this information. Polluted and large municipalities are legally obliged to compile reports about air pollution. These reports, however, are not always disclosed to the public. In order to write reports on the actual air pollution many municipalities have a measurement system that measures often-occurring toxic pollutants in the air. The data generated from these systems can be published in various formats. For example, annual reports with aggregated figures might be published on a website. Another disclosure format would be to reveal frequent, hourly figures giving up-to-date air pollution information. Hence, municipalities are important in combating air pollution. Figure 8.1 shows which object of trust matches transparency of policy outcome.

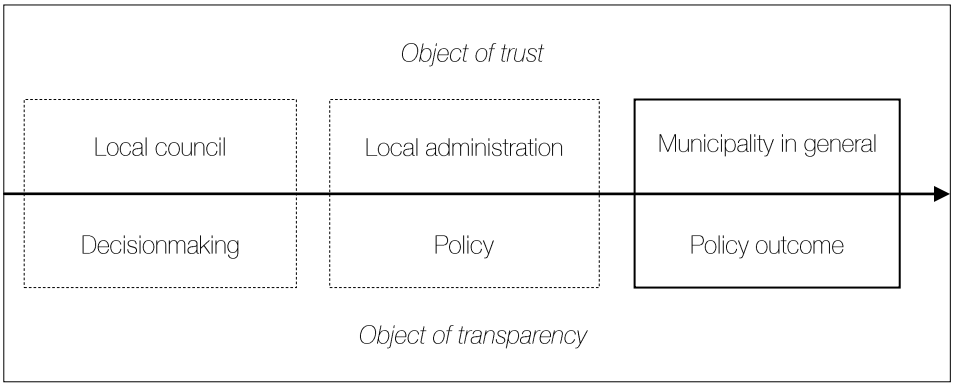

Figure 8.1 – Object of trust and object of transparency

The matching object of trust is the municipality in general. Although in reality air pollution might not concern a municipality as a whole, the effect of policy outcome transparency on this specific policy topic affects the attitude of people towards the

municipality as a whole. Hence, a specific part of the municipality represents the whole: *pars pro toto*.

The final specific feature of the experiment is the usability of policy outcome information. It should be noted that this does not concern the usability of the website as a whole but the usability of the *information* about policy outcomes. The usability of information is important to transparency, as unwelcome policy outcomes can be made 'pseudo transparent' by launching a website with difficult-to-comprehend information. Pseudo transparency refers to a situation in which government organisations pretend to be transparent, while in reality this might not be the case. The Internet makes it possible to disclose a great deal of information, which leads to an information overload. This not only consists of information but also a flood of misinformation (O'Neill, 2002). For example, government might upload myriad lengthy reports with policy results on their websites, acting as if this is very transparent, yet these reports are often old and already outdated once they are published. In addition, such reports are very hard to understand for non-experts. In other words, policy outcome information often is hardly usable for laymen because it is outdated and incomprehensible. What is meant with information usability in the experiment is outlined in more detail in the next section.

In sum, this section explained three specific features of the experiment. It showed how policy outcome transparency was related to the two elements of the realistic context: air pollution and municipalities. Further, it highlighted the importance of information usability for transparency and policy outcome transparency in particular. We now turn to explaining the design and procedure of the experiment.

8.3 The policy outcome experiment: method and sample

8.3.1 Two stages of analysis

Again, two stages of analysis have been distinguished. First, we assess whether policy outcome transparency has any effect at all. This will be called the 'overall effect' of transparency and entails a comparison between a group of participants who did not receive any information and a group of participants who received transparent (usable) information. The second step contains a separate analysis: the experiment will compare only experimental groups with each other, i.e., those which used a

degree of usability of policy outcome information. This compares the effect of different degrees of usability with each other. The control group is not included in this analysis. This separate analysis is needed to understand *how* policy outcome transparency leads to trust, which is the third and final stage. This assesses the potential mediating effects of specific knowledge and message credibility.

8.3.2 Design and measures

An independent 2x2 experiment (N=834) with one control group was set up to investigate the effect of policy outcome transparency on trust in a municipality. This means two factors were distinguished in this experiment: transparency itself and policy outcome. The latter refers to whether the outcome of a policy is positive or negative for government. In this experiment, the policy outcome is represented by the degree of air pollution in a municipality: the air is either very clean or much polluted. The actual outcome might impact people's trust in local government besides the effect of transparency itself. By incorporating this in the research design the effect of the content of transparency (negative or positive policy outcome) can be separated from the effect of transparency itself. For example, information usability might be very timely and understandable, yet if it shows if the air quality is terrible this might still lead to negative evaluations of the government organisation. On the other hand, bad results presented clearly and honestly might lead to more appreciation than when they remain hidden behind hardly usable information. As a result, four experimental groups were created, plus one control group (see Table 8.1).

Table 8.1 – Design policy outcome experiment

0 – Control group		*Usability*	
		Low	*High*
Outcome	*Negative*	1	3
	Positive	2	4

To expose the effect of different outcomes, the website showed only extremely negative policy outcomes (groups 1 and 3) or extremely positive outcomes (groups 2 and 4). 'Outcome' was operationalised as the degree of air pollution (i.e. polluted or

clean)[34]. 'Transparency' was operationalised according to the extent to which the information was up-to-date and comprehensible (Table 8.2).

Table 8.2 – Operationalisation of usability of policy outcome

Usability element	*Source*	*Example*
A. Timeliness 1. Old 2. Recent	Heald, 2006	"Old" and "recent" information about a policy outcome was made feasible for the experiment as follows. 1. Old data in the experiment consisted of air pollution figures from 2006[35]. 2. Recent data yield air pollution figures updated one hour ago.
B. Comprehensibility 1. Difficult 2. Easy	Drew & Nyerges, 2004 Larsson, 1998 Etzioni, 2010	Information which was "difficult" and "easy" to comprehend was made feasible for the experiment as follows. 1. Difficult: only figures, no explanation. 2. Easy: Figure, with textual and visual explanation.

Comprehensibility and timeliness of the information here is referred to as the overarching dimension 'usability'. Both aspects of information usability varied across groups simultaneously, which means that only the overall effect of usability can be assessed and not the effect of each usability element separately. These two dimensions varied across the experimental groups simultaneously in order to create two extreme conditions and thereby create the highest probability to detect an effect.

[34] Different types of toxics in the air determine 'air pollution'. The four most important substances that are measured in the Netherlands are nitrogen dioxide (NO_2), fine dust particles (PM_{10}), benzene (C_6H_6) and carbon monoxide (CO). Because showing figures about all these substances would overload participants with many figures in little time, only nitrogen dioxide (NO_2) figures were shown in the experiment. Pollution by nitrogen dioxide is one of the biggest air pollution problems, along with fine dust particles. However, local government has a greater degree of influence on reducing nitrogen dioxide locally, since this type of pollution is mainly caused by cars on local roads. This in contrast with the degree of fine dust particles, which is better combated at the national level.

[35] The experiment was carried out in July 2010.

What do these two elements of usability consist of? The first element central to information usability is timeliness of the data. This element is particularly important because the outcome of a policy is not static but perpetually subject to change. Old data about air pollution disclosed on a website are much less meaningful than recently updated figures about toxic pollutants currently in the air. 'Reactivity' is the yardstick against which 'timeliness' is measured: the amount of time between the actual measurement or determination of the policy outcome and the disclosure of this data. Moreover, this could allow government to 'massage' the information or release information at a point of time that is politically more convenient.

Besides the timeliness dimension, the experiment varied on comprehensibility. This element is important to citizens in being able to use and assess the information. Although the degree of comprehensibility depends on the expertise and knowledge possessed by each individual, the comprehensibility on a general level is checked by asking participants how understandable they perceived the information to be. In sum, swift and comprehensibly disclosed information contribute to information usability.

8.3.3 Procedure

How was the abovementioned operationalisation put into practice in the experiment? The procedure consisted of four elements: (1) an introduction of the experiment, (2) an instruction, (3) the experiment itself, and (4) a post-test questionnaire. Each of these elements will be explained.

A municipality granted permission to make use of a panel of citizens that regularly participated in their online questionnaires. An e-mail was sent on behalf of the municipality and Utrecht University to a panel of 3,000 citizens (step 1, introduction of the experiment). This e-mail contained an invitation for people to participate in the experiment:

'The municipality is collaborating with the University of Utrecht in a research concerning air quality in the city. We would like to ask a few questions about the municipal website to improve it if necessary. In addition, we would like to ask some questions that will be used in the research of the University of Utrecht.'

Those who received the e-mail were free to decide whether or not to participate. People then had to click on a link which randomly put them in one of the groups explained in the previous section. The invitational e-mail told people that the investigation was aimed at improving the municipal website, the actual goal of the research; that they were assigned to different websites was only revealed to them after they had completed the questionnaire.

Participants were first shown the start of the questionnaire with some general questions about prior visits to municipal websites. After this first page of the questionnaire, people were instructed to click on a link which led them to one of the four websites in the experiment. Before clicking on the link, the questionnaire told participants to read the website and to follow the instructions on the website (step 2 in the procedure).

The third part of the procedure consisted of the experiment itself. Each website consisted of two pages. The first page had a general explanation about air pollution in the city, and the content was the same for each group. People were then instructed to click on to the next page, which contained a map with three stations measuring air pollution depicted on it. These stations exist in reality; however, the degree of air pollution indicated by each station was manipulated to fit the purposes of the experiment. Participants were further instructed to read the information provided by each of the three measuring stations (Fig. 8.2).

Figure 8.2 provides an example of the website shown to participants and attributed to experimental group 4 (i.e. usable, positive policy outcome). The two websites with a low level of information usability only mentioned a number for air pollution without providing further explanation; it furthermore used a figure attributed to the year 2006. The difference between groups one and two is the adjusted number which indicates the degree of air pollution, which was low or high depending on the policy outcome. Further, the two other groups are much clearer: the website indicates that the figures are very recent, at most one hour old. In addition, the figures are easily comprehensible by indicating whether the air quality is currently ‘good’ or ‘very bad’. The control group only completed a questionnaire and hence did not look at a website. After looking at the map, people were instructed to close the window of their browser and to complete the questionnaire.

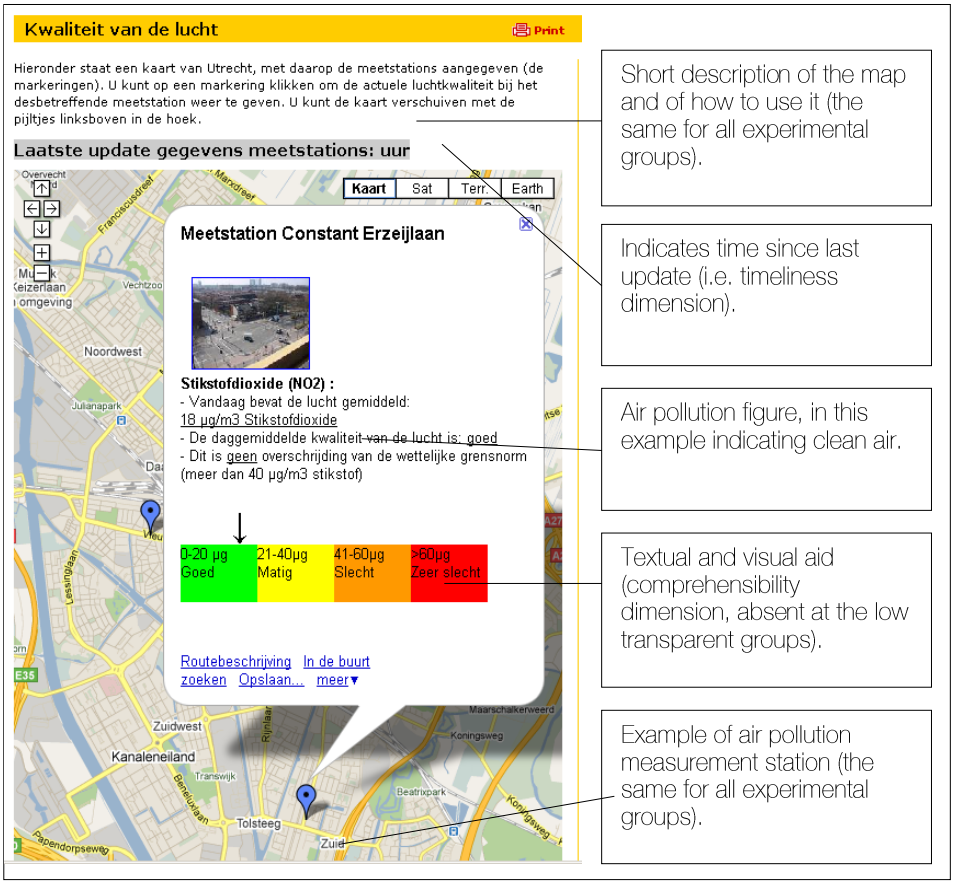

Figure 8.2 – Example of group 4: high level of transparency, clean air.

8.3.4 Selection and sample

The sample consisted of a total of 834 respondents recruited from the municipality's citizen opinion panel. Table 8.3 presents the composition of the sample on several background variables. Variables such as political preference might affect trust in government, and unequal distribution of these background variables potentially threatens the internal validity of the results. A more detailed argument about potential sample biases was discussed in Chapter 5.

Table 8.3 – Sample composition experiment three

	% male	*Av. Age*	*% highly educated*	*Pol. Pref (% l.w.)*
0 – Control group *no website visit* (N=154)	43.5	39.4	81.1	65.6
1 - Low transparency of website, negative policy outcome (N=175)	50.9	40.6	80.0	65.1
2 - Low transparency of website, positive policy outcome (N=160)	40.4	39.9	73.3	64.0
3 - Highly transparent website, negative policy outcome (N=168)	44.6	41.0	73.2	58.9
4 - Highly transparent website, positive policy outcome (N=177)	44.6	43.1	70.1	62.7
Total (N=834)	*44.9*	*40.9*	*75.6*	*63.2*

Pol. Pref (% l.w.) = Percentage of participants that indicated a preference to vote for a left-wing political party. "Left-wing political parties"=D66, PvdA, GL, SP, PvdD. According to manifesto research by Klingemann et al. (2006) these parties give relatively much attention to environmental issues.

At first sight the sample appears to show a rather equal distribution of relevant background characteristics. A Pearson chi-square test using crosstabs was carried out to test whether these differences were actually large enough to be statistically significant: this indicates whether there is a bias on one of the background variables that occurs between the groups. This was not the case, however, as these chi-square tests showed no evidence for an unequal distribution of gender, age, education or political preferences amongst the groups[36]. This means that the

[36] Gender (Pearson chi^2=4.69, df=5, p = 0.466), Age (Pearson chi^2=324.40, df=315, p = 0.346), Education (Pearson chi^2=9.11, df=5, p = 0.105), Political preference (Pearson chi^2=1.83, df=5, p = 0.873).

randomisation of participants in the experiment was successful and that differences between groups probably occurred by chance. Further, this should cancel out confounding effects of these background variables on perceived trustworthiness. Overall, the sample is fairly left-wing, as on average more than sixty percent of the sample expressed a left-wing preference. However, this is not necessarily a problematic since an additional regression analysis shows there is no significant effect of political (left-wing) preference on perceived trustworthiness in this study.[37]

In addition, trust in government in general was taken into account in the analysis; it indicates one's predisposition to trust government. This covariate was taken into account to increase the explained variance, in order to increase the overall strength of the experiment.

8.3.5 Manipulation check

Before attempting any further analysis, the experimental manipulation was checked. Participants were asked whether they perceived the data to be up-to-date and if they found it understandable. These are the two key manipulations that constitute data usability in this experiment. Participants of the two highly transparent groups indeed found the data much more comprehensible and timely than participants in the two other groups. When stating 'I feel the municipality provides air pollution figures in a very timely manner', the low transparency groups (1 and 2) had means of 2.3 on a five-point scale; groups 3 and 4 both had means of 4.0 ($p < 0.01$). Participants were also asked whether they thought the information was intelligible. Groups 1 and 2 had means of 2.6, while groups 3 and 4 both had means of 3.7 ($p < 0.01$).

An additional check was carried out to see whether participants perceived the policy outcome the same way the researcher did. A positive or negative policy outcome was recognised as such by participants in the two transparent groups, since this information was made readily understandable. The positive policy outcome group had a mean of 3.4, whereas the negative policy outcome group had a mean of 2.7 ($p < 0.01$). Visitors of the two low transparency websites could not discern a positive from a negative policy outcome. This was anticipated, as these groups were purposefully

Further, these background characteristic have been analysed for interaction effects with the independent variable. However, no significant interactions were found ($Fs \leq 1.35$, $ps \geq .182$).
[37] See appendix D for more details about the regression analysis.

provided with figures about air pollution without clarification. Overall, the highly transparent websites were indeed clearly recognised as being understandable and up-to-date, and the policy outcome was perceived in the same way as intended in this research.

8.4 Does policy outcome transparency make a difference?

8.4.1 Research model and hypotheses

This section outlines the research model and the hypotheses of the expectations regarding the overall effect of policy outcome transparency on perceived trustworthiness (Fig. 8.3).

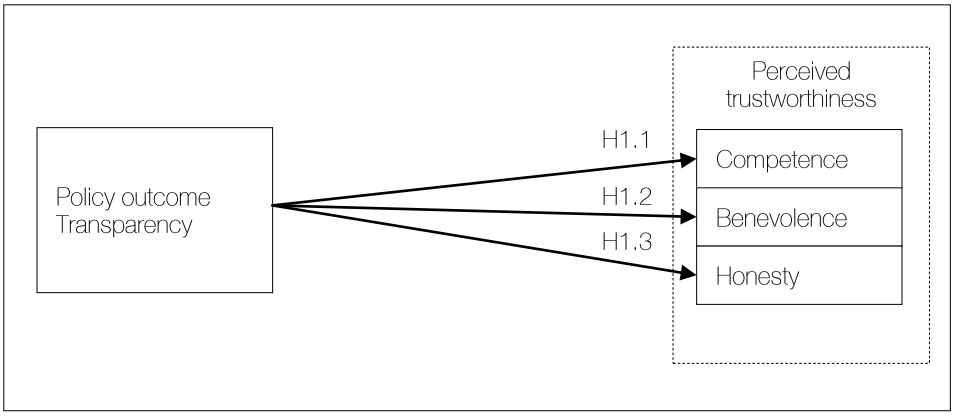

Figure 8.3 – Policy outcome research model concerning overall effects

The first hypothesis is divided into two sub-hypotheses. The effect of transparency is expected to depend on whether the outcome is positive or negative. Even if – and maybe because – transparency is high it will be easier for people to scrutinise government. This could lead to negative evaluations of its competence. Obviously if outcomes are positive, i.e., a good result is attained by government, government will be perceived as being more competent than in a non-transparent situation.

H1.1a: A high degree of policy outcome transparency is expected to have a negative overall effect on perceived competence if the policy outcome is negative.
H1.1b: A high degree of policy outcome transparency is expected to have a positive overall effect on perceived competence if the policy outcome is positive.

Policy outcome transparency and perceived benevolence are thought to be positively associated to each other. The two elements of usable information we distinguished both point to a benevolent government organisation. First, timely and hence quickly disclosed information shows the government organisation making great efforts to provide citizens with up-to-date information. Further, comprehensible information shows that the government organisation is putting effort into making information understandable to citizens with non-expert knowledge. Overall, policy outcome transparency revealing usable information shows that government organisations have put effort into quickly making information understandable to a larger public, which supports the idea that the organisation is acting in the citizens' interests.

H1.2: A high degree of policy outcome transparency is expected to have a positive overall effect on perceived benevolence.

Usable policy outcome provides a clear image of government performance. Regardless of whether the policy outcome is positive or negative it is expected that citizens perceive a municipality as honest if comprehensible and timely information is provided. It shows that nothing is hidden behind technical language and lagged information. Therefore, the following hypothesis is postulated:

H1.3: A high degree of policy outcome transparency is expected to have a positive overall effect on perceived honesty.

8.4.2 Testing the overall effect of policy outcome transparency

Do people who read policy outcome information think differently about the municipality than those who do not? This section focuses on the *overall* effect of transparency on perceived trustworthiness, and thus it tests the first three hypotheses (H1.1, H1.2 and H1.3). In order to gather full insight a pair-wise group comparison is needed (i.e., comparing groups with each other). First, we will assess both the overall multivariate effect and the univariate effect of policy transparency on the separate dimensions of perceived trustworthiness.

The overall multivariate test showed the significant effect of transparency on perceived trustworthiness ($F(2,503) = 2.01$, $p < 0.05$). A closer examination of the multivariate effects of transparency on perceived trustworthiness showed that it actually yields

very limited effects on perceived competence and benevolence, which are only significant at $p < 0.1$ (competence: $F(2,503)=2.38$, $p = .093$, benevolence: $F(2,503)=2.55$, $p = 0.079$).

Hence, the univariate results are not convincing. In order obtain more detail about the specific effects the three groups that have been distinguished were tested in a pair-wise group comparison. To test every possible group combination, post-hoc tests with Bonferroni-corrections for multiple comparisons were carried out; the results are shown in Table 8.4. If means have a superscript in common within rows then no statistical difference was found between those groups. Means within rows with deviating superscripts are statistically different from each other at an alpha-level of $p < 0.05$.

Table 8.4 – Group comparisons of perceived competence, benevolence and honesty for overall effect

Dimension of trustworthiness	*0. Control group*	*3. High usability, negative outcome*	*4. High usability, positive outcome*
Perceived competence	3.14(.05)[a]	3.09 (.05)[a]	3.23 (.05)[a]
Perceived benevolence	3.39(.06)[a]	3.37(.05)[a]	3.53(.05)[a]
Perceived honesty	3.15(.05)[a]	3.21(.05)[a]	3.15(.05)[a]

Means displayed, standard errors in parentheses. N = 506[38]. Rows with unequal superscripts differ significantly at p < 0.05 with Bonferroni-correction for multiple comparisons.

In general the results shown in Table 8.4 do not provide evidence for effects of transparency on dimensions of perceived trustworthiness. The only difference that can be found (but at $p < 0.1$) is on perceived competence, between the group's negative and positive outcomes. This is in contrast to our hypotheses, as highly usable information was expected to positively contribute especially to perceived honesty. In sum, this means that all we can conclude is that if people see a website with highly usable information compared to one with no information, their perceptions remain stable.

[38] An additional ANOVA-analysis in which all three dimensions were added to one 'general perceived trustworthiness dimension' also shows that there is no overall effect of policy outcome transparency on general perceived trustworthiness ($F(2,504)=1.15$, $p=0.317$).

8.4.3 Conclusion: policy outcome transparency does not increase trust

In this section we will draw up the balance sheet for the first part of the analysis. For this purpose, a summary of the results of the hypotheses is shown in Table 8.5.
All hypotheses regarding the overall effect of transparency have been rejected. This nevertheless brings out some interesting findings. Hypothesis 1.1 concerned the effect of transparency on perceived competence. Participants who visited the highly transparent website with a positive policy outcome did not assess the municipality as being more or less competent than did the control group. Further, no effect was detected regarding perceived benevolence (H1.2). This is in contrast with the expectation that benevolence would be positively affected by transparency. This means that a municipality is perceived to care neither more nor less for its citizens when people are confronted with policy results. The third hypothesis (H1.3) regarding the overall effect of transparency predicted a positive effect of the more transparent websites on perceived honesty. This hypothesis should also be rejected.

Altogether this means that there is no significant difference between the perceptions of people in the 'standard' situation, i.e., when no information is provided about air pollution, and the perceptions of people who encountered a website containing highly usable information about this topic.

This means that perceived trustworthiness did not increase because people read highly usable policy outcome information. Since mainly positive overall effects were hypothesised, this can be considered to be an unexpected result. This first analysis regarded a comparison of a situation in which people had not seen any information with a situation of a high degree of transparency (i.e., highly usable information). However, this does not show us through what relations transparency could lead to more (or to less) trust.

Table 8.5 – Summary of overall effect hypotheses of policy outcome transparency

Overall effect hypotheses	*Result*	
H1.1a: A high degree of policy outcome transparency is expected to have a negative overall effect on perceived competence if the policy outcome is negative.	No effect of (positive) policy outcome transparency on perceived competence was found.	Not supported
H1.1b: A high degree of policy outcome transparency is expected to have a positive overall effect on perceived competence if the policy outcome is positive.	No effect of (negative) policy outcome transparency on perceived competence was found.	Not supported
H1.2 A high degree of policy outcome transparency is expected to have a positive overall effect on perceived benevolence.	No effect of policy outcome transparency on perceived benevolence was found.	Not supported
H1.3: A high degree of policy outcome transparency is expected to have a positive overall effect on perceived honesty.	No effect of policy outcome transparency on perceived honesty was found.	Not supported

8.5 Does policy outcome transparency have direct and mediated effects?

8.5.1 Research model and hypotheses

The second analysis tests the specific relations in the mechanism between transparency and trust. Three relations have been distinguished (Fig. 8.4). It should be noted, however, that this test does not result in an explanation for the results found in the previous section, since different experimental groups were tested to assess the mechanism. In the first analysis the control group (no information) was compared to the groups with high information usability to see whether transparency makes a difference at all. In this second analysis only the groups that actually used some level of decision-making transparency were included to test the mechanism, since only they can assess their specific knowledge and the credibility of the message.

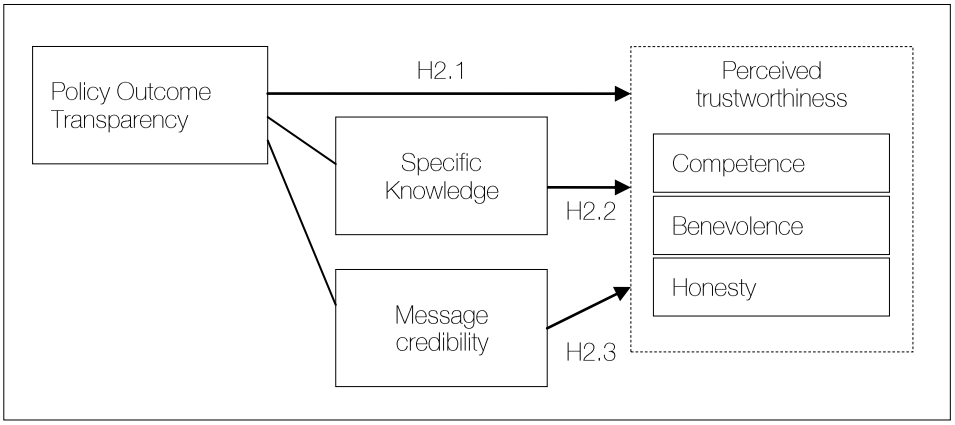

Figure 8.4 – Policy outcome research model concerning mechanism

The second part of the analysis presented here consists of a test of three distinct relations (Figure 8.4). First, the act of transparency is expected to be perceived as something positive in itself. If people are allowed to see comprehensible and timely information, instead of lagged and incomprehensible information, this is expected to be appreciated and as such is expected to positively affect the dimensions of perceived trustworthiness:

H2.1: A higher degree of policy outcome transparency is expected to have a positive direct effect on perceived competence, benevolence and honesty.

Policy outcome transparency is hypothesised to increase the knowledge of participants about government performance since information is presented to them in an understandable way. It is expected that increased knowledge leads to a more rational and realistic view of the potential performance of the municipality. Whether this more rational view affects perceived trustworthiness in a positive or negative way is tested by the following hypothesis:
H2.2: A higher degree of policy outcome transparency is expected to lead to higher levels of knowledge, which is expected to have an effect on perceived competence, benevolence and honesty.

The third effect is mediated by message credibility. If highly usable policy outcome information is provided it is also thought to be perceived as credible. This positive

view of the information will also positively affect the way in which the source of this information is perceived, which thus leads to the following hypothesis:

H2.3: A higher degree of policy outcome transparency will lead to higher message credibility, which is expected to have a positive effect on perceived competence, benevolence and honesty.

8.5.2 Heterogeneous effects of transparency and policy outcome

The empirical evidence for the hypotheses is presented in this section. First, the results regarding the direct effect hypothesis (H2.1) are presented; then the data for knowledge (H2.2) and the message credibility hypotheses (H2.3) are presented.

Testing the direct effect

This section compares the differences in perceive trustworthiness between the four experimental groups by carrying out a two-way MANCOVA analysis. This enables us to separately test the strength of the effects of two factors: 'usability' and 'outcome'. Three multivariate tests were conducted: one to test the effect of transparency, the second to test the effect of policy outcome and a third to test whether the combination of transparency and policy outcome has any effect (interaction effect). If significant, these multivariate tests were followed up by univariate tests to assess differences within each separate dimension of perceived trustworthiness.

The effects of transparency ($F(3,654)=3.38$, $p = 0.018$) and policy outcome ($F(3,654)=3.02$, $p = 0.029$) both proved to be significant. In contrast, the interaction effect between transparency and policy outcome yielded no significant results ($F(3,654)=1.59$, $p = 0.192$). Now we will examine which dimensions of perceived trustworthiness were specifically affected. Significant univariate effects of transparency were detected for perceived benevolence ($F(3,654)=4.13$, $p = 0.043$) and perceived honesty ($F(3,654)=7.90$, $p = 0.005$).

Remarkably, Table 8.6 shows an effect of usability that is contrary to our expectations. In case of perceived benevolence and perceived honesty transparency actually has a negative effect. This means that the hypothesis regarding the direct impact of transparency (H2.1) should be rejected. Further, no difference in perceived

competence was found: this dimensions of perceived trustworthiness remains virtually the same.

Table 8.6 – Group comparisons of perceived competence, benevolence and honesty for mechanism

Dimension of trustworthiness	*Low usability (1 & 2)*	*High usability (3 & 4)*
Perceived Competence	3.09(.03)[a]	3.06(.03)[a]
Perceived Benevolence	3.46(.03)[a]	3.36(.03)[b]
Perceived Honesty	3.24(.03)[a]	3.12(.03)[b]

Scale 1- 5; N = 654. 1 = visit low-transparency website, negative policy outcome, 2 = visit low-transparency website, positive policy outcome, 3 = visit high-transparency website, negative policy outcome 4 = visit high-transparency website, positive policy outcome.[39]

The second effect described in this section originates from the content of policy outcome transparency: the policy outcome itself. The univariate tests show that the outcome of a policy has a significant impact on perceived competence ($F(3,654)=5.08$, $p = 0.024$). The results of the pairwise group comparison are shown in Table 8.7.

The outcome of a policy particularly affects perceived competence. If people are able to see that an outcome is very negative they tend to judge the municipality as less competent. Although a smaller effect was found on perceived benevolence, this difference was not large enough to reach a significance level at the $p < 0.05$ level.

[39] An additional ANOVA-analysis in which all three dimensions were added to one 'general perceived trustworthiness dimension' confirms the negative effect of policy outcome transparency ($F(1,653)=6.02$, $p=0.014$).

Table 8.7 – Group comparisons of perceived competence, benevolence and honesty for mechanism, effect of policy outcome

Dimension of trustworthiness	*Negative outcome (1 & 3)*	*Positive outcome (2 & 4)*
Perceived Competence	3.03(.03)[a]	3.12(.03)[b]
Perceived Benevolence	3.37(.03)[a]	3.45(.03)[a]
Perceived Honesty	3.17(.03)[a]	3.19(.03)[a]

Scale 1- 5; N = 654. 1 = visit low-transparency website, negative policy outcome, 2 = visit low-transparency website, positive policy outcome, 3 = visit high-transparency website, negative policy outcome 4 = visit high-transparency website, positive policy outcome.[40]

Overall, the differences caused by the direct impact of transparency and policy outcome are fairly small. A difference of 0.09 was found for perceived competence, which was due to the policy outcome. Further, a difference of at most 0.12 (perceived honesty) caused by transparency itself was found. In spite of these small differences, these results yield an interesting insight in the different judgment criteria people hold for separate dimensions of perceived trustworthiness. The act of transparency itself invokes judgments (albeit slightly negative) based on the ethical dimensions of perceived trustworthiness, whereas the content of transparency yields judgments about their competence. The next section will make clear how we should value the magnitude of the direct effect of transparency.

Testing the effects of specific knowledge and message credibility

The mediation effects of knowledge and message credibility were tested and are described in this section. The test entailed a mediation analysis (cf. Baron & Kenny, 1986). In order to do that we first needed to separately test the effect of transparency on knowledge and message credibility. Next, the individual effects of knowledge and message credibility on perceived trustworthiness were tested. The research model was again tested by carrying out a MANCOVA[41].

[40] An additional ANOVA-analysis in which all three dimensions were added to one 'general perceived trustworthiness dimension' shows that the effect on perceived competence, probably it is largely mitigated by the two other dimensions incorporated in the general trustworthiness construct ($F(1,651)=3.07$, $p=0.080$).

[41] One covariate is included in the model: trust in government in general.

The overall multivariate effect of transparency on knowledge and message credibility was significant ($F(6,1306)=20.70$, $p < 0.01$). Next, the specific univariate effects on knowledge and message credibility were tested specifically. Both the univariate effects of transparency on knowledge ($F(3,654)=28.26$, $p < 0.01$) and message credibility ($F(3, 654)=21.76$, $p < 0.01$) were significant.

The following group comparison shows the exact differences of knowledge and message credibility between the experimental groups (Table 8.8). If mean scores have a superscript in common within rows, no statistical difference was found between those groups. Means within rows with deviating superscripts are statistically different from each other at $p < 0.05$.

Table 8.8 - Group comparisons of specific knowledge and message credibility

Dependent Variable	*1.*	*2.*	*3.*	*4.*
Specific Knowledge Df=3, 653 F = 28.26*** R^2 = .115 Adj. R^2 = .111	2.62^a	2.56^a	3.19^b	3.15^b
Message Credibility Df= 3, 653 F = 21.76*** R^2 = .091 Adj. R^2 = .087	2.97^a	2.98^a	3.46^b	3.37^b

Scale 1- 5; N = 658. 1 = low-transparency website, negative policy outcome, 2 = low-transparency website, positive policy outcome, 3 = high-transparency website, negative policy outcome, 4 = high-transparency website, positive policy outcome.

Table 8.8 clearly shows an effect of transparency on knowledge and message credibility. The two highly transparent websites – with up-to-date and comprehensible data – have significantly higher means on both knowledge and message credibility than do the low-transparency websites.

The online information is perceived to be more credible if the website is more transparent. However, there appears to be no statistical difference of message credibility between the two groups with incomprehensible and old data. Furthermore, message credibility is not affected by the outcome that is shown on the website.

Website 2 and 4 both show a positive policy outcome, whereas the websites of groups one and three presented a negative policy outcome. No differences between websites one and two or three and four were detected. In other words, regardless of the policy outcome, transparency contributes to higher levels of message credibility.

Further, specific knowledge is positively affected when people receive clear and up-to-date information. The two low-transparency websites both have average scores of slightly below 3.0. The websites with comprehensible and up-to-date information have mean scores of 3.46 and 3.37. This means that the degree of transparency makes people feel they know more about air pollution figures and pollution.

Now that we know the effects in the first part of the mechanism, the next section assesses the effects of specific knowledge, message credibility and transparency on perceived trustworthiness.

Effects of knowledge and message credibility on perceived trustworthiness

The effect of specific knowledge and message credibility is shown in Figure 8.6. Again, a two-way MANCOVA was carried out to test this[42]. The statistical procedure recommends that first the overall multivariate effect is assessed.

The effect of having a transparent policy outcome is taken into account to allow us to assess the magnitude of its effect on all three dependent variables together. Table 8.9 shows this direct effect and also shows the effect of the two mediators' specific knowledge and message credibility.

The table makes clear that the direct effects of transparency and policy outcome are, albeit significant, not very large. For example, the effect of policy outcome only explains 0.8 percent of the total variance. Further, transparency affects both perceived honesty and benevolence, yet the size of this effect only ranges from 0.6 percent to 1.2 percent.

[42] Box's M was significant ($p < 0.001$), however, because of the large sample size and since the group sizes are nearly equal Box's *M* is highly unstable and Pillai's statistic can assumed to be robust (Field, 2005: 599). Further, no problems with multicollinearity were detected and no outliers were evident.

People's specific knowledge of the government organisation's policy has a significant direct and positive effect on two dimensions of perceived trustworthiness. In other words, people with higher levels of specific knowledge perceive the government organisation as being more competent and benevolent. It should be noted, however, that this effect is small. The eta-squared indicated it explains a proportion of 1.7 percent of perceived competence and only 0.8 percent of perceived benevolence. Eta-squared indicates the proportion of variance that is explained by a particular variable in the model (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The results demonstrate that specific knowledge does not affect perceived honesty of the municipality. In addition, parameter estimates[43], which are not displayed in the table, show that knowledge has a positive impact on these perceptions. Hypothesis 2.1 predicted that knowledge would affect all dimensions of transparency; this means that this hypothesis is partly confirmed.

Table 8.9 – Univariate effects on dependent variables

	Perceived competence		*Perceived benevolence*		*Perceived honesty*	
Factors	*F*-value	Eta^2	*F*-value	Eta^2	*F*-value	Eta^2
Transparency (usability)	.352	.001	4.13*	.006	7.90**	.012
Policy Outcome	5.08*	.008	3.68*	.006	.173	.000
Transparency*Outcome	2.58	.004	2.28	.003	.145	.000
Mediators						
Message credibility	33.67**	.180	28.33**	.119	142.28**	.179
Specific knowledge	11.04**	.017	5.22*	.008	.43	.001
Covariates						
Trust in gov. general	174.50**	.211	199.93**	.235	282.74**	.303
Intercept	13.61**	.020	16.77**	.025	9.65**	.015
Df1, Df2	3, 654		3, 654		3, 654	
F	84.56**		70.63**		95.30**	
R^2	.438		.394		.468	
Adjusted R^2	.433		.389		.463	

F-ratios and partial eta^2 are displayed. N=658.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

[43] Parameter estimates are regression coefficients for the variables in the model.

Further, Table 8.9 demonstrates that message credibility is more important with regard to all dimensions of perceived trustworthiness. It is highly significant and explains a fair proportion of the total variance, ranging from 11.9 percent to 18.0 percent. Parameter estimates, which are not displayed in the table, show that message credibility has a positive impact on these perceptions. Hence, if the information on the website is found to be more credible, the government organisation 'behind' that information is perceived to be more trustworthy. Hence transparency positively affects message credibility, which has a positive effect on perceived trustworthiness. This thus confirms Hypothesis 2.2.

One covariate was included in the model: trust in government in general. Trust in government in general is an important predictor for perceived trustworthiness of a specific government organisation. Especially in the perceived honesty model trust in government in general is a strong predictor. The *eta*-squared of 0.303 means that 30.3 percent of the variance in perceived honesty is explained by this variable. Trust in government in general also explains a large extent of perceived benevolence and perceived competence.

The variables in the model have a high overall adjusted *R*-square. This indicates that perceived trustworthiness of a specific government organisation is fairly well explained by the variables taken into account in the model. The lowest adjusted *r*-square is that for perceived benevolence. The variables displayed in the table are able to explain 38.9 percent of the variance of benevolence. The degree to which the government organisation is perceived as competent can be explained for 43.8 percent. Finally, nearly half of the variance in perceived honesty of the government organisation is explained by the variables in the model (46.3 percent).

In sum, the results provide mixed evidence for the three relations between transparency and trustworthiness. The direction of the direct effect of transparency was in the opposite direction. It is difficult to explain this and it should therefore be noted that its relative importance is rather low. The same is true for the effect of specific knowledge: significant positive effects on perceived competence and perceived benevolence are found yet its effect size is comparably small. Even honesty remains unaffected by people's self-assessed knowledge. Message credibility was a more important predictor of perceived trustworthiness.

8.5.3 Mixed effects on perceived trustworthiness

This section assesses the analysis of the mechanism through which transparency lead to trust. A summary of the results is shown in Table 8.10.

Table 8.10 – Summary of mechanism hypotheses of policy outcome

Overall effect hypotheses	*Result*	
H2.1: A higher degree of policy outcome transparency is expected to have a positive direct effect on perceived trustworthiness.	A slightly negative effect of policy outcome transparency on perceived trustworthiness was found.	Not supported
H2.2: A higher degree of policy outcome transparency is expected to lead to higher levels of knowledge, which is expected to have an effect on perceived competence, benevolence and honesty.	A slightly positive mediation effect of knowledge on perceived competence and benevolence was found. Perceived honesty remained unaffected.	Partly supported
H2.3: A higher degree of policy outcome transparency is expected to lead to higher message credibility, which is expected to have a positive effect on perceived competence, benevolence and honesty.	A positive mediation effect of message credibility on all three dimensions of perceived trustworthiness was found.	Supported

The hypothesis concerning the direct effect of transparency should be rejected. Instead, a small negative effect was found. This negative direct effect might be explained by the combination of positive outcomes which were presented in a transparent manner. This might present a positive image of the government organisation too boldly to its citizens. By clearly stating that the policy outcomes are very positive, in this case that the air is very clean, a feeling of suspicion was raised among people. They may have felt that this might not be the truth, hence affecting especially perceived honesty and somewhat affecting perceived benevolence.

However, this effect should be put into perspective, as it explains only 1.2 percent of the variance at best. Apart from the magnitude of the direct effect of transparency, we may conclude that policy outcome transparency invoked two different types of

judgment criteria. First, the content of transparency and transparency itself had different effects on perceived trustworthiness. Transparency itself had an independent effect on perceived honesty in particular, whereas the actual outcome (i.e. content of transparency) affected the municipality's perceived competence. Hence, the content of transparency affected the more utilitarian dimension of perceived trustworthiness, whereas transparency itself was much more related to the ethics of the municipality (i.e., whether it was perceived as honest).

The positive effect of knowledge found in this chapter seems to support a finding that knowledge about "the other" actually contributes to trust. Cook et al. (2010) found that providing people with (objective) information can enhance citizens' knowledge, which causes an increase in trust in government. This might be regarded as good news to those who argue that people tend to be very critical about government activities that they do not know much about (cf. Blendon et al., 1997: 215; Bok, 1997). Although this study indeed shows that knowledge about a government organization lends a positive contribution, this view should be nuanced. The effect of transparency on knowledge was limited, as was the effect of knowledge on perceived benevolence and competence. This means that the overall mediated effect of knowledge remains small. Perceived honesty is even not affected by knowledge whatsoever.

In contrast to specific knowledge and the direct effect of transparency, message credibility is a much more influential relationship in our model. If people positively assess the information (i.e., think it is credible) they also tend to be more positive about the municipality. This means that attention should be paid to providing usable information to people, since this is what increases message credibility. What does this teach us if we relate these results to the apparent lack of overall effect of transparency on perceived trustworthiness? This is discussed in the overall conclusion.

8.6 Policy outcome transparency: a lack of transparency as a dissatisfier

This conclusion will provide an answer to the central question of this chapter: *What is the effect of information usability of policy outcome transparency on trust in a government organisation?* The first stage of the analysis provided evidence that policy outcome transparency, even when policy outcomes are positive, does not contribute

to higher levels of perceived trustworthiness. On the other hand, no negative effect of transparency was found, either. The second analysis compared the effects of low and high levels of information usability, which brought out three interesting findings. First, participants were shown to have two separate judgment criteria for different dimensions of perceived trustworthiness. Perceived competence was affected mainly by the outcome of the policy itself: a negative outcome contributed to slightly more negative perceptions of the municipality's competence. The act of transparency itself especially influenced the two more ethical dimensions of perceived trustworthiness, i.e., benevolence and honesty. Second, the direct effect of transparency on perceived trustworthiness was, albeit significant, not very large. Instead, the message credibility had a more important positive effect on all three dimensions of perceived trustworthiness. In addition, the effect of policy outcome transparency was also partly mediated by people's specific knowledge, yet this was only a small effect. Third, the overall effect of policy outcome transparency never surpassed the standard situation in which participants had not taken notice of transparency.

So if transparency does not contribute to higher *overall* levels of trust, how can we explain this? A better understanding is gained by borrowing the concepts of "hygiene factors" and "dissatisfiers" from literature on motivational factors and consumer satisfaction. Herzberg (1976) identified a list of factors that contribute to satisfaction, in other words, factors which contribute to people's motivation. A second list contained factors that contribute to dissatisfaction if absent: hygiene factors. The latter will never contribute to more positive assessments, or at least they will do so only up to a certain point. Hygiene factors might merely invoke negative assessment if they are not fulfilled. The concept of "dissatisfiers" in marketing and consumer research resembles that of the hygiene factors described by Herzberg. This concept has been developed in research on consumer satisfaction. It is based on the idea that people determine perceived service quality based on a limited set of attributes, of which some are important in determining satisfaction with services. On the other hand, some attributes are not critical to satisfaction of consumers yet determine dissatisfaction when service quality or performance is satisfactory (Swan & Combs, 1976: 25; Johnston, 1995). Swan and Combs (1976) state that consumer satisfaction is determined by two types of performance: instrumental and expressive performance. Instrumental performance related to a set of means to an end, whereas expressive performance is an end in itself. Expectations of instrumental performance must be met to attain satisfaction; it is

a prerequisite. If expectations of expressive performance are met consumers will be satisfied. Swan and Combs bring forward the example of clothing. Discontent with the physical product (e.g., the fiber) leads to dissatisfaction and caused customers to return the clothes to the store. The physical product corresponds with instrumental performance and is a 'dissatisfier'. For most people, clothing serves another end and, in order to meet expectations of expressive performance, expectations of the aesthetics of the clothes must be met.

The results found in the first stage of the analysis indeed point to transparency – or a lack of it – as a hygiene factor or dissatisfier: it is something that only contributes to dissatisfaction if absent but does not contribute to positive assessments. People's expectations are crucial in understanding a lack of transparency as a dissatisfier. If the expectations are fulfilled by a transparent policy outcome this at best does not lead to dissatisfaction. For example, participants who did not visit any website at all were rather satisfied; the experimental groups with highly usable information could only match this situation. Being transparent seems only to meet the expectation that this is part of a normally functioning government. This is in line with prior research, for example, Piotrowski and Van Ryzin (2007) found that a high demand of citizens' for transparency reflects the expectation they have on this particular topic.

Nevertheless, policy outcome transparency could still contribute to maintaining current levels of trust. Creating websites that have a low usability of information is not an option, since this dissatisfies people. Being transparent, even if a municipality has negative news to present about its policy outcomes, produces better results than when websites present incomprehensible and/or old information. Information credibility is strengthened by focusing on improving the comprehensibility and timeliness of policy outcome, and this will contribute to higher levels of perceived trustworthiness. In the end this will probably not surpass the image citizens already have of that government organisation, yet it does contribute to maintaining current trust levels.

Overall, the rise of NPM and its focus on outcome transparency has forced governments to be transparent about policy outcomes to citizens. However, this may have given rise to a shift in the expectations of citizens regarding transparency and policy results. According to citizens, offering transparent websites has become the

standard for government, as has attaining good policy results. A lack of transparency of policy outcomes has become a dissatisfying element for people. The policy goal of increasing trust through this type of transparency might simply be unattainable. Although it might not lead to direct gains in trust for individual government organisations, designing websites with highly usable information is still necessary in order to contribute to government's credibility and to maintain current trust levels.

9. Assessing the experiments

9.1 Does transparency deliver its promise?

Government transparency has been trumpeted as the key to strengthening citizen trust in government (Coglianese, 2009). Does transparency deliver this promise? The previous three chapters have looked into this puzzle. After presenting and discussing the results from these three empirical chapters, it is now time to draw up the balance sheet and answer the central question of this dissertation: *Does government transparency have an effect on citizen trust?*

The previous chapters already indicated that the idea that transparency is a panacea for restoring or increasing trust in government should be nuanced. This chapter provides a comparative analysis of the results of each of the experiments. Which general patterns emerge from the data with regard to overall effects of transparency and the mechanism through which it might lead to trust?

To answer the question of the first paragraph we will look into the overall effect of transparency by comparing the perceptions of people who did not read any information with people who saw transparent information: that is, information that is complete, balanced and usable. Further, three different objects of transparency have been distinguished: decisionmaking, policy and policy outcomes. Three experiments were designed to determine whether the effects are actually causal. The following combinations of objects and dimensions of transparency have been examined:

- Completeness of decision-making transparency
- Colour of policy transparency
- Usability of policy outcome transparency

The results regarding these overall effects of the three experiments are compared in Section 9.2.

The empirical chapters did not merely provide empirical data about the comparison between transparent versus no information. Different degrees of transparency also were compared in a separate analysis, which enables us to assess the mechanism

through which transparency leads to perceived trustworthiness. Three effects have been hypothesised:

- Transparency has a direct effect on perceived trustworthiness.
- Transparency increases knowledge, which is expected to affect perceived trustworthiness.
- Transparency increases message credibility, which is expected to positively affect perceived trustworthiness.

Section 9.3 presents a comparison and analysis of the three experiments regarding the mechanisms found for transparency of decisionmaking, policies and policy outcome. Hence, the central research question of this dissertation has two types of answers. The first regards the overall effect of transparency; the second regards the effect of different degrees of transparency and the mechanism that follows from this. Both answers are connected in Section 9.4. In Section 9.5 the limitations of this study are discussed. The final section (9.6) of this chapter explores the potential for wider use of experiments for mainstream public administration research. First, however, a systematic analysis of the overall effects of the three experiments is outlined in the next section.

9.2 Assessing the overall effects

What have we learned about the overall effect of transparency on perceived trustworthiness? Does transparency actually make a difference? The first experiment focused on the effect of transparency of decisionmaking while varying on the completeness of the decision-making information. The second experiment took transparency of a policy as the object of transparency. The dimension of information central to this experiment was the colour of the policy message (balanced, positive or highly positive). Third, a final experiment assessed the effects of making policy outcome transparent. The information varied on usability, i.e., the timeliness and comprehensibility of the information.

This section only compares the control group (those who received no information) with the group with the most transparent information in the experiment. Full information of decision-making processes, a balanced policy message and highly usable policy outcome information are all compared to the control group. Hence the effects

compared in this section do not regard the effect of varieties in the dimension of information but the effect of transparency of the object as such. The results of each of three experiments are listed in a summary table (9.1).

Table 9.1 – Summary of results concerning overall effect of transparency

Dimension of perceived trustworthiness	*Overall effects on Perceived Trustworthiness*
Perceived competence	• Negative effect of decision-making transparency • No effect of policy transparency • No effect of policy outcome transparency
Perceived benevolence	• No effect of decision-making transparency • No effect of policy transparency • No effect of policy outcome transparency
Perceived honesty	• Positive effect of decision-making transparency • No effect of policy transparency • No effect of policy outcome transparency

9.2.1 Negative or no effect on competence

One of the most remarkable observations from Table 9.1 is the negative effect of decision-making transparency on perceived competence. No particular overall effects were found. How can we explain the absence of positive effects on perceived competence even though positive effects were expected?

Transparency tends to also provide negative information about a decision/policy/outcome. In the decision-making experiment, the incremental processes and bargaining of decisionmaking were exposed, which conflicts with the model of rational decisionmaking presented to the public (Stone, 2002). This points to an important implication of the overall effect of transparency on perceived competence: people tend to judge a government organisation on its actions. From the overall comparison we can conclude that the colour of the disclosed information seems to be more important when it concerns the perceived competence of a government organisation. However, the overall effect remains fairly limited.

Overall, the reality shown through transparency illustrates that government's policy or decision-making is much more chaotic and less effective than people expect it to be.

In this sense, transparency creates citizens who are critical about the effectiveness of government policies.

9.2.2 Benevolence is not affected by transparency

A positive effect of transparency on perceived benevolence was expected. However, an overall effect on perceived benevolence was not found in any of the experiments. As mentioned in Chapter 3, benevolence can be viewed as an ethical dimension of trustworthiness because it particularly focuses on the intention of government actions or decisions. Benevolence is a commitment to act in the interest of the truster (Levi & Stoker 2000: 476). Thus perceived benevolence reflects what citizens perceive to be the intentions of government: are they thought to be acting in citizens' interest or not? Benevolence reflects government's motives and is based on some kind of altruism (i.e., not acting in one's own interest).

First, this might have caused benevolence to be hardly affected by transparency: it is an ethical trait that is difficult to assess from decisionmaking, policy information and policy outcome alone. Hardin (1998) argues that although governments may achieve this attribute of trustworthiness (i.e., are indeed benevolent) this does not mean that citizens will automatically have enough knowledge to actually assess that a government organisation is acting in their interest.

Second, this type of belief about one's motives touches on the very core of the character of government. Does one see it as an entity with malicious intent or not? This means that the benevolence of a government organisation can be seen as a "core belief" of citizens and is one that is not changed easily. This touches upon one of the experiment's limitations: we only investigated the effect of a single and rather short encounter of people with transparency. A core belief such as benevolence is not altered that easily. Further, providing information might not express the good intentions of government per se: it shows only whether it is competent (by judging the content of the information) and maybe if it is honest (because the government organisation is being open).

9.2.3 Limited positive effect on honesty

The strongest positive effect of transparency was expected to be on the perceived honesty dimension since transparency optimists argue that positive effects of

transparency on perceived honesty and trust are particularly expected. Transparency optimists emphasise that transparency is said to stimulate a 'culture of openness' within organisations, or at least the perception of having an open culture, which is supposed to have a positive effect on trust (Hood, 2006b: 217). This idea that no one will oppose transparency if there is nothing to hide implies that those who are more open are also perceived to be more honest.

However, Table 9.1 shows that this only holds true for decision-making transparency. This raises the question of why policy information and policy outcome transparency did not cause an effect on perceived honesty. Being transparent seems only to meet the expectation that this is part of a normally functioning government. This is in line with research by Piotrowski and Van Ryzin (2007) who investigated US citizens' expectations regarding several topics of transparency of local council proceedings. They found citizens to have a high demand for transparency, which reflects the expectations they have on this particular topic. It seems like disclosure of policy information and policy outcome information is a *conditio sine qua non* for perceived honesty in a government organisation. Combined with the emergence of the Internet, which has increased people's expectations and demands regarding access to a great deal of government data (Shapiro, 1999), transparency of policy information might be the minimum of what people expect from a government organisation.

This does not explain, however, why a partly positive effect on honesty was found specifically for decision-making transparency. The positive effect might be due to the character of the decision-making experiment. In this experiment, council minutes were provided to people. This really gives a "look behind the scenes": it provides insight in decision-making — the discussions and bargaining of government before these have taken shape in smoothly polished policy plans. This kind of intimate feel might appeal to a perception that an open, honest culture exists. In sum, the overall effect of transparency is limited, yet where an effect occurs it tends to be positive.

9.2.4 Mixed and limited overall effects

The general discourse on transparency is generally optimistic about its potential effects on trust (e.g., Nye et al., 1997; Florini, 1998; Birkinshaw, 2006b; Hood, 2006b; Florini, 2007). On the other hand, critics warn for potential perverse side effects. It should be clear by now that government transparency does not necessarily

lead to more trust in government (e.g., O'Neill, 2002; Bovens, 2003; O'Neill, 2006; Etzioni, 2010). In the case of information disclosure of policy information and information about policy outcomes, transparency did not have the promised positive effects on trust. The only exception was perceived honesty in the case of decision-making transparency. In contrast, divulging more complete information about decisionmaking appeared to have negative effects on perceived competence of the government organisation.

In sum, in most cases the overall difference between perceptions of people who visited a transparent website and perceptions of people who did not is fairly limited. This means that only in case of decision-making does transparency have an effect that exceeds the prior expectations of participants. However, this only concerns a comparison between perceptions of those who have not seen information at all and people who have encountered highly transparent information. Hence, it seems that to a large extent the transparency "skeptics" are right (see for example Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003): there is little to no relation between transparency and trust. However, the effect of different gradations of transparency showed a different pattern. Therefore, the next section delves into whether less transparent decisions, policies or policy outcomes have an effect on perceived trustworthiness and through which mechanism this potential effect runs.

9.3 Assessing the mechanism

The second part of the analysis regards a comparison of different levels of transparency. This section also assesses the mechanism through which transparency might lead to trust. Three effects were distinguished: a direct effect and mediation effects through knowledge and message credibility.

The first effect is a direct effect of transparency on perceived trustworthiness. This effect is characterised not by rational consideration (knowledge) or conscious assessment of information (message credibility) but by the act of being transparent itself. A positive direct effect was expected since people's general judgment of the act of transparency itself is thought to be positive: being transparent is perceived as a positive value as such (e.g., Birkinshaw, 2006a; 2006b; Hood, 2006a).

Second, knowledge is expected to increase when people read more transparent information. Further, knowledge is thought to affect perceived trustworthiness. Knowledge is regarded as the most rational and cognitive way in which to determine perceived trustworthiness. If people know more about the operations of a government organisation they tend to like it more (Blendon, 1997; Bok, 1997; Cook et al., 2010). On the other hand, scholars argue that knowledge has no effect or a negative effect (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 1995; 2001).

Third, transparency was hypothesised to be mediated by message credibility. In other words, if people believe a message is credible they tend to be more trusting toward the source that spread this message (cf. Metaxas & DeStefano, 2005: 70; Flanagin & Metzger, 2007). This particular effect concerns whether people actually judge the credibility message consciously for cues of credibility. These cues are thought to be present more clearly in transparent messages (e.g., complete, balanced and usable information).

9.3.1 Direct effects: no rewards for transparency, punishment for "bad" policies

The supposed direct effect postulates that people are partly influenced by the image of the government organisation apart from more cognitive considerations such as knowledge and message credibility. Table 9.2 provides an overview of the results of the direct effects found for each experiment.

The overview presented in Table 9.2 shows that varying the degree of transparency has no positive effects on perceived trustworthiness. In the decision-making experiment there were no direct effects at all. However, providing balanced content about policies in the policy transparency experiment negatively affected perceived competence. This means that providing a moderate proportion of negative information has a negative effect on competence, yet it has no positive effects on honesty or benevolence.

In addition, the usability of policy outcome transparency had mixed effects on perceived trustworthiness. Both the effect of transparency and the policy outcome itself were investigated in the policy outcome experiment. A difference for perceived competence and benevolence occurred when comparing the experimental groups who were shown positive versus negative outcomes. In other words, the policy

outcome itself determined people's perceptions of the municipality's competence (and to a lesser extent also perceived benevolence).

Table 9.2 - Overview of results regarding the direct effect of transparency

Object and dimension of transparency	*Direct effect of transparency*
Decisionmaking Information completeness	• No effect on competence • No effect on benevolence • No effect on honesty
Policy Colour	• Negative effect on competence in case of showing balanced policy message. • No effect on benevolence • No effect on honesty
Policy outcome Usability	• Negative effect on competence if policy outcome is negative. • Very small negative effect on benevolence if transparent. • Very small negative effect on benevolence if transparent.

On the other hand, the usability dimension also slightly affected perceived benevolence and honesty. Remarkably, perceived benevolence and honesty were held in slightly lower regard after people were shown websites with highly usable information. In case of the positive policy outcome, the websites with highly usable information might present a positive image of the government organisation too boldly. By clearly stating that the policy outcomes are very positive, a feeling of suspicion is raised among people. They feel that this might not be the truth; perceived honesty is especially affected and to some degree perceived benevolence as well. However, it should be noted that the magnitude of the direct effect of transparency was very small.

In sum, if more negative information about the organisation's policy is presented the organisation tends to be assessed as being less competent. There is no "reward" for government organizations, such as increased perceptions of honesty, in providing transparency. In other words, bad policy results are punished (cf. policy transparency and policy outcome transparency), and the act of transparency is not rewarded by the public.

A positive direct effect of the more transparent information on perceived benevolence was expected. However, only one small and negative effect on benevolence was found. The policy outcome transparency showed that perceptions of benevolence are affected negatively if policy results are not very good. In the case of air pollution this means that when it was made clear to people that the air was polluted they were more negative about whether they thought government acted in their own interest or in the citizens' interest. Overall, it is hard to assess the intention of a government organisation from the information provided since normally there is no specific proof present in the information pointing to the organisation's benevolence. Apparently the "next best thing" – if no specific cues concerning benevolence are available – is the actual result of a policy. This touches upon the idea that a municipality is perceived to be interested in citizens' well-being even if it is not able to keep the air of its citizens clean and healthy. Caring for others' well-being is a crucial element of benevolence (Mayer et al., 1995; McKnight et al., 2002). Hence, benevolence is hardly affected by completeness and colour, yet is seems to be determined by the outcomes attained by government policies.

Hardly any direct effects were found that affected perceived honesty. How can we explain this lack of a direct effect? In the empirical chapters people's general trust in government was taken into account in measuring the effects of transparency on perceived trustworthiness. This analysis showed that 'trust in government in general' has a strong effect on perceived honesty in a specific organisation. Honesty is arguably the most ethical dimension of perceived trustworthiness. It determines the fundamental perceptions of government. Competence and, to a lesser extent, benevolence have a slightly more utilitarian nature (McKnight et al., 2002). This means that people's predisposition towards the honesty of government is not easily overturned by one single interaction with transparent information, even if this concerns a new topic and a specific government organisations.

9.3.2 Knowledge: only a slightly positive effect when providing factual knowledge

One of the core ideas behind government transparency is that it is a means of empowering citizens with more knowledge about government decisions, processes and results.

To assess the mediation effect of knowledge, two separate tests were conducted. First, it was tested whether people obtained specific knowledge after using the website containing information about decisionmaking, policies and policy outcomes. Second, it was tested whether knowledge has an effect on the dimensions of perceived trustworthiness to confirm a mediated effect of specific knowledge on perceived trustworthiness. Table 9.3 provides an overview of the results of each experiment.

Table 9.3 – Overview of results regarding knowledge

Object and dimension of transparency	*Effect of transparency on knowledge*	*Effect of knowledge on perceived trustworthiness*
Decisionmaking Completeness	• No effect	• No effect on competence • No effect on benevolence • No effect on honesty
Policy Colour	• No effect	• No effect on competence • No effect on benevolence • No effect on honesty
Policy outcome Usability	• Higher levels of knowledge after visiting website with usable (timely and comprehensible) information	• Slight effect on competence • Very slight effect on benevolence • No effect on honesty

Overall, the effect of knowledge in these three experiments was very limited: only in the case of policy outcome transparency was a slightly positive effect on perceived competence and benevolence found.

It is remarkable that both decision-making transparency and policy transparency do not contribute to higher levels of knowledge. In the first experiment, participants were asked whether they thought to have knowledge regarding the municipality's wheeling and dealing regarding local decisionmaking. In the latter experiment, participants were inquired about their knowledge about policy measures. In the decision-making transparency experiment, people received complete information versus restricted

information while the policy transparency experiment provided more balanced information to the participants. How can we explain that these increased levels of transparency do not affect people's specific knowledge, whereas increased usability of policy outcome information does affect specific knowledge? The type of information provided to participants might be the key to understanding this difference in effect of transparency on knowledge. The type of information provided in the first two experiments has a more or less political nature. Information about decisionmaking, for example, concerns the opinion and arguments of politicians, and this information is political by default. Of course, facts are used in a debate in a decision-making process, yet they are only used to demonstrate a certain point. Especially decision-making information of the local council is mostly political. Information about policy measures might be less political, yet it represents facts in strategic manner in order to persuade people (cf. Stone, 2002; O'Neill, 2006: 88).

In contrast, policy outcome transparency provides information about air pollution figures. This has a factual nature, or at least it gives the impression that it is factual. Cook et al. (2010) studied the relationship between providing factual information and trust in a government organisation. They found there was an increase in knowledge and a positive effect of knowledge on trust after giving factual information about that government organisation. Hence, the nature of the information disclosed determines the effect on specific knowledge. Campbell (2003) argues that one cause for a lack of trust in government is that citizens are not provided with factual documentation about government processes and performance. In this sense, reporting on government activities (processes and performance) is necessary to increase citizen trust.

Nevertheless, even in the case of policy outcome transparency, knowledge had only a very small effect. This effect was limited to perceived competence and perceived benevolence; honesty was not affected. The effect of knowledge has been characterised as a rational and cognitive "route" to perceived trustworthiness (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Lewicki & Bunker, 1995). However, participants hardly determine their perceptions of government by these rational standards. Perceived competence is somewhat more determined by knowledge: the performance or effectiveness of a government organisation is indeed partly determined by the degree of knowledge available. The more ethical dimensions and especially perceived honesty are apparently very hard to determine by knowledge alone. How do you *know* if someone

is being honest? Apparently citizens have a *feeling* of whether an organisation is honest.

It should also be noted that in everyday life government information might be used by people who already have high levels of prior knowledge. This might eventually weaken the effect of knowledge in everyday practice. People who already have a great deal of knowledge will not easily learn more by reading government information compared to laymen.

Having said this, overall we have seen that knowledge plays a limited role in determining perceived trustworthiness. The idea that transparency increases knowledge which will cause people to have more positive attitudes towards government should thus be nuanced. Factual information that is usable (i.e., timely and comprehensible) contributes to knowledge, yet even this effect is rather small.

9.3.3 Message credibility: positive effects on and of perceived trustworthiness

The credibility of an organisation's message is said to be closely connected to perceived trustworthiness (Metaxas & DeStefano, 2005: 70; Flanagin & Metzger, 2007). However, do higher levels of transparency of decisionmaking, policies and policy outcomes actually contribute to message credibility? The results regarding this second mediated relationship are outlined in this section.

To assess the effect of message credibility two separate tests were again conducted. First, the effect of the degree of transparency on message credibility was examined and second, the effect of message credibility on perceived trustworthiness was assessed. Table 9.4 provides an overview of the results of each experiment.

Table 9.4 makes clear that the perceived credibility of the message is always related to perceived trustworthiness. This confirms the importance of message credibility in determining the trustworthiness of the source spreading that message (Metaxas & DeStefano, 2005: 70; Flanagin & Metzger, 2007). Does transparency help in making messages or information more credible?

The only experiment in which no significant effect on message credibility was found was that of policy transparency. This result is related to the dimension of information central to that experiment. In contrast with decisionmaking (information completeness) and policy outcome (information usability), the policy transparency experiment had a

more subtle variation: the colour of the message was adjusted, ranging from balanced to highly positive. A highly positively formulated message might still be perceived as credible, whereas incomplete information affects message credibility much more directly.

Table 9.4 – Overview of results regarding message credibility

Object and dimension of transparency	*Effect of transparency on message credibility*	*Effect of message credibility on perceived trustworthiness*
Decision-making transparency Information completeness	• Positive effect	• Positive effect on competence • Slight positive effect on benevolence • Positive effect on honesty
Policy Colour	• No significant effect	• Positive effect on competence • Positive effect on honesty
Policy outcome Usability	• Positive effect	• Positive effect on competence • Positive effect on benevolence • Positive effect on honesty

This can be explained by the need for prior expert knowledge (which was not measured in the experiment) to assess a message when its veracity is only subtly manipulated. For laymen it may be hard to judge the credibility of the content of a message if one does not know whether policy measures have been successful in reality.

In general, the mediation effect of message credibility is confirmed: people make conscious considerations of the message. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) was outlined in Chapter 4. This offers important insights with regard to how people assess information. ELM is a theory of persuasion and argues there are two routes to persuasion: the central and the peripheral route. In case of central processing people assess the message itself, whereas the peripheral route involves processing simple cues such as the

appearance of the source of a message and thus does not closely scrutinise the message itself (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Freeman & Spyridakis, 2004).

9.3.4 A mixture of cognition and feelings

What have we learned about the mechanism through which transparency leads to perceived trustworthiness? Table 9.5 summarises the main conclusions.

Table 9.5 – Main conclusions concerning the mechanism

Part of mechanism	*Main conclusion*
Direct effect	• Mostly negative effect on perceived competence based on judgment of policy • Yet no rewards for act of transparency in terms of increased perceived honesty
Specific knowledge	• Only slightly positive effect when provided with factual information • Perceived trustworthiness hardly determined by rational cognitive considerations
Message credibility	• Completeness and usability contribute to credibility; positive effect on perceived trustworthiness • Perceived trustworthiness partly determined by assessment of message credibility

First, the discussion is set out with a remark regarding the effect of trust of government in general. The levels of perceived trustworthiness of a government organisation (twenty to thirty percent) are generally determined by people's fundamental existing impressions of government in general. This is a one-way relationship: trust in government in general affects specific trust in a government organisation, yet specific trust does not affect trust in government in general. The latter results fits with Van de Walle's finding (2004) that attitudes regarding specific government agencies do not relate to people's trust in government in general.

That said, people's trust in government in general is an important determinant for specific trust in a government organisation. Does this make the comparably small effect of transparency on trust in a government organisation irrelevant? Although the effect of trust in government in general is far larger than the effect of transparency, one cannot expect that one single encounter with the local council through transparency radically changes one's general and fundamental attitudes towards government. It is actually quite remarkable that this short encounter with transparency causes an effect at all, even when taking into account the effect of trust in government in general. Further, the mediated effect through message credibility is still fairly large even compared with the effect of trust in general: on average fifteen to twenty percent is explained by the effect of message credibility.

Specific knowledge, which was considered to be the most cognitive and rational way of determining perceived trustworthiness, has only a small part in this relationship. Hence, rational considerations are not that important. The effect of transparency on perceived trustworthiness consists of a mixture of (1) a credible message (positive effect) with a cognitive nature and (2) a direct effect with an affective nature. In their seminal article about the nature of trust, Lewis and Weigert (1985) argued that 'trust in everyday life is a *mix* of feeling and rational thinking, and so to exclude one or the other from the analysis of trust leads only to misconceptions that conflate trust with faith or prediction'. In other words, trust purely based on feelings (such as affection) and no proof whatsoever would be "faith", having complete knowledge about future behaviour of the government organisation is pure rational predication. This mixture of affection and cognition-based trust is confirmed in the relationship between transparency and perceived trustworthiness. It is slightly determined by knowledge (prediction), a direct effect of transparency (feeling), and more strongly determined by message credibility (mixture of prediction and feeling).

We might conclude that in spite of the idea that knowledge about government will increase trust (Blendon, 1997; Bok, 1997; Campbell, 2003), simply providing factual information about government activities might not help very much in increasing understanding and appreciation for government policies. Although it has some importance, this is only a small part in determining trust. A more comprehensive view is needed to fully understand its relationship: a "good feeling" and a credible message.

The overall effect of a transparent message was made clear in Section 9.2, while the effect of different degrees of transparency on the mechanism was explained in this section. Next, the dominant overarching patterns of both parts are combined.

9.4 Transparency has a limited and mostly negative effect on trust

Could transparency deliver its promise to increase citizen trust in a government organization, or does it fall short? The results presented in this dissertation showed that transparency's promise should at least be nuanced. This brings us to answering the central question of this dissertation: *Does government transparency have an effect on citizen trust?*

Hardly any evidence was found for a positive effect of transparency on trust in government. Only perceived honesty was positively affected by decision-making transparency. Also, a slightly negative effect on perceived competence was found in case of decision-making transparency, policy transparency and policy outcome transparency. To fully answer the main question, three issues will be discussed. First, we will look into what is the actual effect of transparency on trust. Second, the aspects of transparency that determine trust are important. Third, the nature of the effect of transparency plays a central role in answering the research question.

First of all, the overall effect of transparency is very limited. The results have shown that, except for decision-making transparency, the levels of perceived trustworthiness are hardly higher or lower after people had encountered a website containing information which ought to make policies and policy outcomes more transparent. Transparency of government practices is thought to be the standard for government practices and will therefore not easily cause more positive perceptions of government.

The comparison between different degrees of information completeness, colour and usability demonstrated somewhat different patterns. Perceived competence was mainly negatively affected, both when comparing the overall effect and the effect of different degrees of transparency. This result is thus consistent in both analyses. People are critical when negative information about policies is presented to them.

The results also showed a rather consistent pattern with regard to perceived benevolence. Perceived benevolence was only affected slightly negatively if negative policy outcomes were made transparent. People generally seem to assume the good intentions of government, which are hard to assess from government information alone. Thus perceptions of benevolence are not affected by saying that an organisation is trying hard, but they slightly decrease by showing bad policy results to people. Hence, good intentions (acting in citizens' interests) are assumed unless transparency uncovers bad results.

Only in one case, i.e., when people who visited a transparent website were compared with those who did not, was it found that the overall effect of transparency on perceived honesty was positive. Further, honesty was mainly determined by people's predisposition about government in general. Perceived honesty is hard to alter by a single interaction with government transparency since it is fairly strongly embedded in citizens' fundamental views of government. However, in those cases when people were really able to take a look behind the scenes, perceived honesty of a single government organisation increased.

Second, we need to look into what aspects of transparency determine the perceived competence, benevolence and honesty of a government organisation. The assessment of the three experiments in this chapter shows that transparency turned out to give rise to two different ways of judging the government organisation. The first is a judgment of the act of transparency itself. A government organisation's being transparent affects its perceived honesty. Nevertheless, though honesty is affected by transparency its main determinant is rooted in people's predisposition to trust in government in general. The next aspect concerns an assessment of the substance of the information that is disclosed. The idea behind transparency is that government discloses all information available — not only information that is favourable to them. This means that transparency tends to show sides of government policy that are not necessarily positive. Think of, for example, negative policy outcomes or the messy nature of political decisionmaking. Transparency thus creates citizens who are critical about government's activities. This results in more negative perceptions of the government's competence. In sum, the content of transparency is related to the more utilitarian dimension of perceived trustworthiness, i.e., perceived competence.

Third, the results provided important information about the nature of the relationship between transparency and trust. The dominant pattern here is that perceived trustworthiness is affected by a mixture of cognitive and affective considerations. Being a form of institutions-based trust (cf. Zucker, 1986), trust in a government organisation was expected to be predominantly affected by cognitive considerations. The main determinant of trust in the cognitive dimension is knowledge. An incomplete state of knowledge is implied when considering cognition-based trust (Johnson & Grayson, 2005). If knowledge increases this provides 'good reasons' needed for the basis for cognition-based trust decisions (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; McAllister, 1995). This view should be nuanced in the case of judging an individual government organisation.

The role of knowledge is fairly limited in the transparency and trust relationship. Only a small significant effect was found if factual information was presented to people. Message credibility is also considered to be part of the cognitive dimension (Etgar & Goodwin, 1982; Kamins et al., 1989). Further, we have seen that transparency also has direct effects on perceived trustworthiness. A direct effect is expected based on the general judgment of people about the act of transparency itself, which was thought to be positive: being transparent is perceived as a positive value in itself (Hood, 2006b: 216). The direct effect is thought to be less based on the cognitive dimension. This assessment, without specifically assessing the message based on credibility cues or knowledge, is therefore considered to be more based on faith and thus to be the most affective relationship between transparency and perceived trustworthiness.

9.5 Discussion: How robust are the results?

Thus far we have looked at the combined results of the experiments. These yielded some remarkable results: transparency had no effect – and sometimes even a negative effect – on trust in government organisations. To what extent are these results an artifact of methodological flaws or measurement errors? In other words, how robust are these results? This section addresses several potential limitations: the student bias in the samples of two experiments is discussed; the effect of the small size of one of the samples; the operationalisation of message credibility, knowledge and information usability; the limitations of the analyses; the potential bias caused by

the experimental procedure and a discussion on the effect of the specific configurations of transparency objects and dimensions chosen for this study.

9.5.1 Sample bias?

The policy transparency experiment used only students in its sample, and in the decisionmaking transparency experiment about half of the sample consisted of students. It could well be that this student bias influenced the results. The high student proportion may have made the effect of transparency appear more positive than it actually is, as their being unengaged with the topic and highly educated might make them more positive about government. The issue of external validity of student samples in experimental research was briefly discussed in the chapter on methodology, but in this section we will elaborate more extensively on this limitation. People from the general population who can be expected to visit government websites "for real" are citizens who find local air pollution an important issue. This determines whether an issue is salient to people, which in turn may have an impact on how they read the information and how they rate its trustworthiness (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Eastin, 2001; Freeman & Spyridakis, 2004; Flanagin & Metzger, 2007).

People who find an issue important generally read information about it more closely than those who are not concerned with it; thus they are expected to be more critical regarding government information about that particular topic. It is therefore important to assess the extent to which this distortion actually occurs in the results. To what extent is local air pollution salient to students? They have a wide range of interests, but air pollution is not necessarily one of them. If the issue has low saliency, they may read the disclosed information in a very different manner, which affects how perceived trustworthiness of government is rated. The data of the third experiment (policy outcome transparency) are used to assess this potential distortion, as this sample only contained a few students.

First, to analyse the extent to which a bias actually occurs, the difference in issue salience between the "real world website visitors" and the sample was assessed. For this purpose an additional ANCOVA[44] was carried out with the following three categories: (1) participants who never visited the municipality's website; (2)

[44] Covariates: age, political preference and gender.

participants who visited the website but not about air pollution; and (3) participants who visited the municipal website about air pollution. The third group (part of the general population) consisted of actual consumers of information about air pollution. Was the policy issue "air pollution" indeed more salient to these participants than to others? The extent to which an individual considers an issue to be importance contributes to its saliency (e.g. Bélanger & Meguid, 2008). The ANCOVA results confirm that real visitors perceived it to be a more important issue than other participants ($F(1,834)=51.09$, $p=0.00$)[45]. Thus, one can rightly raise the question as to how representative students are of the population.

Second, to assess the bias, it was necessary to know whether students had different levels of issue salience compared to others. An additional ANCOVA analysis shed light on whether there was a difference between students and non-students with regard to the level of issue salience of *local air pollution*. The third experiment, regarding policy outcome transparency, had a large number of participants. The sample was diverse, consisting of a number of students (N=51) and non-students (N=697). The variable "student" was used as a factor, while "issue salience" was the outcome variable. Covariates in this model were "political preference", "education", "gender" and "age". The results show that being a student does not negatively affect salience of the issue ($F(1,747)=1.31$, $p=0.270$) (Appendix F, Table 3). On the other hand, two covariates were found to affect salience. Participants' age had a moderately negative effect, whereas left-wing political preference had a slight positive effect on the perceived importance of the issue of local air pollution. No effect of the level of education was found. To what extent are these background variables similar to the characteristics of students? An additional MANOVA test with "students" as a factor showed that students did not have significantly different voting preferences from those of the non-students within the sample. However, the students in the sample were much younger than the average of the rest of the participants ($t(1,242.3)=29.46$, $p=.000$). Hence, the only variable in which students were really different from the rest of the sample, and has a significant effect on "issue salience", was "age". This analysis shows that students did not necessarily care less about local air pollution

[45] A table with full figures of this analysis is found in Appendix F (Table 2). "Issue salience" was operationalised as follows: "Air quality in the city of […] is an important issue to me" and "I follow the local news to know about developments concerning air quality". Also see Table 1 in Appendix F.

than others did. However, it cannot completely be denied, since an important predictor of concern and perceived importance was "age".

Third, an additional analysis was carried out to assess how important salience is in determining perceived trustworthiness. A correlation analysis, which included "saliency" and "perceived trustworthiness", only showed a small negative correlation between both variables (R=-0.12, p=0.001). This means that participants with higher issue salience tended to be slightly less trusting.

How should we assess the question posed at the beginning of this section? To what extent is the student bias problematic for message salience? This question was assessed by taking advantage of the size and diversity of the sample used for the third experiment. The sampling of students in experimental research has been a point of discussion for many years (e.g. Berkowitz & Donnerstein, 1982; Lynch, 1982), yet in this study the effect of a student bias seems to be limited. People who had visited the air pollution website tended to perceive the issue as more important than participants who had not visited the website. However, the variable "student" had no significant predictive effect on issue salience. In this regard, the use of students was not necessarily problematic. Nevertheless, the second additional analysis showed that age positively affects issue salience. Since students are comparatively young, this indicates that students might be somewhat less committed to the air pollution issue. The third additional analysis showed that salience indeed matters for general perceived trustworthiness, albeit only slightly: higher saliency coincides with less perceived trustworthiness. Considering all things mentioned above, it is safe to state that the bias towards students in two of the experiments (regarding decisionmaking transparency and policy transparency) skews the results towards slightly higher levels of perceived trustworthiness. That said, the magnitude of this distortion for the results should not be overstated, because only a weak link was found and, in addition, in only one of the experiments did the sample consist solely of students, which even further mitigates the overall effect of this sample bias on the results.

9.5.2 Small sample size?

A second limitation concerns the small sample size of the policy transparency experiment. This experiment was carried out with a sample of 91 participants. In an experiment with four groups this means on average there were only a little more than

twenty participants per group. Due to practical reasons it was not possible to recruit more people for this experiment. This might have biased the results found in this experiment. The small sample size caused the experiment to have low power to detect significant differences (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007: 36-37). The policy transparency experiment showed differences of 0.20 and 0.23 between groups in the dimensions of perceived competence and benevolence, yet these were not large enough to establish significance. In other experiments, for example the one concerning decision-making transparency, we saw that differences of a similar magnitude were significant. Of course, 'significance' is not just a meaningless label: it indicates the possibility that differences occur by chance. Because of the small sample size, odds are that this difference is indeed just a coincidence.

A larger number of participants would have increased the power of the statistical test. This could have led to slightly different conclusions in the case of the policy transparency experiment. As mentioned above, there was, for example, a rather large yet not significant positive effect on perceived benevolence of the municipality. However, in spite of these descriptive results we cannot infer any conclusions about these differences, since they were not significant. It should be noted that the differences caused by transparency are rather small and therefore hard to detect by an experiment. Future research should address this issue and aim for an experiment on a larger scale to be able to detect these differences.

9.5.3 Inadequate operationalisation?

The results might also have been an artifact of the way certain key variables were operationalised. Therefore, this section discusses the adequacy of the operationalisation of three variables: message credibility, information usability and specific knowledge.

Message credibility

Message credibility[46] was operationalised by two items: perceived information accuracy and perceived completeness. A first point of criticism is that this operationalisation lacks several additional dimensions. Indeed, although prior research stressed that these are two crucial dimensions of (perceived) message credibility

[46] A PCA analysis which includes the original message credibility items and factor loadings can be found in Appendix A, Table 1.

(Boritz, 2004, p. 21; Nicolaou & McKnight, 2006; Flanagin & Metzger, 2007, p. 327), other dimensions are also mentioned, such as information believability, timeliness, trustworthiness, and information bias (e.g. Flanagin & Metzger, 2000; Eastin, 2001; West, 2004; Flanagin & Metzger, 2007).

However, it should be noted that when assessing the items or dimensions that are to be included in the study, one must determine whether the credibility of the source or of the stimulus (i.e. information content) is being measured. Further, this can be evaluated from the perspective of the user of the information, yet also from attributes of the source/content itself (Eastin, 2001). Central to this dissertation is the perceived credibility of the stimulus/content, since we want to know whether the message is perceived to be credible. Therefore, only items regarding actual attributes of the message were included, assessed from a user's perspective. This excludes, for example, "information believability" and "trustworthiness", which are solely user-end evaluations of information.

That said, dimensions which reflect message attributes, such as "information bias" and "timeliness", were included as elements of transparency itself in this study. Information bias was a central element in Chapter 7 (i.e. information colouring), whereas timeliness was part of the experiment in Chapter 8 (i.e. part of information usability). Information completeness, on the other hand, is considered to be part of both message credibility and transparency. This means that transparency and message credibility are on a similar conceptual playing field. Which dimensions belong exactly to which concept could be the basis for further transparency research. In a field that has only just begun to explore its conceptual underpinnings and relations to adjacent concepts, this study has sought to make a preliminary contribution.

Information usability

The "usability" of disclosed information was central to the policy outcome transparency experiment. Both the timeliness and comprehensibility of the information was manipulated, as these were thought to be central elements of information usability. Two potential limitations will be discussed in this section. Firstly, the content-based approach of usability can be criticised: isn't usability of information "in the eye of the beholder"? Secondly, the measurement of information usability as such will be discussed.

Is information necessarily usable to a person, even if it is timely and clear? Whether or not someone understands certain information depends on individual characteristics, such as his or her education. This means that information which is comprehensible to one might be incomprehensible to another. The concept of usability was used because the experiment aimed at simulating government information that is obfuscated by not presenting it in a clear and timely matter. The difference between usable and non-usable information was made "extreme" by presenting information that was very timely and explained in simple terms, in order for it to be comprehensible for most people. Of course, comprehensibility is a particularly subtle dimension in reality and is dependent on both the receiver and the actual content of the information. Yet by exaggerating the difference on the side of the sender (i.e. government) it was made more likely that information would be perceived as intended by the researcher (i.e. being timely/intelligible or not). This was checked by asking people afterwards about the comprehensibility and timeliness of the information (i.e. manipulation check). The results show that this approach worked. When stating 'I feel the municipality provides air pollution figures in a very timely manner', the low usability experimental groups had means of 2.3 on a five-point scale; the high usability groups both had means of 4.0 ($p < 0.01$). Participants were also asked whether they thought the information was comprehensible. The mean difference was less striking, yet still rather large (2.6 compared to 3.7 on five-point scale ($p < 0.01$).

The second issue was the focus of the information usability concept on timeliness and comprehensibility. Is information really more "usable" if it is more timely and comprehensible? One can imagine that additional or maybe different dimensions are more inherent to usability than these two. Admittedly, other dimensions might also be part of the information usability construct, yet these are additional and not substitutive to timeliness and comprehensibility. Both dimensions contribute to usability, because old information disclosed on a website is much less meaningful than recently updated information about government activities or results. "Reactivity" is the yardstick against which "timeliness" is measured: the amount of time between the actual measurement or determination of the policy (outcome) and the disclosure of this data. Further, comprehensibility allows citizens to actually use the information.

That said, it should be noted that transparency scholars only recently started to conceptualise and operationalise transparency. One of this study's contributions is a

new attempt to conceptualise transparency and the usability dimension of transparency. Based on prior research, timeliness and comprehensibility of information were included in the information usability dimension (e.g. Larsson, 1998; Heald, 2006; Karr, 2008; Dawes, 2010; Michener & Bersch, 2011).

Future research should aim to further and more comprehensively operationalise information usability, as this is lacking in current transparency research. These studies could address this issue by aiming to develop more sophisticated measures of usability. This study operationalised usability as a trait of the information, whereas a more sophisticated measure could construct combined measures of information and user characteristics. For example, what is usable information for people with little education, or what is usable information for elderly people?

Specific knowledge

A third issue with operationalising the variables regards the way in which "specific knowledge" was measured. It should be noted first that this variable did not regard a measure of "objective" knowledge but rather of perceived knowledge. This means that people were asked how much knowledge they perceived themselves to have about the object under scrutiny, for example policy plans or policy outcomes.

This being a subjective measure of knowledge, it can also be argued to be a measure of manipulation. In other words, if the 'level of transparency' is the manipulated variable, perceived knowledge can be a measure to assess whether participants perceive this manipulation in the way the researcher intended. In this case, the manipulation can be checked by asking participants whether they perceived themselves to have more knowledge.

However, in at least two of the three experiments there is no reason to assume this since no effects of perceived knowledge were found. In the policy outcome experiment a relation between transparency and perceived knowledge was found. It seems unlikely, however, that knowledge was an artifact of transparency because the relation between transparency and knowledge was rather weak.

9.5.4 Skewed analyses?

A fourth weakness of this study might be the way the results were analysed. To check whether the use of a specific analysis skewed the results, auxiliary analyses were carried out to see whether these confirmed the current results. The main analysis assessed the effect of transparency on separate dimensions of perceived trustworthiness (i.e. competence, benevolence and honesty). In this additional analysis the three dimensions of perceived trustworthiness were combined into one 'general perceived trustworthiness' construct and then again assessed by MANCOVAs to see if these yielded similar outcomes.

The majority of the results were confirmed by the additional analyses, in which the mean of the three separate dimensions of perceived trustworthiness was used to determine the "general perceived trustworthiness" (see Appendix E). In the original analysis the limited mediating effect of specific knowledge was confirmed. In two experiments no effect was found, while only a slight effect of knowledge on in the policy outcome experiment was detected. This was confirmed by the additional analysis. Secondly, the mediating effect of message credibility in the auxiliary analysis was very similar to the results in the main analysis. The relation between message credibility and perceived trustworthiness in all three experiments was confirmed, although only in the decisionmaking and policy outcome experiment was this an actual mediated relation. Further, the effect of trust in government in general on perceived trustworthiness of a government organisation was verified for each experiment.

Moreover, the auxiliary analyses again showed that transparency has only a limited effect in most cases, and sometimes even a negative one. The result which diverged most strikingly from the main analysis is considered to be the decisionmaking transparency experiment. In the main analysis a heterogeneous overall effect was found: perceived competence was affected negatively, while perceptions of honesty were higher. This heterogeneous effect could not be confirmed in the additional analysis. Nevertheless, the results from the main analysis are still thought to be plausible, because the lack of effect on general perceived trustworthiness in the additional analysis is a sum of both negative and positive overall effects of transparency. Hence, altogether we might detect no effect only because the negative effect is compensated by a positive effect on perceived honesty. Further, the results

of the analyses of the policy-making experiment were very similar, as no overall effect could be confirmed in either instance. In addition, the main analysis of the policy outcome experiment was confirmed by the additional analysis. No overall effect of policy outcome transparency was found in either case. Also, when comparing the low transparency with the high transparency experimental groups, a slightly negative direct effect of low transparency of information indeed occurred, thus confirming the main analysis. Finally, an additional MANCOVA test encompassing data of all three experiments and all levels of transparency (control group, low transparency, and high transparency) confirmed the general conclusion that high levels of transparency do not lead to altered levels of perceived trustworthiness. In line with the analyses, "low" transparency does lead to *lower* levels of perceived trustworthiness, especially perceived competence (Appendix F, Table 4). In sum, the auxiliary analyses provided outcomes very similar to those of the main analysis presented in this dissertation.

Further, because this is one of the first empirical studies into the effect of transparency on trust, only a general assessment was carried out, aiming to uncover the effect of transparency for the whole sample at once. However, transparency might have different effects on people who have high or low levels of trust in government in general, or have high or low prior knowledge about the topic made transparent. Therefore, future research should look into effects of transparency on these particular groups of citizens in order to provide more comprehensive insights into how transparency and trust are related.

9.5.5 Experimental procedure bias?

A fifth limitation concerns the duration of the experiments. Participants encountered a website only once and for a short period of time. This might have had particular effects on the outcomes of the experiments. The magnitude of the effects was probably lower due to the act that this was a single and rather short encounter with transparency. The experiments did not investigate long-term effect and repeated visits to websites with transparent information, while if that had been done the effect of knowledge on the long-term might have been more substantial. Lewicki and Bunker (1995) argue that trust can be built over time. Time might indeed have a more profound effect on knowledge, and this could eventually have an effect on perceived trustworthiness. The experiments presented in this dissertation do not make clear how long the effect of transparency will last. Most likely the effect largely fades with the

passage of time. In order to investigate this issue, future experiments could examine longitudinally to what extent the effect lasts. In addition, the effect of multiple "transparency encounters" can be examined by carrying out experiments and showing multiple websites.

9.5.6 Biased results caused by specific transparency configurations?

The results may have been biased because of specific configurations of transparency objects and dimensions investigated in this dissertation. Only three specific combinations of objects and dimensions of transparency have been investigated, i.e., the completeness of information concerning decision-making, the colour of policy transparency, and the usability of policy outcome transparency. Although these combinations covered all dimensions and objects in a way, other configurations of objects and dimensions of transparency are expected to provide an even fuller understanding of the effects of transparency. This could especially shed more light on the tension between completeness and usability of disclosed information. Providing people with complete and usable (timely and understandable) information at the same time is difficult. The specific relation between these dimensions is not yet fully clear. For example, the decision-making transparency experiment focused only on the completeness of information yet not on whether the information was timely and comprehensible. On the other hand, the policy outcome transparency experiment only looked into the usability of information, whereas the role of information completeness was neglected. Investigating other configurations in future research – such as the usability of decision-making information and the completeness of policy outcome information – will thus not only give us a fuller understanding of the effects of transparency, it will also shed light on the relation between information completeness and usability.

Overall, this section discussed potential weaknesses of this study. Although the study, as any other, has its limitations, the main findings are thought to be rather robust. This means that the remarkable results cannot be explained only by methodological flaws and biases. How can we explain these results and what does it mean for government organisations? Before exploring this question in the next chapter, the following section discusses how the experimental method as such might be useful to public administration research.

9.6 Experiments and public administration research: strange bedfellows?

The number of experiments in public administration research is limited. This section considers to what extent experiments might be useful to our discipline. Three elements of experiments in public administration are highlighted: (1) experiments in public administration research have potential use for investigating causal effects and theory building (2) when the central research question involves individual behaviour or perceptions and (3) while adhering to a realistic context. The first element highlights the potential of experiments, while the second element entails prerequisites for experiments in general. The third element specifies how experiments should be designed to combine the need for realism for public administration practice and the need for theory-building for public administration research.

9.6.1 Causality and theory building

Experiments are pre-eminently useful to investigate causal effects and to contribute to building more robust theories. Since the element of causality has already been discussed in detail in Chapter 5 (Method), this section primarily focuses on how experiments can contribute to theories in public administration research.

The external validity of samples in experimental research is often attacked. Indeed, representative samples achieved by random selection are generally considered to be better than convenience samples of, for example, students. However, in experimental settings homogeneous samples might be preferable. Homogeneous samples are stronger in detecting systematic violations of a theory that is false (Calder, Phillips & Tybout, 1981; Lynch, 1982: 226). Most theories in public administration science are fairly general in scope in the sense that they are applied to a generic set of people or organisations. For example, theories about the relationship between transparency and trust assume that a positive effect applies to all people who read them in all instances of transparency and for all government organisations. This assumption can be shown to be false if an experiment demonstrates the contrary while using a subsample of any group of people, including a convenience sample of students. This closely follows Popper's philosophy of falsification (1959): theories can never be verified completely, they only hold as long as the opposite is not proven. Hence, experiments could contribute to falsifying current theories in public administration.

In addition, Calder et al. (1981) argue that statistical generalisation is not necessarily required for research into the application of general scientific theory. It is the *theory* that is applied beyond the research setting, not the sample. Statistical generalisation is not recommended when the exact population to which we want to generalise is unclear. More often than not we are unsure about what the population is which we think we should generalise. This might even be impossible as there are myriad configurations of background traits that play a role in the population. Uncertainty about the population is also applicable to this study: there is no data available about the exact background characteristics of the population (people making use of computer-mediated transparency). In such cases it is better to make generalisations *across subpopulations* that might be important to the subject under study (Cook & Campbell, 1979).

At a more practical level, there might be a solution to partly overcome the issue of external validity in experimental research. The representativeness of samples can be enhanced by joining already existing (e.g. Internet) panels of respondents. By designing an online experiment many respondents can be recruited[47]. This might come at the cost of a loss of control over the actions of participants, yet this can be partly obviated by making clear-cut instructions.

In sum, experiments are useful to public administration research even though samples are often not representative: theories can be made more robust by the principle of falsification and causal effect can be determined more thoroughly.

9.6.2 Focus on individuals

In many cases of public administration research the experiments are not feasible. The units of analysis of scholars in public administration are often countries or organisations, while experiments are mostly suitable at the individual level. Individual citizens can participate in experiments. In addition, individual decisionmakers within a government organisation are a suitable unit of analysis in experiments (e.g., Bozeman & McAlpine, 1977; Scott, 1997).

If the unit of analysis focuses on the individual level, experiments are potentially very useful. The perceptions and behaviour of citizens are currently understudied in public

[47] See for example the policy outcome experiment (Chapter 8) in this dissertation.

administration research but are suitable for examination with experiments. In addition, behavioural patterns of individual or small group decisionmaking in the public sector do fit the prerequisites of experiments. Thus, experiments can be useful to public administration research if the unit of analysis concerns individuals or small groups. This means that experiments are useful to investigate the effect of transparency on trust and decision acceptance in other policy fields. For example, De Fine Licht (2011) examined the effect of transparency of decisionmaking on trust and decision acceptance in health care policy.

Further, experiments can be used in cases of individual decisionmaking. For instance, Scott (1997) carried out an experiment into factors affecting street-level decisionmaking. The findings of aracteristics were most influential in the awarding of benefits and services to clients seeking public assistance. One could also think of situations of top-level or other bureaucratic decisionmaking, such as budgetary decisionmaking (Bretschneider, Straussman & Mullins, 1988), or making and justifying policy decisions (Weiss, 1982). Another field of study where experiments can be useful concerns the field of accountability. Philip Tetlock has been carrying out several experiments into accountability in the field of political psychology. For example, he explored the need to justify one's views to others about the complexity of people's thinking on controversial social issues (Tetlock, 1983). Other fields of research where individuals are studied and that could benefit from experimental research are civil servants' loyalty towards political leaders or leadership in times of crises. For instance, experiments could be used to isolate factors affecting civil servant or leadership behaviour in a hypothetical situation.

Notwithstanding the potential usefulness of experiments in public administration research, we are not social psychologists who are trained in using a concept abstracted from reality which leads to elegant and simple research designs. The study of public administration mainly focuses on applicable research results. When using experiments in public administration research we therefore need to find a mixture of realism and theory-building.

9.6.3 Need for contextual realism

The experiments in this dissertation tried to use contextual realism to make the information look as if it were really disclosed by a government organisation. For

example, the experimental task and setting (surfing a website) were designed to look realistic, yet the setting was still somewhat artificial. People were asked to read a website and use it in a specific way; they were not allowed to use or browse the website freely. Traditionally, experiments are not designed to exactly mirror reality. To put it more clearly, Lynch (1982: 238) argues that:
'The "realism" of experimental tasks and stimuli is irrelevant to external validity unless the experiment is unrealistic on a dimension that interacts with the treatment manipulations.'

The results of experimental studies as such cannot be generalised, but the external validity entails the generalisation of the causal effect (Cook & Campbell, 1979). By enhancing external validity by making it as realistic as possible, internal validity and hence the ability to determine causal effects might be threatened (Lynch, 1982: 231). For instance, the external validity of this experiment might have been enhanced if our research setting had allowed participants to roam freely among the government's website to search for information. At first glance, this would have made the experiment results more realistic and more suited to generalisation. However, this would have severely threatened internal validity, as other and unknown factors might have played a role in website searching behaviour (which was not the object of study). In addition, it would have been impossible to recover which pages were exactly visited and read, and even more difficult to compare groups with different people who searched for and read different information.

The whole point is that the realism of the experimental setting does not automatically enhance the ability to generalise results (Berkowitz & Donnerstein, 1982). Nevertheless, the discussion of an artificial versus realistic experimental setting is important regarding the use of laboratory experiments in public administration research. In this dissertation some degree of realism is attained by using a realistic setting, e.g., a real-world website was visited by participants. Bozeman and Scott (1992: 309) argue that laboratory experiments in public administration research should require attention to 'mundane reality'. This means there should be sufficient levels of contextual realism in experiments in order to be able to use the results in public administration practice. Because of this mundane reality the experimental setting is not as abstracted from reality as are social psychological experiments. As a result,

public administration experiments are likely to be more complex than the elegant social psychological experiments.

The idea of "mundane reality" poses a dilemma within public administration research. In experimental research we need to find a balance between sufficient variation in the independent variable to find an effect while still maintaining sufficient mundane reality. For example, in the policy transparency experiment the effect of colouring of information (balanced, positive or highly positive) was very limited, although prior studies on balanced messages in advertisement showed positive effects of this on credibility (Etgar & Goodwin, 1982; Kamins et al., 1989). In constructing the policy message there might not be enough negative information in the balanced message to cause these effects. On the other hand, in designing the experiment the negative information in the policy message could not be too obvious since people had to believe that this was a policy message on a real government website. Hence, in designing the experimental manipulation researchers need to strike a balance: they need a realistic and convincing stimulus, while on the other hand they need to search for a stimulus with a maximum chance of having an effect.

Overall, this section has explained the possibilities for the application of experiments in public administration research. Certainly, laboratory experiments do have a role when it comes to assessing causal effects and when individuals are the units of analysis. Experiments should not be perceived as replacements for surveys and other "conventional" methods in public administration research, since different methods results in different types of knowledge and insights. Methodological pluralism should be considered to be a strength and not a weakness. Experiments can nevertheless contribute to the advancement of knowledge accumulation, rigor and theory in public administration research (Bozeman & Scott, 1992).

10. Transparency and trust

10.1 Transparency optimists, pessimists and skeptics: who is right?

The previous chapter showed that although this study has its limitations, the results can still be considered as robust. Therefore, Chapter 10 explores potential explanations and the implications of these results.

This dissertation began by questioning the common assumption that government transparency is the answer to restoring declining levels of trust in government. Three positions in the debate on transparency have been distinguished: transparency optimists, transparency pessimists and those who believe transparency does not have any effect at all on trust in government. Optimists argue that "lifting the veil of secrecy will be beneficial to all of us" (Davis, 1998) since transparency can do no harm if you have nothing to hide. Transparency makes government perform better, prevents corruption and will strengthen public trust. Pessimists, however, argue that there is a "dark side of transparency" (O'Neill, 2002; Bovens, 2003; Etzioni, 2010): it will lead to misinformation, worse decisionmaking, politics of scandal and distrust. Those who take a neutral stance state that trust is not or only marginally determined by transparency but by other, external, factors, such as economic tide (e.g., Roberts, 2006b: 119). Which argument is supported by the results in this dissertation?

The empirical findings provide some support for all three arguments. First, results partly support the transparency pessimists, who argue that transparency necessarily comes with negative side effects on trust. A negative overall effect of decision-making transparency on perceived competence was found (i.e. "clumsy government"). In addition, the other experiments showed negative effects on competence if information about a policy was balanced compared to when it was presented in a more positive light. In the experiment on policy outcome transparency we found that competence was negatively affected if information usability was low or the outcome itself was negative. Hence, in general, transparency has mostly a negative effect on perceived competence of a government organisation.

On the other hand, the transparency optimists are supported by the positive effect of *decision-making* transparency on perceived honesty. Their main argument is that transparency contributes to an open culture (Hood, 2006: 216-217) which will have a positive impact on trust in government. Thus this only applies to a specific, yet very relevant, type of transparency. This is remarkable since it was the rise of the NPM doctrine that triggered governments to focus on an active form of transparency of government *outcome* (cf. Hood, 1991; Noordegraaf, 2000; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004). The basic argument is that citizens will trust government more if they see government policies yield good results (cf. 'output legitimacy' by Scharpf, 1999: 9-11). Ironically, outcome transparency did not contribute to higher levels of trust, whereas a traditional and input-oriented form of transparency, i.e. decision-making transparency, did.

Evidence supporting transparency skeptics was also found. Certain dimensions of trust, especially perceived benevolence, are to a large extent affected by people's predisposition to trust government and not by transparency itself. Further, we have seen that the overall effects of transparency on perceived trustworthiness in case of policy transparency, and transparency of policy outcomes does not surpass the 'standard' level of perceived trustworthiness of a government organisation. This supports one of the arguments of transparency skeptics: the effect of transparency is minor compared to other determinants of trust. The second argument was that trust in government is not related to what it actually does in a concrete case, yet that it is rooted in a predisposition to trust in government (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003: 333). Although people's predisposition to trust government in general is indeed an important determinant, transparency *does* matter at the level of an individual government organisation: if not done well it can contribute to lower levels of perceived competence.

Overall, it seems that the three points of view all hold some truth, yet on different dimensions of trust. In this sense, especially optimists and pessimists are partly at cross-purposes. Part of the transparency pessimist argument regards that it demystifies government and that it leads to increased and unjust blaming of government (Bovens, 2003: 128-130; Roberts, 2005b; Worthy 2010: 574-575). This argument is based on the idea that it decreases the perceived competence of government organisations. Indeed, the negative effects of transparency that were found mostly concerned the competence dimension of trustworthiness.

On the other hand, transparency optimists mainly focus on the positive effects on (perceived) honesty of government. Transparency is supposed to shine a "bright light" on government practices, which is supposed to make it being perceived as honest. This argument was partly supported, although it regards another element of perceived trustworthiness. In other words, because transparency pessimists and optimists focus on different aspects of the transparency and trust relation they are both – at least partly – proven right.

10.2 Trust at the meso-level: dashed expectations and demystification

The main findings indicate that the promise of transparency should be toned down and even indicate that transparency might actually have a negative effect. How can we understand this effect? First, two explanations at the meso-level (i.e. at the level of individual government organisations) are explored.

Dashed expectations

First, results showed that it was difficult to meet the rising expectations of citizens which, in turn, caused transparency to be not a satisfier but a dissatisfying element if not done well.

First, transparency itself has been subject to rising expectations. In other words, transparency has become the norm for government actions. Every government organisation has to participate in the rat race toward more transparency, or at least in appearing to be transparent. In the previous chapter we discussed a study by Piotrowski and Van Ryzin (2007), who investigated U.S. citizens' expectations regarding several topics of transparency. They found a high demand by citizens for transparency, reflecting the expectation they had on this particular topic. It seems like disclosure of policy information and policy outcome information is a *conditio sine qua non* for trust in a government organisation. In addition, the use of the Internet to create transparency has been subject to rising expectations. In the late nineties a government organisation with a website was perceived to be innovative and maybe even transparent. However, nowadays not having a website will cause dissatisfaction, and high demands are placed on current websites. In this race the initial gains of frontrunners of transparency slowly dissolve. Thus, rising expectations for transparency, combined with the emergence of the Internet, has increased people's

expectations and demands regarding access to a great deal of government data (Shapiro, 1999).

Second, transparency exposes certain content, e.g., policy outcomes, policy measures or decisions. In turn, these decisions or policies have themselves been subject to rising expectations. According to Orren (1997) and Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004), the expectations of citizens about what government can or should do have increased immensely in the last few decades. Societal problems have become harder to solve: demands posed upon solutions are very high and change over time. Knowledge about the problem and potential solutions are insufficient and are not commonly agreed upon, and many interdependent actors are involved in the problem. These three factors cause some societal problems to be 'wicked' (Rittel & Webber, 1973; Bueren, Klijn & Koppenjan, 2003). The central topic in this dissertation, air pollution, can be viewed as a wicked problem. Demands for the solutions to the problem of air pollution are high: EU rules prescribe that air pollution, even in large cities, should not surpass certain strict standards. Further, many actors are involved in solving the problem: the national government, regional and local government, and executive agencies are all involved. However, these government agencies are highly dependent on the cooperation of polluters, particularly large polluting companies and car drivers. Thus, expectations regarding policies are on the rise, whereas solving them is difficult.

The abovementioned rising expectations regarding transparency and policies themselves shows it is hard to meet expectations regarding both at once. If the demand for transparency is met it is likely to dash expectations about the policy itself, since transparent information also sheds a brighter light on the uncertainties, failures and complexities in policymaking for wicked problems. Increased transparency might backfire, as it exposes the limitations of government actions and performance.

This brings out a tension between the perceived competence and perceived honesty of a government organisation. Being completely transparent may cause people to regard a government organisation as being very honest yet not so competent because all mistakes and bickering are also open to scrutiny. This is exactly what we found in the decision-making experiment. On the other hand, giving a positive spin on

information might make the government organisation look "better" regarding its competence and could eventually be harmful to its (perceived) honesty.

For government organisations, this tension caused by rising expectations makes the promise of transparency a millstone around their necks. Because people's expectations are hard to meet, let alone to exceed, people become disappointed and their expectations are dashed.

Demystification of government (or: 'pay no attention to the man behind the curtain')
The second issue regards the demystification of government organisations: transparency allows a look behind government's "golden walls", behind which processes of decisionmaking are not as smooth and rational as anticipated from the outside.

Behind the curtain the façade of rational public decisionmaking is indefinitely unmasked. It is not a smooth process in which all values and solutions are listed, weighed and then chosen. It is incremental, involving a process that includes petty arguments, a lack of resources and information: the "optimal" solution cannot be determined objectively.

Hence, the expectation of rationalism is not met and cannot be met. Strategic representations of facts by political parties are inherent to public decisionmaking (Stone, 1998/2002). This might contribute to political cynicism and to the decline of citizen trust. People expect a government organisation to be transparent, but in the end there seems to be a gap between public expectations and the reality shown through transparency, i.e. that the government organisation is much more chaotic and public decisionmaking is, in Lindblom's words, often a process of 'muddling through'.

Demystification mainly concerns decision-making transparency (i.e. "clumsy yet honest government"). In addition, the increasing complexity of policymaking has also caused governments to be faced with a difficult predicament: they have to participate in the "rat race" toward more transparency, knowing that this potentially exposes more and more information about complex and hard-to-manage policies. This contributes to the 'demystification of government'. According to Bovens (2003) this is a price governments might have to pay for increased transparency.

That said, demystification is not necessarily a bad thing. People can no longer be kept ignorant: seeing government organisations as normal organisations in which mistakes and failures occur may in this sense contribute to 'political maturity'. Transparency and the dismantling of the golden walls of government are part of modern societies, where people expect a great deal of transparency yet have little tolerance for mistakes. Citizens' loss of 'bliss ignorance' and governments' loss of authority through demystification is brought to life surprisingly well by a classic scene in the *Wizard of Oz*. Once 'the man behind the curtain' is revealed, there is no use in saying to citizens that they should 'pay no attention the man behind the curtain'.

Thus far the effects of transparency on trust in government organisations have been explored in the short term on the meso-level. In Chapter 1 we saw that transparency is also seen as an important solution for trust in government in general, i.e., at the macro-level.

10.3 Is there a negative effect of transparency on trust at the macro-level?

The previous section did not show a very rosy view: both demystification and dissatisfaction are effects that occur at the meso-level in the short term. What does this mean for the relation between transparency and trust in government in general and in the long run? Can we also expect to see limited and mostly negative effects here?

Based on the empirical data presented in this dissertation it is not possible to infer conclusions about the relation between transparency and trust at the macro-level. Nevertheless, from prior research we know that citizens' trust in government in general is not simply a sum of their trust in single government organisations (Van de Walle, 2004). Thus although we have concluded that transparency is needed to prevent the dissatisfaction in the short term and at the meso-level, this does not necessarily apply to trust in government in general and in the long run. In this case, transparency might, albeit indirectly, actually contribute to trust in government.

At the general level and in the long run, transparency is needed to prevent the abuse of money and power by governments and government officials. Transparency is often

said to contribute to combating corruption in government (e.g., Florini, 2007; Meijer, 2009: 256). In other words, if transparency and/or accountability are lacking, corruption is more likely to occur (Klitgaard, 1998). A recent study by Lio, Liu and Ou (2011) hypothesised a link between the Internet, which can increase transparency and accountability, and reduced corruption. In a comparison of seventy countries researchers found a limited though significant positive effect. One limitation of this study is that it only measures the degree of Internet adoption in a country and not transparency itself. Therefore, research on the relation between transparency, corruption and trust is needed to establish these positive effects more rigorously. In addition, there is evidence for a link between the existence of strong Freedom of Information (FOI) laws and low levels of corruption. Warren and Cordis (2011) found that US states that instigated strong FOI laws at first had higher levels of corruption convictions, yet that corruption convinctions decline in the long run of about eight years.

In both the long-term and at the macro-level transparency and corruption are said to be negatively correlated. If a high level of corruption exists this is purported to be detrimental for public trust in government in general (DellaPorta, 2000; Van der Meer, 2009). Corruption points to a lack of the two dimensions of perceived trustworthiness: a lack of government competence to combat corruption and a lack of moral values. Benevolence is lacking when government officials are corrupt or abuse their powers: they are perceived as not caring much about the interests of their citizens. An international comparison between 23 European countries carried out by Van der Meer (2009) indeed shows that the presence of corruption is associated with lower levels of trust in government in general. This means that if government is perceived to be more corrupt, it is trusted less. These variables might of course be endogenous, yet more transparency could still contribute to improving perceptions about or occurrence of government corruption.

Apart from the existence of corruption the basic level of citizen trust in government in general may influence the macro-level effect of transparency. Traditionally, the Netherlands has been a high-trust country; in other words, trust in government has always been relatively high (Bovens & Wille, 2008). Some other “high-trust countries” are Luxemburg, Denmark and Sweden. In contrast, countries with lower levels of general trust in government are called “low-trust countries” and include, among

others, the United States, former communist countries and southern European countries (Van de Walle et al., 2008; Van der Meer, 2009). Suspicion against government is much more common in these countries and may cause people to be more critical towards online government information in advance.

In low-trust countries, transparency might have a positive short-term impact on perceived trustworthiness since citizens do not expect government to divulge a great deal of information anyway. For example, decision-making transparency provides a look into the kitchen of political decisionmaking. Especially in countries without long-standing democratic traditions, low expectations may exist regarding decision-making transparency. This means that the positive effect of decision-making transparency on perceived honesty might be reinforced by the low expectations in these countries. The other side of the coin is that people's distrust might be supported by the exposure to the bickering and discussions in political decisionmaking.

In sum, at the meso-level (and in the short term) a limited and/or negative effect of transparency occurs. However, this does not mean that this effect also occurs at the general level (cf. Van de Walle, 2004). Transparency at the general level might even have a positive effect. It is correlated with low levels of corruption, which in turn is associated with high levels of trust in government in general (cf. Van der Meer, 2009). Further, the basic level of a nation´s trust in government (high versus low general citizen trust in government) may influence the expectations of government transparency at large.

Empirical research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of the interaction effect between people's predisposition to trust government in general and effects of transparency at the meso-level. Also the expectations about low-trust and high-trust countries in this section can be investigated by means of an international comparative research on transparency and trust in government.

10.4 Should we care about the negative effects of transparency?

A peek behind the golden wall on the short-term and meso-levels may decrease trust in government. Nevertheless, in the long term on the macro-level we might witness a positive relation between transparency and trust. How should we weigh these two

diverging effects of transparency? Should we accept the short-term negative effects and gamble on positive effects in the long-term? To properly decide upon the desirability, reasons other than encouraging trust are involved.

First, the disclosure of relevant government information is an imperative condition to enabling the accountability of governmental bodies. Classical principle-agent theory postulates that more information about the behaviour of the "agent" improves accountability mechanisms, improving its behaviour and causing the agent to place more effort in working for the common good (Holmström, 1979; Prat, 2006). According to Bovens (2007) several phases can be distinguished in processes of accountability. The first phase consists of information provision, in which information is transferred from those being held to account (the actors) to those who are holding them to account (the forum). This is needed to enable the second requirement of accountability, which is a debate in which the actor explains and justifies his or her conduct. Third, the forum can pass its judgment and even impose sanctions on the actor. From an accountability perspective, transparency thus is essential to observe the "agent" and for the primary phase in accountability processes: the provision of information about the conduct of the government organisation. Without transparency, accountability processes already fail from the start.

Second, transparency broadens accountability by opening up the process to other groups in society who previously did not have access to information about the conduct of government organisations or officials (e.g., Meijer et al., 2010). From this perspective, government should be transparent to empower citizens, i.e. give them 'equal weapons'. On the one hand, government uses information to make citizens transparent, e.g., to gain personal information which may harm individual privacy. By forcing governments to be transparent governments are unable to hide their own secrets (Brin, 2004). Hence empowerment of citizens by transparency can be the basis of more social or economic power, or at least a first step to more equal power between citizens and their institutions (Barber, 1984; O'Donnell, 1998; Florini, 2007).

Third, there is a deontological argument for transparency. Transparency is widely recognised as a cornerstone of democratic governance. Transparency is a democratic value, and as such it is also an end in itself (Northrup & Thorson, 2003). From the 'transparency as a value' perspective, the potentially negative effects of

transparency should be taken for granted. Modern transparency has its roots in Freedom of Information Acts (FOIAs). Freedom of information at large is said to be a human right for protecting individuals against inefficient, oppressive, or even bullying government. According to Birkinshaw, freedom of information is necessary to protect the form of democracy that developed through the twentieth century (Birkinshaw, 2006b: 55-56). Simply put, people have a fundamental "right to know" about what their government is doing or fails to do. As Karl Popper (1945) pointed out in his influential diptych '*The Open Society and its Enemies'*, openness is necessary to allow reasonable criticism, protect individuals, and to curb power abuse of the elite.

Hence, although negative effects of transparency might occur, this should be weighed against the importance of transparency as an imperative condition for accountability mechanisms and transparency as an important democratic value in itself.

10.5 The road ahead for government transparency

Government organisations are in a difficult predicament: they are expected to be transparent and show good results to the public, which is difficult to attain since this can easily lead to dissatisfaction and demystification. In spite of this it was argued that there are normative and deontological reasons for transparency. This means that although initial decreases in transparency may occur, policies aimed at strengthening transparency on the meso-level and in the short term are still needed. This section outlines policy recommendations for both individual government organisations who want to prevent dissatisfaction and for national governments who have a coordination task at hand. Further, principles and design issues of computer-mediated transparency are discussed in this section.

The road ahead for individual government organisations

Several objects of transparency been discussed throughout this dissertation. What is the potential for each object of transparency? First of all, we have seen that decision-making transparency was the only object of transparency that had an overall positive effect on perceived honesty. On the other hand, it had an overall negative effect on perceived competence. Further, decision-making transparency might not be

interesting enough for the general public to take notice; it is probably mostly of interest to a few very interested individuals and interest groups.

Policy transparency may appeal to a somewhat larger audience, as it provides them with information about the activities that an organisation is carrying out to improve a policy problem. However, the effects of policy transparency on trust have shown to be fairly limited. The results showed that providing balanced information about one's policies could have a negative effect on a government organisation's perceived competence. On the other hand, boasting too much and providing merely very positive information does not work, either. An advantage of policy transparency would be that the initial investments to create it are limited. Mostly the only thing needed is the disclosure of policy plans that probably have been developed already along with a text providing an explanation and context.

Policy outcome transparency may reach the largest audience. For instance, worried or committed citizens wonder about crime rates in their neighbourhoods or about the degree of air pollution in their streets. Making these outcomes transparent entails the risk that results might not be as good as citizens had hoped. Also, government organisations should make sure that these results are understandable and disclosed in a timely manner, especially since such disclosure has the potential to appeal to a larger audience. The disadvantage of this transparency object is that it might require a considerable investment to develop systems to monitor policy outcomes and to keep them up-to-date. In addition, how policy outcomes are measured and presented is a difficult and contentious issue (e.g., Van de Walle, 2008) and should be carefully thought through. Without going into detail in the government performance debate, potential issues regard whether results should be measured quantitatively so as to allow them to be presented in an easily understandable and comparable format. Results might also be described qualitatively, which allows a richer description and contextual explanation. The abovementioned advantages and drawbacks are summarised in Table 10.1.

Table 10.1 – Potential effects and reach of transparency

	Potential effect	*Potential reach*	*Other*
Decisionmaking	Positive and negative	Very small reach: only for interest groups and a few highly interested individuals	Needed anyway to enable democratic control and accountability
Policy	Negative if providing balanced information Too much boasting does not have desired effect	Small-to-medium reach: for interested citizens	
Policy outcome	Negative if result is negative Dissatisfaction with transparency if not done well	Medium reach: interested citizens and citizens who are more generally worried or committed to local problems	Requires considerable investment in system to monitor policy results Measurement can be a contentious issue

The effects of policy transparency on trust are limited. Extensive decision-making transparency is attractive if government organisations are aiming to be perceived as more honest. One caveat is that this might come at the cost of a decline in perceived competence. In addition, decisionmaking has a low reach since it attracts only pressure groups and perhaps a few citizens with a high interest in the topic under scrutiny. Based on the potential reach, policy outcome transparency seems to be a wise investment. It should be noted, however, that it risks public disappointment if not done properly and if the actual outcomes are negative.

Three principles for computer-mediated transparency

The previous section exclusively focused on objects of transparency, yet in this dissertation we also distinguished several dimensions of information: completeness, colour and usability. Based on these dimensions three principles for computer-mediated transparency can be distinguished.

1. Credible information is vital for trustworthiness.
First of all, we have seen that message credibility is an important determinant of perceived trustworthiness in two of three experiments. It is a more significant determinant than, for example, people's knowledge. This means government organisations should not primarily focus on aiming to increase knowledge through transparency. It is primarily important to carefully rethink how information on websites is made transparent and how to disclose information that is (perceived as) credible. How can government organisations do this? The second principle sheds light on this issue.

2. Both completeness and usability strengthen message credibility.
So what makes information to be perceived as reliable? Although the positive effect of credible information will not surpass the trust that people have of a government organisation without taking notice of a transparent website, it is important to build websites with credible information to maintain current trust levels. Two dimensions of transparency are particularly important for the credibility of a message. Information completeness is essential to credible messages. A government organisation should not overload citizens with information, yet if information in certain documents is incomplete, people believe this to be less credible. In addition, a credible message contains usable information. If information is flawed because it is outdated and hard to understand this negatively affects its credibility.

3. Layered transparency: coping with the tension between completeness and usability.
The previous principle brings out a conflict between information completeness and usability (cf. Graham, 2002: 5; Dawes, 2010). More complete information might be harder to disclose in a timely way and might be harder to understand than incomplete, "simplified" information. The third principle sheds light onto how to cope with this tension: *layered transparency*. Simplified, easily understandable and timely available information is available in the first layer, whereas complete and more detailed information is disclosed in the second layer. The Internet is preeminently suitable for this kind of transparency. Websites offer the flexibility to provide different ways of presenting information: simple, usable and with one mouse-click further complete and comprehensive information is available to experts and to those who are interested.

The road ahead for the national government

To help achieve the three abovementioned principles for computer-mediated transparency, national government needs to foster transparency of municipalities and individual government organisations. We have seen that transparency at the level of the individual organisation does not really deliver its promise yet that it is necessary apart from increasing trust since transparency serves a collective interest. It could help in increasing and maintaining trust government at the macro-level, enabling and improving democratic accountability. Since the gains for individual organisations are fairly limited, it might not be very attractive to individual government organisations to invest in transparency policies.

Government transparency as a collective good is subject to a common problem of collective goods. The "collective action problem" in this case concerns the situation in which several individual organisations would benefit from collective transparency in the long term. However, this might come at a certain cost (initial decline of trust, financial investment for individual organisations), which makes it improbable that any individual organisation will contribute to attaining the collective goal (cf. Olsen, 1965). In order to overcome this problem of collective action the government at the national level must more strictly regulate and enforce transparency policies of individual and/or local government organisations. This will in the end contribute to individual government organisations disclosing complete and usable information, which will at least maintain current levels of trust and will also contribute to accountability and the "higher ideal" of government transparency.

10.6 Transparency: a promise, principle, and reality

This dissertation set out with President Obama's plea for transparency. When we oversee the results and conclusions of this dissertation, what can be said about this promise?

'Too often the American people don't know who Washington is working for, and when they find out, they don't like what they hear. . . . We're not going to be able to change America unless we challenge the culture that has dominated Washington for far too long. And that means shining a bright light on how Washington works.'

Obama's promise is actually twofold. First, it hints at the ideal of enlightenment by transparency (even literally by 'shining a bright light'). From a modernistic perspective transparency leads to better-informed and more rational citizens who are expected to have more trust in government (Meijer, 2009). Second, the ideal of enlightenment by transparency also promises rational and proper government actions. However, Obama not only highlights the importance of light or enlightenment, he also points to the reality that is exposed by transparency ('when they find out, they don't like what they hear').

This reality exposed by transparency tends to show that government organisations are nothing special. This is where the rational ideal of transparency collides with the everyday reality of government decision- and policymaking, which is not smooth or rational but rather a messy reality of decisionmaking by 'muddling through' (cf. Lindblom, 1959). Transparency is a pivotal value of democracy which reveals this reality.

Transparency catalyses demystification and dashed expectations. Transparency at best maintains current trust levels if information is designed well. We should therefore acknowledge that transparency will not do wonders for public trust yet is "part of the deal" of decision- and policymaking of government organisations. Demystification and dashed expectations are negative consequences of transparency that we have to accept.

Nevertheless, we have seen that transparency is a valuable principle. In the long term and at the macro-level an indirect positive effect of transparency on trust in government may occur. Further, transparency is central to other democratic values such as accountability. Transparency is even considered a value itself: people have a 'right to know' (Birkinshaw, 2006b).

Although admittedly making promises are pivotal to democracy for electoral reasons: transparency's promise in the end has been a sobering experience. It has been sobering in the sense that the reality shown through transparency causes hardly any positive effect to occur at the meso-level. This means that the ideal of more trust through enlightenment promised by transparency does not seem to hold.

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Appendix A – Principal component analyses

Table 1 - Principal Component Analysis of perceived trustworthiness dimensions.

Coding	Item	1	2	3	4
C1	*De [trust object]* is bekwaam.*	**.697**	.346	.218	.251
C2	*De [trust object]* is effectief.*	**.679**	.282	.237	.056
C3	*Over het algemeen is de [trust object]* vakkundig.*	**.702**	.252	.103	.339
C4	*De [trust object]* deskundig.*	**.710**	.357	.142	.250
C5	*De [trust object]* voert haar taak zeer goed uit.*	**.728**	.409	.166	.083
B1	*Als burgers hulp nodig hebben dan doet de [trust object]* haar best om hen te helpen.*	.362	**.693**	.133	.043
B2	*De [trust object]* handelt in het belang van burgers.*	.325	**.747**	.164	.122
B3	*De [trust object]* is oprecht geïnteresseerd in het welzijn van burgers, niet alleen in haar eigen welzijn.*	.243	**.764**	.207	.052
B4	*De [trust object]* benadert burgers oprecht.*	.264	**.746**	.184	.191
H1	*De [trust object]* is eerlijk.*	.251	**.640**	.297	.314
H2	*De [trust object]* houdt zich aan haar toezeggingen.*	.395	**.568**	.266	.143
H3	*De [trust object]* is oprecht.*	.335	**.702**	.254	.219
MC1	*Ik heb de indruk dat de informatie op de website van [trust object]* volledig is.*	.284	.109	**.750**	.030
MC2	*Ik heb de indruk dat de informatie op de website van [trust object]* geheel correct is.*	.125	.209	**.840**	.092
TG1	*Over het algemeen geeft de overheid om het welzijn van burgers.*	-.068	.476	.139	**.642**
TG2	*Over het algemeen houdt de overheid zich aan de door haar gedane toezeggingen.*	.091	.263	.058	**.767**
TG3	*Over het algemeen doet de overheid haar werk effectief.*	.361	.052	.026	**.768**
TG4	*Over het algemeen doet de overheid haar werk bekwaam.*	.271	.224	.102	**.765**

** [Trust object]: exact wording depends on experiment..Extraction: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax KMO Bartlett's test of sphericity: 0.942.*

The PCA extracted only two factors of perceived trustworthiness, in stead of the three factors that were expected from theory. Broadly speaking there seems to be a factor based on the more utilitarian dimension of competence and a more ethical dimension of honesty and benevolence. However, the literature on trust strongly suggests there is more than one ethical dimension concerning trust (e.g. Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995; Peters, Covello and McCallum, 1997; Tyler, 2001; McKnight, et al., 2002; Kim, 2005; Welch et al., 2005). Therefore another factor analysis is carried out to see whether sub-dimensions of this ethical dimension can be uncovered.

Table 2 - Principal Component Analysis of perceived benevolence and honesty

	Item	*1*	*2*
B1	If citizens need help, the [trust object]* will do its best to help them.	**.838**	.238
B2	The [trust object]* acts in the interest of citizens	**.781**	.375
B3	The [trust object]* is genuinely interested in the well-being of citizens.	**.745**	.385
B4	The [trust object]* approaches citizens in a sincere way.	*.627*	*.530*
H1	The [trust object]* is sincere.	.296	**.837**
H2	The [trust object]* keeps its commitments	.309	**.761**
H3	The [trust object]* is honest.	.412	**.797**

** [Trust object]: exact wording depends on experiment.*

Extraction: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax.

KMO Bartlett's test of sphericity: 0.914.

The outcome of this PCA is in line with the theoretical dimensions of trustworthiness, both benevolence and honesty appear to be separate (sub-)dimensions. However, one item (B4) loads on both factors. The wording of this item makes clear why: it contains elements of both the honesty dimension and the benevolence dimension (sincerity and the way citizens are approached). Therefore this item was omitted from further analysis.

Appendix B – Original and translated items "specific knowledge" and "message credibility"

Table 1 - Specific knowledge items with original Dutch wording

	Decision-making transparency items
SK1	I have knowledge about the air pollution policy plan.
Dutch	Ik heb kennis over het luchtkwaliteitsplan.
SK2	I have knowledge about the council minutes regarding the realisation of the air pollution policy.
Dutch	Ik heb kennis over de verslaglegging van de gemeenteraad van Utrecht betreffende de totstandkoming van het luchtkwaliteitsbeleid.
SK3	I have insight in the decision-making process regarding the municipal air pollution policy.
Dutch	Ik heb inzicht in de besluitvorming van de gemeenteraad betreffende het [trust object]* luchtkwaliteitsbeleid
	Cronbach's alpha = 0.82
	Policy transparency items
SK1	I have great deal of knowledge about the air pollution policy of this municipality.
Dutch	Ik heb veel kennis over hoe het luchtkwaliteitsbeleid van de gemeente er in grote lijnen uitziet.
SK2	I have a great deal of knowledge about the measures carried out by the municipality regarding the air pollution policy.
Dutch	Ik heb veel kennis van de maatregelen die de gemeente Utrecht neemt om de lokale luchtkwaliteit te verbeteren.
	Cronbach's alpha = 0.71
	Policy outcome transparency items
SK1	Currently I have knowledge about [trust object]* air pollution policy in general.
Dutch	Ik heb op dit moment kennis over hoe het luchtkwaliteitsbeleid van de gemeente Utrecht er in grote lijnen uitziet.
SK2	I have knowledge about current levels of air pollution in several places in the municipality.
Dutch	Ik heb op dit moment kennis over de actuele luchtkwaliteit op verschillende plekken in [trust object]*.
	Cronbach's alpha = 0.67

Table 2 - Message credibility items with original Dutch wording

MC1	I believe that the information on the website of *[trust object]** is complete.
Dutch	Ik krijg de indruk dat de informatie op de website van de gemeente Utrecht over luchtkwaliteit compleet is.
MC2	I believe that the information on the website of *[trust object]** is highly accurate.
Dutch	Ik krijg de indruk dat de informatie op de website van de gemeente Utrecht over luchtkwaliteit zeer accuraat is.
	Cronbach's alphas: *Decision-making experiment = 0.77* *Policy experiment = 0.78* *Policy outcome experiment = 0.65*

** [Trust object]: exact wording depends on experiment.*

Appendix C – Descriptive results and correlations

Table 1 - Correlations and means of main variables (Chapter 6):

	Knowledge	*Message credibility*	*Competence*	*Benevolence*	*Honesty*
Specific Knowledge *N=156*	*1.77 (.80)*				
Message credibility *N=111*	.25**	*3.58 (.69)*			
Competence *N=154*	-.106	.29**	*3.27 (.61)*		
Benevolence *N=156*	.024	.28**	.56**	*3.44 (.62)*	
Honesty *N=154*	.056	.37**	.55**	.66**	*3.23 (.66)*

*Means (standard deviations) displayed in italics, Scale 1-5. Pearson correlation coefficients displayed. Scale 1-5. *p<.05 ** p < .01*

Table 2 - Correlations and means of main variables (Chapter 7):

	Knowledge	*Message credibility*	*Competence*	*Benevolence*	*Honesty*
Specific Knowledge *N=93*	*1.95 (.81)*				
Message credibility *N=62*	-.04	*3.09(.59)*			
Competence *N=93*	-.04	.33**	*3.19 (.67)*		
Benevolence *N=93*	-.03	.23*	45**	*3.63 (.63)*	
Honesty *N=93*	-.10	.46**	.45**	.58**	*3.16 (.66)*

*Means (standard deviations) displayed in italics, Scale 1-5. Pearson correlation coefficients displayed. Scale 1-5. *p<.05 ** p < .01*

Table 3 - Correlations and means of main variables (Chapter 8):

	Knowledge	*Message credibility*	*Competence*	*Benevolence*	*Honesty*
Specific Knowledge *N=835*	*2.79 (.87)*				
Message credibility *N=658*	.28**	*3.20 (.73)*			
Competence *N=835*	.20**	.51**	*3.09 (.63)*		
Benevolence *N=835*	.16**	.42**	.73**	*3.41 (.72)*	
Honesty *N=835*	.11**	.47**	.76**	.79**	*3.17 (.67)*

*Means (standard deviations) displayed in italics, Scale 1-5. Pearson correlation coefficients displayed. Scale 1-5. *p<.05 ** p < .01*

Appendix D – Regression analyses background variables

	Experiment 1		Experiment 2		Experiment 3	
	Coefficient (SE)	*β*	Coefficient (SE)	*β*	Coefficient (SE)	*β*
Political preference (1=left-wing)[48]	-.07 (.04)+	-.14	.15 (.11)	.16	.02 (.05)	.02
Education (1=high)[49]	-.24 (.10)*	-.21	N/A		-.05 (.06)	-.03
Gender	-.12 (.09)	-.11	.13 (.11)	.14	.03 (.04)	.03
Age	-.01 (.00)+	-.17	-.05 (.03)	-.18	-.01 (.00)**	-.21
Student (1=Yes)	-.15 (.11)	-.13	N/A		.03 (.09)	-.01
Constant	4.00 (.22)**		4.11 (.65)**		3.61 (13)**	
N	156		91		748	
R^2	.101		.096		.046	
Adjusted R^2	.069		.061		.040	
F	3.21**		2.75*		7.23**	

+ $p < .1$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

[48] "Left-wing political parties"=D66, PvdA, GL, SP, PvdD. According to manifesto research by Klingemann et al. (2006) these parties give relatively much attention to environmental issues. Because of the specification toward environmental issues, although the author is aware of criticism on the traditional right-left political scale

[49] "High educated" = higher vocational and scientific level and up. "Low educated" = all other levels.

Appendix E – Auxiliary analyses results chapters

Table 1 - Auxiliary analyses overall effects of transparency

Experiment	*Control group*	*High transparency*
Decisionmaking transparency (N=96)	3.30(.06)[a]	3.33(.06)[a]
Policy-making transparency (N=52)	3.35(.08)[a]	3.39(.10)[a]
Policy outcome transparency (N=506)	3.26(.04)[a]	3.21 (.04) / 3.28(.04)[a]

Means (standard errors) displayed in italics, Scale 1-5.

Table 2 - Auxiliary analyses decisionmaking transparency (mechanism)

Variables in the model	*General perceived trustworthiness*	
	F-value	Eta^2
Transparency	.019	.000
Mediators		
Message credibility	17.67**	.144
Specific knowledge	.419	.004
Covariate		
Trust in gov. general	44.24**	.296
Intercept	5.94*	.054
Df1, df2	4,109	
Total Model F	24.18**	
R^2	.480	
Adjusted R^2	.460	

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$. N=110.

Table 3 - Auxiliary analyses policy-making transparency (mechanism)

Variables in the model	*General perceived trustworthiness*	
	F-value	Eta^2
Transparency	.06	.002
Mediators		
Message credibility	15.81**	.226
Specific knowledge	.89	.016
Covariate		
Trust in gov. general	29.32**	.352
Intercept	4.85*	.082
Df1, df2	5,59	
Total Model F	12.04**	
R^2	.527	
Adjusted R^2	.483	

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$. N=60.

Variables in the model	*General perceived trustworthiness*	
	F-value	Eta^2
Transparency	4.61*	.007
Air pollution	3.25	.005
Transparency*air pollution	1.90	.003
Mediators		
Message credibility	165.96***	.203
Specific knowledge	3.80*	.006
Covariate		
Trust in gov. general	296.77***	.313
Intercept	18.27***	.027
Df1, df2	6,657	
Total Model F	111.51***	
R^2	.507	
Adjusted R^2	.502	

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$, N=658.

Appendix F – Auxiliary analyses section 9.5

Table 1 – Measure for 'issue saliency'

Item wording (Dutch, original)	*Item wording (translated)*
Luchtkwaliteit in de stad […] is voor mij een belangrijk onderwerp.	Air quality in the city of […] is an important issue to me.
Ik volg de ontwikkelingen rondom de luchtkwaliteit in het lokale nieuws.	I follow the local news to know about developments concerning air quality.
	Cronbach's alpha = 0.60

Table 2 – ANCOVA post-hoc group comparison for prior website visit

	No prior visit of website	*Visit website in general*	*Visit air pollution website*
Mean level of salience (N=747)	3.16(.09)[a]	3.28(.03)[a]	4.12(.09)[b]

Means (standard errors) displayed in italics, Scale 1-5.
Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: age = 40.66, education (1=high) = .78, political preference (1=left-wing) = .71, student (1=yes) = .07, gender (2=woman) = 1.55.

Table 3 – ANCOVA issue salience

Variables in the model	*General perceived trustworthiness*	
	F-value	Eta^2
Student (1=yes)	2.63	.004
Covariates		
Age	84.83***	.103
Education	.04	.000
Political preference	5.55*	.009
Gender	.02	.000
Intercept	125.18***	.220
Df1, df2	5,747	
Total Model F	25.20***	
R^2	.145	
Adjusted R^2	.139	

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$, N=748.

Table 4 – MANCOVA with three datasets combined

	Control group	*Low transparency*	*High transparency*
Perceived competence	3.17(.03)[a]	3.02(.03)[b]	3.14(.02)[a]
Perceived benevolence	3.43(.04)[a,b]	3.37(.03)[a]	3.47(.03)[b]
Perceived honesty	3.18(.09)[a]	3.13(.03)[a]	3.22(.02)[a]

Rows with unequal superscripts differ significantly at $p < 0.05$ with Bonferroni-correction for multiple comparisons. Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Trust in government in general = 3.23. Overall multivariate test is significant ($F(2,1077)=3.04$, $p=.006$).

Samenvatting in het Nederlands

1. Is transparantie de sleutel tot meer vertrouwen in de overheid?

Transparantie wordt gezien als een panacee voor alles wat er mis gaat bij overheidsorganisaties. Het zou corruptie bestrijden, tot betere prestaties leiden en bovenal leiden tot meer vertrouwen in de overheid. President Barack Obama zag de potentie van transparantie en gebruikte het als een belangrijke peiler in zijn campagne voor de presidentsverkiezingen van 2008. Het herstel van het vertrouwen in de overheid wordt gezien als een belangrijk doel van transparantie. Het achterliggende idee is dat als men maar weet wat overheidsorganisaties doen, dat zij dan vanzelf meer vertrouwen krijgen van het publiek.

Een combinatie van de opkomst van informatie- en communicatietechnologie (ICT) en overheidshervormingen in het kader van Nieuw Publiek Management (NPM), hebben de hype rondom transparantie aangezwengeld. NPM-achtige overheidshervormingen hebben geleid tot een focus op transparantie om overheden beter te laten presteren. Door technologie kunnen veel meer gegevens worden opgeslagen en via websites worden verspreid. ICT draagt eraan bij dat informatie actief aan burgers kan worden aangeboden in plaats van dat burgers hier expliciet om moeten vragen. Transparantie in dit proefschrift wordt dan ook gezien als *actieve* informatieverstrekking via het internet. Dit in plaats van traditionele *passieve* openbaarheid zoals gewaarborgd door de Wet Openbaarheid van Bestuurd (Wob), waarbij burgers zelf informatie bij overheden moeten opvragen door middel van het doen van een verzoek.

Dit proefschrift onderzoekt het basisidee dat actieve transparantie zal leiden tot meer vertrouwen. Is dit eigenlijk wel zo of zijn er juist negatieve neveneffecten te verwachten? Transparantie kan er ook voor zorgen dat overheidsorganisaties keer op keer aan de schandpaal worden genageld: als alle informatie openbaar is, kan er altijd wel een fout geconstrueerd of gevonden worden. Dit kan terecht zijn of niet, maar het is denkbaar dat transparantie juist zorgt voor minder vertrouwen in de overheid. Denk hierbij aan de recente openbaarmaking van *warlogs* en diplomatieke *cables* door WikiLeaks, waarbij duidelijk werd dat voorheen niet alle of zelfs onjuiste informatie naar buiten is gebracht coor overheden.

Om te onderzoeken wat nu eigenlijk het effect is van transparantie op vertrouwen in de overheid, is de volgende onderzoeksvraag opgesteld:

Heeft transparantie een effect op het vertrouwen van burgers in de overheid?

Deze brede onderzoeksvraag impliceert een oorzakelijk verband tussen variabele X (transparantie) op variabele Y (vertrouwen). Om een oorzakelijk verband te onderzoeken zijn experimenten bij uitstek geschikt, omdat hierbij oorzaak en gevolg van elkaar worden gescheiden in de tijd. In dit proefschrift zijn drie experimenten opgezet die allen variëren op het type en de mate van transparantie. Deze informatie wordt door verschillende proefpersonen bekeken, waarna zij door middel van een vragenlijst zullen worden gevraagd naar de mate van vertrouwen in de desbetreffende overheidsorganisatie. Door de groepen met elkaar te vergelijken (bijvoorbeeld één groep die veel en één die weinig informatie te lezen krijgt) kan er een causaal verband vastgesteld worden. Om dit te kunnen doen moeten de twee kernbegrippen in deze dissertatie (transparantie en vertrouwen) eerst nader gespecificeerd worden. Hiervoor zijn de drie onderstaande conceptuele deelvragen geformuleerd:

- *Uit welke componenten bestaat het begrip 'vertrouwen in de overheid'?*
- *Uit welke componenten bestaat het begrip 'overheidstransparantie'?*
- *Hoe ziet de relatie tussen transparantie en vertrouwen eruit?*

2. Twee verwarrende begrippen nader uitgewerkt

Transparantie en vertrouwen zijn twee moeilijk onderzoekbare begrippen. Om deze te kunnen gebruiken in empirisch onderzoek is een precieze definitie en nadere uitwerking van beide concepten noodzakelijk.

Vertrouwen: gepercipieerde competentie, welwillendheid en eerlijkheid
Voor het begrip 'vertrouwen' geldt dat er een lange traditie van sociaal wetenschappelijk onderzoek bestaat naar de effecten en antecedenten van het begrip. In dit proefschrift verwijst vertrouwen naar *'een psychologische staat bestaande uit de acceptatie van kwetsbaarheid, gebaseerd op positieve*

verwachtingen over de intenties of het gedrag van een ander.' (vert. Rousseau et al., 1998: 395).

Deze definitie bestaat uit vier componenten:

1. Psychologische staat
2. Acceptatie van kwetsbaarheid
3. Positieve verwachtingen
4. Intenties of het gedrag van een ander.

In deze samenvatting zullen alleen componenten drie en vier worden toegelicht. Voor een uitgebreide toelichting op de eerste twee componenten wordt verwezen naar Hoofdstuk 2. De positieve verwachtingen bestaat uit de percepties die een individu heeft van een ander (persoon dan wel organisatie). Deze perceptie bestaat in dit onderzoek uit drie dimensies: gepercipieerde competentie, gepercipieerde welwillendheid en gepercipieerde eerlijkheid. Voorts gaat het bij de vierde component om de intenties of het gedrag van een ander. In dit proefschrift is die 'ander' een specifieke overheidsorganisatie. Door te kijken naar een specifieke organisatie kan een helderdere relatie tussen transparantie van een overheidsorganisatie *in deze* organisatie gevonden kan worden.

Transparantie: drie objecten en drie dimensies

Transparantie wordt vaak in vage termen gedefinieerd en geconceptualiseerd. Dit onderzoek werkt het concept transparantie theoretisch in meer detail uit en biedt zo een houvast voor verder empirisch onderzoek naar transparantie. Transparantie wordt gedefinieerd als *'de beschikbaarheid van informatie over een organisatie of actor, hetgeen externe actoren toestaat om de interne processen of prestaties van die organisatie te monitoren.'* (vert. Grimmelikhuijsen & Welch, 2012)

De definitie van transparantie bestaat uit vijf componenten:

1. Beschikbaarheid
2. Informatie
3. Organisatie of actor
4. Externe actoren
5. Het monitoren van interne processen en prestaties

Hoe zijn deze componenten in dit onderzoek ingevuld? Er wordt zoals gezegd gefocust *actieve* openbaarmaking van informatie, dit de invulling van de component 'beschikbaarheid'. Daarnaast wordt gekeken naar *overheids*organisaties die informatie over *zichzelf* publiceren, dit verwijst naar de component 'organisatie of actor'. Deze informatie kan door verschillende externe actoren worden bekeken (component vier), maar in dit onderzoek wordt er alleen gekeken naar *burgers* als externe actor. De tweede component ('informatie') bestaat uit drie dimensies: *compleetheid van informatie, de kleuring van de informatie en de bruikbaarheid van de informatie*. De vijfde component van de definitie – 'monitoren van interne processen en prestaties' – kijkt naar wat voor soort informatie openbaar wordt gemaakt. In de context van de publieke sector is er gekozen om te kijken naar drie objecten waar transparantie zich op kan richten: *besluitvorming, beleid en beleidsuitkomsten*.

De drie experimenten die worden uitgevoerd in dit onderzoek bestaan allen uit een combinatie van één dimensie van informatie en één object van transparantie. Zo zal de mate van compleetheid van besluitvormingsinformatie, de mate positieve kleuring van beleid en de mate van bruikbaarheid van transparantie van beleidsuitkomsten worden onderzocht. Dit leidt tot de volgende drie deelvragen:

- *Wat is het effect van de mate van compleetheid van besluitvormingsinformatie op het vertrouwen van burgers in een overheidsorganisatie?*
- *Wat is het effect van de mate van kleuring van beleidstransparantie op het vertrouwen van burgers in een overheidsorganisatie?*
- *Wat is het effect van de mate van informatiebruikbaarheid van transparantie van beleidsuitkomsten op het vertrouwen van burgers in een overheidsorganisatie?*

De relatie tussen transparantie en vertrouwen

Aan de hand van de conceptualisatie van zowel transparantie als vertrouwen is er ook gekeken naar een preciezere theoretische invulling van de relatie tussen deze twee begrippen. Enerzijds is er gekeken naar wat het *overall* effect is van transparantie op vertrouwen, met andere woorden: zijn er überhaupt verschillen tussen mensen die zeer transparante informatie te zien krijgen en zij die geen informatie hebben gelezen?

Anderzijds is er gekeken naar het karakter van de relatie tussen transparantie en vertrouwen: wat is het *mechanisme* tussen transparantie en vertrouwen? Wordt dit

meer bepaald door de hoeveelheid kennis die men opdoet door het lezen van informatie en/of is de betrouwbaarheid van de informatie zelf belangrijker? Of is het zo dat de relatie meer door algemene indrukken wordt bepaald (direct effect)?

Of er daadwerkelijk een effect optreedt en hoe het mechanisme verloopt, is onderzocht door middel van experimenten, welke zullen worden toegelicht in de volgende paragraaf.

3. Methodologische innovatie: een experiment

Om daadwerkelijk te kunnen bepalen of er een effect optreedt, moet er vastgesteld worden wat de oorzaak is en wat het gevolg. Dit is moeilijk vast te stellen door de meer 'traditionele' technieken in de bestuurskunde, zoals interviews en vragenlijsten, omdat hierbij oorzaak en gevolg moeilijk van elkaar te scheiden zijn. In een experiment is dit wel mogelijk. De onderzoeker varieert bewust op de onafhankelijke variabele (transparantie) om daarna veranderingen in de afhankelijke variabele (vertrouwen) te meten.

Het gebruik van experimenten is wijdverbreid in de sociale psychologie. De bestuurskunde heeft van nature een meer praktische aard en daarom zal ook de inrichting van de experimenten meer context gerelateerd zijn. Op deze wijze sluit het experiment meer aan bij de belevingswereld van respondenten. Dit betekent echter wel dat het design van het experiment minder elegant en meer complex is dan die van sociaal psychologen. De context waarin de experimenten plaatsvinden is het gemeentelijk luchtkwaliteitsbeleid.

De gemeente is de overheidsinstantie waar burgers doorgaans het meeste contact mee hebben. Dit is ook de organisatie die onder een brede groep van de samenleving bekend is en dus goed past bij de belevingswereld van participanten van het experiment. Daarnaast blijkt uit eerder onderzoek dat gemeentelijke websites relatief vaak geraadpleegd worden door burgers.

De procedure van het experiment kan grofweg in vier onderdelen gesplitst worden. Eerst kregen mensen een introductie waarin werd uitgelegd wat van de deelnemers verwacht werd. Ten tweede kregen mensen een instructie waarin duidelijk en precies

stond welke onderdelen van de website men moest lezen. Op deze manier is getracht om de procedure te standaardiseren en de onderlinge resultaten van participanten beter vergelijkbaar te maken. Het derde deel was het experiment zelf: mensen keken aan de hand van de instructie naar een website met meer of minder transparante informatie. Als vierde en laatste vulden deelnemers een vragenlijst in.

4. Drie effecten van transparantie

Transparantie van besluitvorming: incompetente maar eerlijke overheid
In dit experiment (N=156) is specifiek gekeken naar wat het effect is van het lezen van complete en incomplete informatie over lokale besluitvorming op het vertrouwen van mensen. Eén groep deelnemers fungeerde als controlegroep en kreeg geen informatie voorgelegd. Een tweede groep kreeg slechts een korte samenvatting van het besluitvormingsproces te zien, terwijl een derde groep 'complete' informatie ontving. De complete informatie is een bijna letterlijke transcriptie van een besluitvormingsdiscussie in de gemeenteraad.

Uit de resultaten blijkt dat mensen die complete informatie voorgelegd kregen de gemeenteraad als minder competent, maar wel als eerlijker zagen. De betrouwbaarheid van de boodschap was het belangrijkste mechanisme in deze relatie. Al met al houdt dit in dat indien men daadwerkelijk een 'kijkje in de keuken' krijgt, de raad als minder efficiënt en effectief wordt gezien. De complete informatie laat dan ook duidelijk het 'gesteggel' en het politieke spel in een dergelijk besluitvormingsproces zien, wat een contrast kan vormen met het ideaalbeeld van rationele besluitvorming. Het effect van transparantie is echter niet eenduidig, omdat mensen die complete informatie te zien kregen de gemeenteraad wel als eerlijker beschouwden. Kortom, de raad werd gezien als minder competent, maar tegelijkertijd wel als eerlijker wanneer men complete besluitvormingsinformatie voorgelegd kreeg.

Transparantie van beleid: opscheppen mag, maar met mate
Het experiment betreffende transparantie van beleid (N=91) richtte zich op het openbaar maken van beleidsmaatregelen. Het ging hier niet om gedetailleerde plannen, maar een tekstuele toelichting op specifieke maatregelen. Uit eerder onderzoek blijkt dat dit type informatie op overheidswebsites vaak wordt gebruikt om een rooskleurig beeld van de gemeente neer te zetten. Daarom is er gekozen om hier

te variëren op de mate van 'kleuring' van de informatie. Eén experimentele groep kreeg zeer positieve informatie over de genomen beleidsmaatregelen voorgeschoteld. Een tweede groep zag gematigd positieve informatie, terwijl een derde groep gebalanceerde informatie te zien kreeg. Deze laatste informatie gaf een afgewogen beeld van de voor- en nadelen van het gemeentelijke beleid. Wederom fungeerde één groep als controlegroep en kreeg geen informatie.

Uit dit experiment bleek dat er slechts geringe effecten van beleidstransparantie optraden. Dit komt vermoedelijk deels door het relatief lage aantal deelnemers (91). Nader onderzoek naar dit type transparantie is nodig om uit te wijzen of het effect inderdaad zo gering is. Desalniettemin blijkt er toch enig effect van transparantie op te treden. Wanneer gebalanceerde informatie over beleidsmaatregelen wordt gegeven - met andere woorden wanneer expliciet wordt benoemd dat niet alles goed gaat - dan wordt de competentie van de overheidsorganisatie lager beoordeeld dan wanneer licht positieve beleidsinformatie wordt gegeven. Aan de andere kant heeft het geven van uitsluitend en zeer positief geformuleerde informatie een minder gunstig effect. Toch blijkt dat overheidsorganisaties kunnen wegkomen met een subtiele vorm van 'imagebuilding' van hun beleidsmaatregelen.

Transparantie van beleidsuitkomsten: een hygiënefactor
Het derde experiment betrof de transparantie van beleidsuitkomsten (N=834). Hierbij werd gevarieerd op de 'bruikbaarheid' van de informatie. In dit geval wordt verstaan onder bruikbaarheid: de tijdigheid en begrijpelijkheid van die informatie. Het transparant maken van beleidsuitkomsten past in de traditie van het Nieuw Publiek Management (NPM), een beweging die voorstaat dat overheidsorganisaties meer als een bedrijf georganiseerd zouden moeten worden. Een onderdeel daarvan is beoordeling van beleid op basis van resultaten. Maar leidt dit ook tot meer vertrouwen?

Deze vraag is onderzocht door te variëren op zowel bruikbaarheid van de informatie (hoog of laag) als de beleidsuitkomst (positief of negatief). Eén experimentele groep kreeg dus weinig bruikbare informatie met een negatieve uitkomst, een andere groep kreeg dezelfde mate van bruikbaarheid maar dan met een positieve uitkomst. Daarnaast waren er twee groepen die te maken kregen met een hoge mate van bruikbaarheid, één met een positieve en één met een negatieve uitkomst.

De uitkomsten wijzen erop dat transparantie van beleidsuitkomsten wordt gezien als een 'hygiënefactor'. Wanneer niet wordt voldaan aan het ideaal van transparantie – dus wanneer ontijdige en moeilijk begrijpbare informatie wordt gepresenteerd – zal dit leiden tot een daling in het vertrouwen. Aan de andere kant, wanneer de bruikbaarheid wel hoog is zal dit niet leiden tot meer vertrouwen in vergelijking met de mensen die geen informatie kregen over de beleidsuitkomsten. Kortom, een overheidsorganisatie kan het wel verkeerd doen, maar nauwelijks goed.

5. Een niet ingeloste belofte

Welke conclusie kunnen we trekken wanneer we alle resultaten overzien? De belofte dat transparantie het vertrouwen in overheidsorganisaties als vanzelf zou vergroten moet genuanceerd te moeten worden op basis van deze studie.

Wanneer we kijken naar het debat over de effecten van transparantie op vertrouwen, dan zijn er drie stromingen die kunnen worden onderscheiden: 'optimisten', 'pessimisten', en 'sceptici'. Transparantie optimisten beargumenteren dat transparantie een positief effect heeft op vertrouwen in de overheid. Pessimisten pleiten het tegenovergestelde, terwijl sceptici zeggen dat transparantie geen enkel effect heeft of dat het effect zo klein is dat het wordt 'overstemd' door andere, determinanten van vertrouwen.

Al deze drie stromingen krijgen op basis van deze studie op onderdelen gelijk. Degenen die een positief effect van transparantie beargumenteren (de 'transparantie optimisten') krijgen gelijk in die zin dat er een positief effect op eerlijkheid werd gevonden in het geval er complete informatie over besluitvorming werd gegeven. Aan de andere kant ging dit gepaard met een negatief effect op de gepercipieerde competentie. Dit pleit weer voor de 'pessimisten'. Wat ook voor hun gelijk pleit, is het voornamelijk negatieve effect dat werd gevonden op competentie in het geval van beleidstransparantie en transparantie beleidsuitkomsten. Degenen die sceptisch zijn over het effect van transparantie krijgen deels ook gelijk met de bevindingen in dit proefschrift. In veel gevallen was er nauwelijks een overall effect van transparantie te vinden. Ook blijkt het effect qua grootte beperkt.

De argumenten van pessimisten lijken vooral gestoeld te zijn op het naar buiten komen van negatieve berichten op de competentie van een overheidsorganisatie door transparantie, dit vertaalt zich ook in een daling in een beoordeling van de competentie. De optimisten richten zich vooral op de (perceptie) van een eerlijke overheid. Ook dit komt uit een deel van de resultaten naar voren: indien een positief effect optreedt, is dat op de gepercipieerde eerlijkheid. In het debat lijken optimisten en pessimisten dus deels langs elkaar heen te praten: ze hebben het over verschillende onderdelen van het vertrouwen in overheidsorganisaties. Dit onderzoek heeft laten zien dat het waardevol is om dit onderscheid expliciet te maken en dus ook om dit mee te nemen in empirisch onderzoek. Op deze wijze kunnen gedifferentieerde effecten van transparantie op vertrouwen gemeten worden.

De bevindingen laten zien dat de belofte van transparantie gerelativeerd moet worden, en dat er zelfs een negatief effect kan optreden op het vertrouwen van burgers. Hoe kunnen we dit resultaat verklaren? Hier zullen we ingaan op twee verklaringen: hooggespannen verwachtingen en demystificatie van overheidsorganisaties.

Hooggespannen verwachtingen
Overheidstransparantie lijkt onderhevig te zijn aan stijgende verwachtingen. Uit eerder onderzoek blijkt dat men transparantie verwacht van overheden. In die zin is transparantie een *conditio sine qua non*. Weinig of geen transparantie wordt afgekeurd, wanneer informatie bijvoorbeeld wel bruikbaar of compleet is dan 'hoort dit erbij'. Dit wordt veroorzaakt doordat de verwachtingen rondom transparantie hooggespannen zijn.

Daarnaast zijn de verwachtingen rondom het overheidsbeleid zelf hooggespannen. Burgers zijn in toenemende mate intolerant geworden ten opzichte van mislukkingen of inefficiënties in beleid. Aan de andere kant is het maken van beleid complexer geworden door een grote onderlinge afhankelijkheid van verschillende partijen. Als overheidsorganisaties werkelijk transparant willen zijn, zullen ze dergelijke complexiteiten en onzekerheden ook openbaar moeten maken.

Dit maakt dat overheidsorganisaties in een lastige spagaat zitten. Transparantie 'hoort erbij' en wordt verwacht, maar werkelijke transparantie laat ook zien dat niet alles goed gaat en laat zien dat besluitvorming en beleid maken complex is, terwijl men ook hier

hoge verwachtingen van heeft. Dit dilemma blijkt ook uit de resultaten: door transparant te zijn kan een overheidsorganisatie als eerlijker worden beschouwd, maar ook als minder competent. Andersom betekent dit dus dat door minder transparant te zijn, de overheidsorganisatie competenter maar minder eerlijk gevonden wordt.

Demystificatie

Transparantie geeft een 'kijkje in de keuken' van overheidsorganisaties en dat laat niet altijd een rooskleurig beeld zien van wat daar gebeurt. Vooral besluitvormingstransparantie geeft een blik achter de schermen, hetgeen laat zien dat politieke besluitvorming minder rationeel is dan naar buiten toe (wanneer het besluit is genomen) wordt gepresenteerd. Het is een proces met politieke spelletjes en onderhandelingen, er is geen objectief gezien 'optimale beslissing', waarbij alle opties netjes en op rationele wijze worden afgewogen. Om in de woorden van Lindblom te spreken, het vormen van beleid is een proces van '*muddling through*'. Achter de gouden muren is de mystiek weg en blijkt de overheid een heel normale organisatie te zijn, waar het er rommelig aan toe kan gaan en waar dingen fout gaan, net zoals bij andere organisaties.

Transparantie draagt bij aan de demystificatie en dus de normalisatie van overheidsorganisaties. Dit betekent ook dat wanneer mensen gebruikmaken van transparantie om een kijkje te nemen in de keuken, dat dit mogelijk bijdraagt aan 'politieke volwassenheid' van burgers: bovendien kunnen mensen niet langer dom gehouden worden. Transparantie 'demystificeert' overheden: het zijn normale organisaties waar fouten worden gemaakt.

Waarom transparantie toch van belang is

Ondanks de beperkte en negatieve effecten van transparantie op het vertrouwen van mensen in een overheidsorganisatie, is transparantie nog steeds van groot belang. Enerzijds op het onderzochte niveau van individuele organisaties (het meso-niveau), want er is ook sprake van dissatisfactie bij transparantie van beleidsuitkomsten wanneer er geen of weinig bruikbare informatie wordt verstrekt. Desondanks zal transparantie negatieve neveneffecten met zich meebrengen en dan vooral op de beoordeelde competentie van de organisatie.

Dit betekent echter niet dat transparantie op een abstracter niveau (het macro-niveau) een optelsom is van het vertrouwen in alle individuele organisaties. Op de lange termijn en op macro-niveau kan transparantie wellicht zelfs bijdragen aan vertrouwen. Op basis van dit onderzoek alleen kunnen daar geen uitspraken over gedaan worden, maar uit eerdere onderzoeken blijkt dat hoge niveaus van transparantie op algemeen niveau samenhangen met minder corruptie op de middellange termijn. Transparantie brengt dus enerzijds meer corruptieschandalen aan het licht op de korte termijn - hetgeen een dramatisch effect heeft op het vertrouwen – op lange termijn voorkomt transparantie corruptie. Een laag niveau van corruptie hangt vervolgens weer samen met hoge niveaus van vertrouwen in de overheid op macro-niveau.

Dit hangt samen met het argument dat transparantie van groot belang is voor betere verantwoordingsprocessen. Als meer en betere informatie over de besluitvormingsprocessen van overheden beschikbaar is kan ongewenst gedrag of misbruik van macht worden voorkomen. Daarnaast kan transparantie verantwoordingsprocessen verbreden, doordat bijvoorbeeld belangengroepen of betrokken burgers nu eenvoudiger toegang hebben tot informatie.

Los van bovenstaande instrumentele en normatieve argumenten is er nog een deontologisch argument voor overheidstransparantie. Transparantie kan namelijk gezien worden als een democratische waarde op zich, los van de (negatieve) neveneffecten. Het 'recht om te weten' is volgens sommigen zelfs een mensenrecht welke individuen beschermt tegen pesterijen en oppressie van de machtige overheid. Dit 'recht' wordt vaak geduid in termen van informatievrijheid en is in veel landen wettelijk verankerd. Kortom, ondanks dat transparantie potentieel negatieve effecten op vertrouwen kan hebben, zijn er verschillende redenen om transparantie van overheidsorganisaties alsnog te stimuleren.

6. Implicaties

Dit onderzoek heeft naast inhoudelijke implicaties, ook implicaties voor de conceptuele en empirische uitwerking van de begrippen transparantie en vertrouwen. Ook methodologisch gezien zijn er lessen te trekken uit dit proefschrift.

Theoretische en empirische implicaties voor transparantie en vertrouwen
Zowel transparantie als vertrouwen worden in de bestuurskundige literatuur vaak als holistische begrippen gebruikt, terwijl dit onderzoek laat zien dat beide begrippen een multidimensionale aard hebben. Dat vertrouwen een dergelijk karakter heeft, was al bekend uit de literatuur, maar de uitwerking van transparantie in meerdere typen en dimensies is relatief nieuw. Een dergelijke – preciezere – uitwerking van transparantie maakt het begrip ook meer geschikt voor empirisch onderzoek en heeft een meerwaarde aangezien er heterogene effecten van de verschillende typen transparantie op de dimensies van vertrouwen gesignaleerd kunnen worden.

Experimenten in de bestuurskunde
Naast de theoretische lessen uit dit proefschrift kan er ook geleerd worden van het feit dat een tamelijk ongebruikelijke methode gehanteerd is. Experimenten kunnen de bestuurskunde verder helpen als het gaat om het vaststellen van oorzakelijk verbanden en het versterken van bestaande theorieën. Echter, niet al het bestuurskundig onderzoek is geschikt voor het gebruik van experimenten. Het gebruik van experimenten als methode moet daarom gezien worden als een waardevolle methode die een toevoeging vormt op de bestaande methoden. Experimenten zijn vooral geschikt wanneer:

- Causale verbanden centraal staan;
- De onderzoekseenheden individuen of kleine groepen betreft;
- Er aandacht wordt besteed aan contextueel realisme van het experiment.

Deze drie aspecten worden in groter detail uitgewerkt in Hoofdstuk 9 van het proefschrift.

7. Praktische implicaties: drie ontwerpprincipes

Ondanks dat transparantie negatieve effecten op vertrouwen in individuele overheidsorganisaties kan hebben, hebben we gezien dat het stimuleren van transparantie onverminderd van belang is. Daarom zijn op basis van de resultaten zijn drie ‘ontwerpprincipes’ voor internettransparantie opgesteld.

1. Geloofwaardigheid van informatie staat centraal

Uit het onderzoek blijkt dat de gepercipieerde betrouwbaarheid van de informatie op websites van groot belang is. Het is een belangrijkere determinant dan bijvoorbeeld de specifieke kennis die men opdoet over het beleid dat transparant wordt gemaakt.

2. Compleetheid en bruikbaarheid versterken geloofwaardigheid
Twee dimensies van informatie zijn van belang als het gaat om de geloofwaardigheid van de informatie: informatie die compleet was werd positiever beoordeeld, evenals tijdige en begrijpelijke informatie. Het gaat er dus niet alleen om dat alle informatie beschikbaar is door bijvoorbeeld allerlei rapportages te ontsluiten (compleetheid), maar ook *hoe* deze informatie wordt aangeboden aan het publiek. Door ervoor te zorgen dat de informatie snel openbaar wordt gemaakt en dat de informatie door duiding begrijpelijk wordt gemaakt voor een breder publiek, kan de geloofwaardigheid van de informatie worden vergroot.

3. Gelaagde transparantie
Echter, compleetheid en bruikbaarheid staan op gespannen voet met elkaar. Als informatie compleet is, is begrijpelijkheid en tijdigheid lastig te realiseren. Informatie openbaar maken via het Internet is bij uitstek geschikt voor een vorm van 'gelaagde' transparantie. De eerste laag bestaat uit gesimplificeerde informatie die toegankelijk is voor een breed publiek. Voor experts of geïnteresseerde burgers is het waarschijnlijk ook nodig om de achterliggende informatie die heeft geleid tot deze informatie te ontsluiten (beleidsplannen, rapportages). Dit kan eenvoudig door deze met één muisklik op de pagina met eenvoudige informatie toegankelijk te maken.

Curriculum Vitae

Stephan Grimmelikhuijsen (Houten, 11 oktober 1984) received a Bachelor's degree in Public Administration and Organizational Sciences at Utrecht University in 2005 and a degree in Law (LLB, 2007) from the same university. In 2007, Stephan graduated cum laude in the Research Master in "Public Administration and Organizational Science", a programme of Utrecht University, Erasmus University Rotterdam and Tilburg University.

From September 2007 Stephan has been working as a PhD candidate at the Utrecht School of Governance. Besides writing this dissertation, Stephan published articles in *Public Administration Review, International Review of Administrative Sciences, Government Information Quarterly, Information Polity*, *Policy & Internet*. Further, he published in Dutch journals and a chapter in an edited volume. Stephan taught courses on governance and supervised several theses. In addition, in 2009 he was a visiting scholar at the University of Illinois at Chicago during a semester to collaborate on a research project on transparency.

His PhD research has been co-financed by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. From 2007 till 2009 Stephan worked part-time as a junior policy adviser at this Ministry. He wrote several policy-research reports on transparency and public service delivery.

In 2010 Stephan received a grant for a post-doctoral research project after winning the "NIG postdoc competition" organized by the Netherlands Institute of Government. As of 2011, Stephan is a post-doctoral research fellow at the Utrecht School of Governance where he continues to work on an international comparison on the determinants of governmental transparency. He will also embark on contracted research projects and continue to be involved in teaching activities.