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Project website			
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Context / Social problem

Communication about climate change is unique in many ways. It concerns a long-term problem, but is sometimes highly relevant today. It receives widespread attention in the media, with considerable coverage given to critics and doom-mongers alike. The debate is not just about the facts of climate change, but also the interpretation of the facts and how they are presented. The Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute (KNMI) for example, receives many questions about how much of what is claimed in the media is actually true. The fact that the enhanced greenhouse effect is a result of human activities, play an explicit and implicit part in these discussions. And all this influences the many decisions by policymakers in government, the corporate sector and civil society organisations, including decisions concerning the spatial development of the Netherlands.

What is already known, and what is not?

From the social science literature (psychology, sociology, policy sciences) we know that the process of communication about risks and opportunities depends heavily on the underlying conceptual frames held by those concerned. These determine how people interpret new information, such as climate scenarios, and how they integrate this information into existing ideas. In discussions between government, the corporate sector and civil society organisations, scientists and policymakers automatically assume their own conceptual frames and approach the issues involved from these particular perspectives. The process of communication can be impeded if these conceptual frames are not sufficiently in tune. We do not know the specific implications of this for the field of climate change.

What is being studied?

A multidisciplinary study has been set up with the aim of removing any blocks to communication and promoting an appropriate exchange of ideas and understanding. This will be carried out with the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (MNP) and the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute (KNMI). The research will focus on the conceptual frames that come into play when dealing with minor opportunities and uncertainties relating to climate change. The question is: what are these frames, how do they influence each other, and how can this process be improved?

What are the results, and who are they for?

Methods for revealing and explaining the risks and opportunities in a scientifically sound manner, and one that is also in tune with the way people and organisations with a stake in climate change communication actually think.

