



**Universiteit
Leiden**
The Netherlands

Uncertainty in social dilemmas

Kwaadsteniet, E.W. de

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Self-interest is often at odds with the interest of the collective. This occurs, for instance, when a group of people share a scarce or limited resource, such as fish, electricity, oil or water. Whereas individuals may be tempted to further their self-interest by harvesting excessively from such common resources, excessive harvesting jeopardizes the collective interest by increasing the chance that these resources become depleted. Such situations are called **social dilemmas**.

This dissertation focuses on such social dilemmas, and more specifically, on **environmental uncertainty** in these dilemmas. Real-life social dilemma situations are often characterized by uncertainty. For example, fishermen mostly do not know the exact size of the fish population (i.e., resource size uncertainty) or how many fishermen are fishing from the same fishing stock (i.e., group size uncertainty). Several researchers have therefore asked themselves the question as to how such uncertainty influences people's choice behavior. These researchers have repeatedly concluded that uncertainty is detrimental to the collective because it induces defection and over-harvesting.

The present dissertation aims to provide a more comprehensive view on uncertainty in social dilemmas. Whereas earlier research has primarily investigated how uncertainty influences harvesting decisions, this dissertation also focuses on how environmental uncertainty affects interpersonal processes. This dissertation introduces a perspective that argues that environmental uncertainty hampers the application of the equal division rule, which in turn influences how group members interact with one another. In six chapters, I elaborate on numerous implications of this notion. By focusing on three key aspects of interpersonal processes (i.e., tacit coordination, justification pressures and interpersonal emotions), and by testing my ideas in seven empirical studies, I demonstrate that the effects of uncertainty are much more differentiated than is portrayed in earlier research.



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Erik W. de Kwaadsteniet



Erik W. de Kwaadsteniet

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UNCERTAINTY
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Paranimfen:

Marijke Leliveld
06 2474 6148

Frank Haaksman
06 4323 2862