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The Netherlands

## Boekbespreking van: Sociale en Culturele Verkenningen 1998

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### Citation

Kolk, H. van der. (1998). Boekbespreking van: Sociale en Culturele Verkenningen 1998. *Acta Politica*, 33: 1998(4), 438-440. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3450615>

Version: Publisher's Version  
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**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

is the best on this account since Stein Rokkan's writings on his own country. As for their handling and analysis of the issue of party decline the editors deserve equal eulogy. Their innovative approach – the hierarchical distinction between the three faces of party – provides the contributors with a scaffolding along which they can build their respective argumentations. In addition, and even more importantly, it allows the editors to reach some conclusions on the matter of party decline – be they tentative. The latter should prove valuable to students of party politics and specialists of the Nordic countries alike. Strøm and Svåsand's work can direct future research on the issue of party decline if not as building stones then at least as stepping stones.

*Michael Wagemans*

*Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau (SCP), Sociale en Culturele Verkenningen 1998 (Social and Cultural Explorations 1998)*. SCP, Rijswijk 1998, ISBN 9057491133, f 36.00. Homepage SCP: <http://www.scp.nl>.

According to its objectives, the Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Office (SCP) describes the (expected) social and cultural situation in the Netherlands; contributes towards considerable choices of policies and policy objectives and to the development of alternative policies; and evaluates government policy, especially inter-ministerial policies. Its most important recurring publications are the biannual Social and Cultural Reports and the annually published Social and Cultural Explorations. Both publications contain figures and tables based on large surveys carried out by Statistics Netherlands, the SCP and many others. Despite the fact that reading the Explorations is less exciting than reading an 'interpretation' or 'essay', it does at least give us a clear and controllable picture of an aspect of social and political reality.

The Explorations of the Dutch SCP have both a fixed and a variable part. The fixed part starts with a description of public opinion with respect to government and politics. The observations presented in this section are mainly based on the social survey called 'cultural changes in the Netherlands'. The main conclusions are to some extent well-known to readers of Dutch newspapers: optimism about the economy was still rising in 1997 and satisfaction with the first purple coalition was (very) high. Some of the other observations presented in the fixed part are also not new, but they might be less well known. A good example is the opinion about the use of drugs. Although acceptance of soft drugs is rising, still 40 per cent of the Dutch population favours heavy punishment for the use of soft drugs. About 70 per cent are of the opinion that hard-drug users should be forced to break their addiction. This data at least partly nuances the 'well-known' tolerance for drugs, which is sometimes said to characterize Dutch society. Another example of possibly less well-known opinions concerns income differences. For example, since (at least) 1970 a (large) majority of the population has been of the opinion that income differences should be reduced.

The extent to which this persistent majority influences the actual income differences can be found in the second chapter of the fixed part. This chapter, called 'living conditions', contains information about the personal income, education, employment and well-being of Dutch citizens. It reveals that income differences grew considerably in the 80s and have been reduced only slightly in recent years. This second chapter also contains the description of an 'index of well-being'. This index tries to tap a general idea of 'well-being' and is composed of variables related to health, living conditions, mobility, sports and vacation: the healthier you are, the bigger your house, and the more you visit foreign countries for holidays, the better your state of well-being. Having constructed this index, one can look for differences in the well-being of specific groups. This analysis reveals that education in particular is strongly related to 'well-being', which of course reveals advertisement opportunities when trying to attract students for our academic programmes and when trying to convince policy-makers to extend the four year academic programmes by one extra year.

The final chapter of the fixed part is about the size, activities and productivity of the public sector. It focuses upon the demand, supply and costs of governmental services. By studying these variables and their mutual relationships, something can be said about the (expected) productivity of the public sector. One of the, not unexpected, conclusions of this chapter is that departments still systematically underestimate future costs for their products.

Further to the fixed part, the Explorations contain chapters on more specific policy issues. The subjects covered in this variable part change every year. In 1997, for example, chapters about victims of crime and opinions about medical ethics were included. The Explorations of 1998 contains information about vulnerable groups and policies to fight social disadvantage. Figures about drug addicts, ethnic minorities, the elderly, the handicapped, the homeless and the long-term unemployed, nuance the optimistic tone that seems to characterize the first part of these Explorations.

Explorations is a policy document. It provides journalists, politicians and civil servants with some relevant data concerning public opinion, governmental activities and policy consequences. Compared with the Social and Cultural Report (which was almost 800 pages in 1998), it is a small and fragmented publication. Because the fixed part does not contain any surprising data, it is a bit boring to read it every year. The variable parts are interesting, but not as all-encompassing as one might wish.

Despite these negative evaluations, the Explorations are important enough to be acknowledged by political and other social scientists. They contain a huge amount of data from survey studies and from in-depth analyses of documents. Anyone who feels in a position to have strong opinions about 'current affairs' in the Netherlands, will be humbled after reading the Explorations. Doing this kind of empirical research is probably a good way to get rid of the 'big stories', which sometimes guide or at least legitimize both politics and science.

*Henk van der Kolk*

Peter John, *Analysing Public Policy*. Pinter, London 1998, ISBN 1855675870, £ 14.99

This book aims to create an encompassing theory of public policy. Peter John argues that the main research in contemporary public policy studies focuses (should focus) on policy variation and policy change. Policy variation research aims to explain differences in policy-making between sectors and across countries. Research on policy change is directed towards explaining policy stability and policy change. The argument this book advocates, is that current political science theories or approaches are not able to explain policy variation and policy change satisfactorily, and that an integrated, evolutionary theory is therefore necessary. After a short introduction to the policy-oriented approach of political science and a critical review of the stages model, the author presents in five successive chapters an overview, some applications and a critical acclaim of the five prevailing theoretical approaches to the study of public policy: institutional approaches, group and network approaches, socio-economic approaches, rational choice theory, and ideas-based approaches. After concluding that none of the former theories fully explains variation and change in public policy, he uses the two remaining chapters to introduce a synthesis in the form of an evolutionary model of public policy variation and change.

By illustrating the deficiencies of simple stagist models like the sequential model of the policy process, Peter John discusses some of the problems with the conventional study of public policy. This leads to the conclusion that stagist models confuse more than they illuminate because in reality policy-making cannot be neatly chopped into pieces of agenda-setting, policy design and policy evaluation. Therefore, stagist models can at best serve as heuristic or learning devices but are not suitable for extracting testable hypotheses.

Each of the five central political science theories and approaches has its strengths and weaknesses. I will give two short examples of Peter John's treatment of the five basic theoretical approaches. First the institutional approach. One of the institutional approaches this book discusses is new institutionalism. According to John, new institutionalists accept that there are a variety of influences on policy and they consider "that institutions affect power of groups, shape the way ideas circulate to influence policy, and influence the coordination of public decisions." (p.57) According to new institutionalists institutions comprise norms and conventions. The broad view of new institutionalism enables a comparison of policy-making across countries. But "by incorporating values and norms as part of institutions, they include too many aspects of political life under one category." (p.64) Second the ideas-based approach. These perspectives have in common that ideas are key factors explaining policy change and variation. This chapter discusses the work of Haas, Sabatier, Fischer and Stone. Not surprisingly the criticism is that one element (ideas) dominates the explanation of policy change and policy variation.

As a result it is impossible to know whether what is being claimed is correct or not. In post-positivist and/or interpretivist public policy everything is transformed into discourse. If the empirical world is to be investigated, it cannot be seen as a seamless connection of ideas. (p.166)

In short, John argues that each approach offers at best a partial explanation for policy change and/or policy variation, while comprehensive explanations are needed. Therefore, a synthesis has to be developed. In doing so John first discusses the work of Sabatier (Policy Advocacy Coalition Framework), Kingdon (Policy Streams Approach), and Baumgartner and Jones (Punctuated Equilibrium Model). These three models have in common that they place ideas at the centre of the analysis and combine them with elements of rational choice, network, institutional, and socio-economic approaches. The drawback is that they do not fully manage to encompass all the activity associated with public decision-making. John suggests that an evolutionary approach is able to fill that gap.

An evolutionary theory of public policy views public policy-making primarily as continuous processes of competition between and cooperation concerning ideas and interests. It is argued that by incorporating elements of Kingdon's Policy Streams Approach and Baumgartner and Jones's Punctuated Equilibrium Model it is possible to explain the 'success' of a policy in evolutionary terms. In an evolutionary approach, institutions, groups, economies and ideas constitute the ground on which policies are born, grow old and become extinct.

John's book offers a critical and very well written, though somewhat roughly sketched, overview of contemporary public policy theory. Public policy analysts and political scientists should, therefore, have it in their bookcases. Less convincing is the way John tries to find a solution to the central problem that existing approaches only provide a partial explanation. In the first place his evolutionary theory is not (yet) very specific. Second, in its present form the proposed evolutionary theory seems to suffer from the same drawbacks as some of the other approaches this study covers. As a result John does not convince me to use his approach in preference to ad hoc combinations of partial approaches.

Rob van de Peppel

Donatella Della Porta and Yves Mény (eds.), *Democracy and Corruption in Europe*. Pinter, London/Washington 1997, ISBN 1-85567-367-3

During the 1990s political and administrative corruption has become an important issue for many states in different parts of the world. Many developing countries as well as established democracies were confronted with series of scandals that showed that no regime is immune to the corruption virus. The volume *Democracy and Corruption in*