MANAGING CONFLICTING CLAIMS IN THE DUTCH COUNTRYSIDE

The role of Regional Innovation Networks

Noelle Aarts, Cees van Woerkum & Babette Vermunt

Introduction

In the year 2005, the Dutch countryside is full of conflicting claims that need to be reconciled somehow. Whereas the countryside used to be largely the domain of farmers and agricultural interests we now see that society poses different demands. In order to deal with these often conflicting demands, a range of societal actors are searching for innovative solutions that combine new modes of thinking about farming, the environment, nature and spatial planning. Such solutions are referred to as 'system-innovations' in which the objectives from different societal domains are integrated. We could also refer to the concept of 'sustainable multifunctional land-use', being the result that is aimed.

The processes that are needed to arrive at system-innovations cannot be controlled by the central government. In order to reach an effective integration of different functions of the countryside – which will work out differently in every region – over-all developmental policies need to "be delicately attuned to the particularities of the local social and cultural organisation" (Geertz, 1963:154). In every region specific opportunities are to be met in order to reach a desired tuning of different functions of the country-side. Besides, the government feels like to stress the importance of *spontaneous* initiatives of the local actors. These should lead to both more creative and more acceptable ideas and activities.

While recognising their limited role, the Dutch central government aims to identify and to support informal regional networks consisting of stakeholders who have a specific interest in the developments within their region. These networks, which have emerged all over the country, are the results of what happened before in a specific region. It is not possible to give a sharp definition of such networks since in practice they differ a lot. They may consist of existing networks of actors, new networks, or combinations thereof in specific regions. Besides, these networks are in principle unlimited: the connections that the networks consist of are open and endless. What they do have in common is the fact that they all operate in processes of structural transformation in the 'green space' involving actors from differ-

ent backgrounds. For this reason they are called Regional Innovation Networks, in short: RIN. The central government's policy has started with the identification of five RIN. These RIN serve as pilots that will be monitored and studied.

The research project: towards a learning environment

This paper reports on a study that consists of a longitudinal research initiated by the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture. The project aimed at getting more and deeper insights in the nature, the workings, the potential and the limitations of RIN in processes of system-innovation. It may be clear that innovation in the context of land-use-planning and natural resource management is not easy: different parties, starting from different backgrounds with different interests have to take common steps in a process of which the final goal is not known, hoping that they will reach better products and services. All parties will try to pursue their goals as much as possible. As a result such innovation-processes are no blue-prints that can be implemented in a predictable way. On the contrary, both direction and pace develop in continuous negotiation between the actors involved and, in addition, by continuous interference between specific policies and external circumstances. The leading device for both actors that are involved in the region and the Ministry of Agriculture is: doing by learning and learning by doing.

The study aspires to investigate the way people involved in RIN engage in learning towards viable policies. The key question is how to build upon local dynamics and how to link these to different support systems in order to achieve impact, both within as outside the specific region (see for a similar approach: Hounkonnou, 2001). This is relevant in the context of a national government, trying to decentralise, but, at the same time aiming at realising integral policies with respect to land use planning.

Research questions, sensitizing concepts and research methods

With this study we tried to get answers to the following questions:

- What does motivate actors to participate in RIN?
- Which types of knowledge do actors involved in RIN consider to be necessary and how do they collect this knowledge?
- How are RIN socially organized?

The study has been divided in two phases of one year each. During the first phase five selected RIN – varying in size, history and location – have been investigated, described and characterised (De Jonge, Cino & Van der Windt, 2003). Parallel to this an extended literature study has been carried out in order to develop a useful conceptual framework, consisting of so-called *sensitising concepts* which are:

1. motivation to participate;
2. social organization of networks;

3. the construction of useful knowledge (Vermunt, Aarts & Van Woerkum, 2003).

These concepts have been theoretically elaborated and operationalized for further empirical research in phase two. We made use of participatory observation in the five regions and of in-depth interviews (27 in total) with key-informants in each RIN. Meetings of participants within RIN were also attended, recorded and analysed. By means of continuous contact with the domain of study (the RIN), the sensitising concepts have gradually got empirically filled contents.

Results

Motivation for co-operating in RIN: the importance of a shared feeling of commonness.

In the conceptual framework we focused on interdependence, being the main motivation for participating in networks. The research, however, shows that we better use the concept of commonness. The main reason is that dependences can easily be ignored by actors involved. The motivation to participate in RIN is based a shared feeling of commonness that is obtained by 1) a shared ideal, or 2) a shared problem. The study shows that, in order to be able to create commonness regions should be small enough. With regard to the role of trust in relation to the motivation to participate small regions are important as well. In small regions it is more easy to involve well-known individuals on who one can rely, instead of anonymous organizations of which one should await.

Social organization for innovation: the importance of new connections between regions and governments

The study shows that RIN should be open networks, easy accessible for others. Openness can be reached by 1) involving people who are 'open-minded', and 2) by developing a common mission that makes it possible to come out into the open.

With regard to the relation with the outside world it became very clear that RIN have difficulties with involving governments. On the one hand, actors involved agree upon the idea that innovation and development should be initiated by the people in the region. In other words, one should work in a bottom-up way. However, on the other hand, according to the RIN actors, the involvement of the government is indispensable for:

- giving clear frameworks to work with,
- facilitating the region with money and means, and
- evaluating the quality of the innovation by linking central tasks with regional characteristics.

It is widely emphasized that nothing will happen in the region without any incentive from higher levels, which puts the idea of bottom-up in perspective. 'Without top-down no bottom-up' is an often heard utterance within the RIN context! It is

clear that new forms for cooperation between regions and governments are needed.

Regional innovation and the need for social knowledge

In the conceptual framework we distinguished between 1) knowledge about problems and causes, 2) knowledge about technical solutions, and 3) knowledge about the way to get people from a to b. It has been striking that, within RIN, knowledge about problems and causes nor knowledge about technical solutions were problematized. As soon as people feel the need for technical knowledge and know how to articulate this they are also able to find out where they can collect this specific knowledge. Instead, there is a big need for social knowledge, knowledge about how to organize the process, how to deal with people and how to improve competences of the people involved.

Innovation, uncertainty and the need for time and timing

In general, innovation processes are characterized by a long starting phase (Rotmans et al., 2000). At a certain moment, based on co-incidence, the process gets accelerated, as is shown in this study by the case of combining agriculture and health care into a new concept: care-farms. We need to accept that innovation is time-consuming, that we do not know on forehand which factor will be decisive for acceleration, and that we thus should create as much co-incidences as possible. This also implies that differences, including different conceptualizations of innovation, fitting the state of the art in the region at stake, should be accepted and even cherished.

Contact details:

Noelle Aarts, Cees van Woerkum en Babette Vermunt
Wageningen University and Research Centre
Social Science Group
Section Communication Science
Hollandseweg , 6706 KN Wageningen
Noelle.Aarts@wur.nl

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Beyond compliance, beyond covenants

Marlon Boeve, Jurgen van der Heijden & Wouter Verweij

Introduction

The Dutch province of Gelderland aims at making the environment part of an encompassing framework of qualities of life. Looking for a legal basis for this framework we have come up with a system of five steps starting with compliance with Dutch and European environmental law. The second step is aimed at involving the industry in the framework. Idea is to incite companies to go beyond compliance and agree upon that in covenants. The third step builds on certain measures in covenants that bind parties to follow all mandatory legal procedures in an optimal way.

The fourth step builds on a new phenomenon that can be observed in the Netherlands nowadays: instead of implementing themselves what they've agreed upon in a covenant the parties hire a manager to take care of that. That sometimes goes beyond covenants because parties don't even make a covenant and immediately hire the manager. Idea behind the fifth step is that various parties together can work on eco-efficient innovations. All the knowledge they make use of and produce in the preceding steps, many of which is legal knowledge, can be useful to come up with innovative products that can protect the environment. Those products can help to comply better with regulation and can give the legislation the chance to demand higher standards of environmental protection.

That brings us back to compliance, the first step, and from there we can begin again making the other steps. Idea is that such a cycle could emerge. The problem we tackle regards the role of law and lawyers in this cycle. The theoretical perspective to look at this follows from the shift from government to governance that's so important in current study of public administration. The methodology used is study of literature, law and practice. The social relevance of the research and the contribution it can make to policy-making regards a better adaptation of law and lawyers to governance and the way governance can help solve environmental problems.

The legislator and the shift to governance

In our paper we run through the five steps, but first we have five other steps. Governmental ways to protect the environment move to ways that are coherent with

modern governance. What alternatives does a legislator have to respond to situations that either ask for governmental command and control, for instance enforcing compliance, or a shift towards governance? Let's assume the law creates a boundary between what's allowed with or without a permit above the boundary, and not allowed underneath this boundary. Then the legislator can choose between the next five alternatives:

1. Regulation; rise the boundary so that above there's less that's allowed;

2. Deregulation; lower the boundary so that below there's less that's not allowed;

3. Negative incentives; give more sanctions when a party crosses the boundary;

4. Positive incentives; give a bonus when a party does better then only comply with the boundary (e.g. Wisconsin's Green Tier Legislation);

5. Allow deviation; allow crossing the boundary when there's good reason to do so (e.g. Dutch Interim City & Environment Act).

Step 1: enforcing compliance

The Dutch legislator so far has only used the alternatives 1, 2, and 3, and has experimented with 5. The fourth alternative might be considered more, and with the covenant system partly is. Wisconsin's Green Tier Legislation does a better job at that. As far as we know it's one of the very few examples that put in the law positive incentives. However it starts with the Control Tier that's about plain and simple compliance. Tiers I and II move beyond compliance like Dutch practitioners try to do with the covenant system. Purpose is to get better environmental compliance, but couldn't it be that improving compliance can help as well? It's maybe too easy to put it aside as plain and simple compliance, and not look for ways to make it better. For instance the Interim City & Environment Act can give permission to deviate from the law. That doesn't sound like good compliance, but in the process to get this permission parties often succeed in complying and don't need deviation altogether. This proves that compliance is an instrument that also changes, and can contribute to new ways of environmental compliance.

Step 2: covenant

Over the past fifteen years all levels of Dutch government have been working with covenants. They usually are agreements on how companies will comply and on how the government will enforce that. That also sounds like a new way to enforce compliance, and doesn't necessarily mean going beyond compliance. That often is the purpose however, especially when the government requires an Environmental Management System (EMS). Sometimes covenants come into being accompanied by public involvement. These multi-party negotiations bring us close to a second sort of covenants the Netherlands have seen many of over the past five maybe more years. The first sort consists of a mutual agreement between mostly two par-

ties, company and government. The second sort consists of comprehensive deals involving the environment with agriculture, housing, mobility, water storage. Instead of mutual agreements parties come to reciprocal deals. Instead of knowing who's going to deliver what and when, they trust that a range of parties giving and taking will eventually supply the needs of all.

Step 3: coordination and optimisation

Picture the development of for instance a new neighbourhood together with sites for commerce and industry. Of course road construction will be necessary and nowadays also water compensation and nature compensation. Before you know it you're in the middle of a development asking for a lot of coordination and integration between many parties. They are looking at sometimes over 30 permits and even more contracts necessary for a development. The national legislation over the past ten years has come up with several measures to make life a bit easier. The most prominent example is the City & Environment Act that was initiated in 1993 and in 1997 enacted as an experiment, that was concluded in 2003. Twenty five cities did partake, and therefore had to go through three stages, at the most. Eye catcher is the third stage that gives the right to deviate from the law regarding noise, external safety, soil and air quality. Pay attention that this only regards national law, since deviation from European Directives isn't allowed.

What occurred is that the first two stages ask for narrow cooperation and coordination between all parties involved. In twenty three of the twenty five experiments that proved to be sufficient to manage the project, and only in two cases deviation was asked. The most important lesson of the experiment is that cooperation and coordination can take you a long way. Idea therefore is that lawyers can do a better job adapting to the sometimes complex and multiple problems that practice has in store for them. That can be done efficiently with the help of techniques for coordination, integration and optimisation. For instance a group of lawyers that together cover all relevant juridical disciplines might be of help. Meanwhile a new and this time permanent City & Environment Act has been proposed in Parliament. Despite the name it will also apply in rural areas.

Step 4: recombination manager

Since maybe five years a new breed of officials emerges in the Netherlands. They work for parties that are in the typical position to come to the second sort of covenants, the reciprocal deals. These parties agree to have a common problem. Instead of dividing the work they hire a manager to do the work for them. We call him the 'Recombination Manager' because for all these parties he recombines their interests to make these reciprocal deals. Since they hire him these parties often don't even make a covenant. It's like they've moved beyond that. Maybe they've learned to trust all the other parties during the numerous negotiations on numbers of cove-

nants they've been in over the past fifteen years. Or maybe this ongoing effort to come to agreements and build trust has created some kind of market. This new manager might be someone who operates on this market, and therefore he emerges and might further develop.

Step 5: eco-efficient innovations

Can environmental regulations incite companies to come up with innovations that both help to get to better environmental and economical performance? Under the right circumstances the law can, but what's of interest here is that the government and other parties can empower this. To begin with the government can use public procurement as a tool to mandate a sound environmental performance of the products it buys. Together with that, or apart from it, government, companies and other parties can start a dialogue to bring together all necessary knowledge to come up with the best possible products. Our thesis is that various Dutch regions with their covenants and Wisconsin with Green Tier are likely candidates to organise such a dialogue. Because of the multi-party negotiations directed at reciprocal deals they're forced to bring together knowledge from all kinds of different sources. From there it's only a small step to innovate products that enhance environmental and economic performance. Looking at this and all that's been said before one can discover a cycle:

- first you take compliance seriously;
- then you can go beyond and do so in dialogue;
- a well organised dialogue can create eco-efficient innovations;
- those enhance environmental performance;
- that gives the chance to ask for compliance at a higher level;
- then again you can go beyond, do that in dialogue and create even better innovations etcetera.

Now is that viable? We don't know, but two things we do know. The first is that the European Emission Allowance Trading Directive gives authority to decrease CO_2 emissions every year. So a company can choose to buy more Emission Allowances, buy innovations that help meet the standards, or innovate itself and bring that to the market. The second thing we do know is that the environment isn't doing well, to put it mildly. So in order to do better maybe as societies we should enforce such a cycle. Thesis is that lawyers should be in the middle of this. They know what the best achievable technologies are that can be mandated. Therefore they can help the industry to come up with technologies that meet those standards. We think you will agree that this puts lawyers in a whole different position than they're used to, and that means a new challenge to them.

Contact details:

Marlon Boeve	Jurgen van der Heijden	Wouter Verweij
Centre for Environmental Law	Centre for Environmental Law	Province of Gelderland
University of Amsterdam	University of Amsterdam	Department of Environmental Protection
m.n.boeve@uva.nl	g.m.a.vanderheijden@uva.nl	w.verweij@prv.gelderland.nl

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

A Comparative Study of Administrative Innovations in Food Safety Regulation in Western Europe after the BSE Crisis

Katharina Paul

Introduction

The 'Food for Thought' project (funded by the NWO) is concerned with governmental institutions charged with food safety policy and the emergence of deliberative-regulatory practices following the BSE crisis in four regulatory nodes: the Netherlands (Voedsel en Waren Autoriteit, VWA), Germany (Bundesministerium für Verbraucherschutz, Ernährung und Landwirtschaft, BMVEL), United Kingdom (Food Standards Agency, FSA), and the EU level (European Food Safety Authority, EFSA)[1].

The particular mechanisms that were set in place in order to restore public trust will be the central object of empirical investigation. The aims of the project are three-fold: first, to trace the different framings of the BSE crises in the different contexts for the purpose of thorough contextualization; secondly, the concrete empirical analysis of institutional practices from a discourse-analysis inspired dramaturgical perspective; and thirdly, to contribute to the growing literature on deliberative governance on both an empirical and theoretical level.

Central research problems

In recent years, institutions have shifted towards constructing specific mechanisms through which 'civic stakeholders' are to become more involved in policy-making. In this new mode of governance, the process of policy-making, 'is reconceived as a constant struggle over the very ideas that guide the ways citizens and policy analysts think and behave, the boundaries of political categories, and the criteria of classification' (Fischer & Forrester, 1987; Fischer, 2003). As a consequence, the 'public' becomes an indispensable part of the 'science-politics interface', as not just a recipient of policy but an actor in a reframed model of policy-making that features

[1] Regarding the case of the Netherlands, Dr. Anne Loeber will be responsible for further research at this moment.

triangular interaction between scientific experts, policy-makers and citizens (Edwards, 1999; Bäckstrand, 2003)[2].

What I aim to investigate in this project is how crises bring about new under-standings of legitimate actions, and thus a new *stage* on which roles are performed, the particular form this stage takes, and how the bringing in of new *dramatis perso-nae* affects the rules of the game. Moreover, this will also shed light on how the processes by which institutions are produced and reproduced and how new reali-ties and knowledge are produced in particular settings.

Research questions

1. Contextualisation: (i) How was the BSE crisis framed in the four different regu-latory nodes? (ii) How can we make sense of these radical changes in policy-making by examining the different discursive backgrounds?

2. New institutions: (i) How do these new agencies attempt to reconstruct their role and image during times of a crisis of legitimacy and trust? How do they use notions such as 'openness', 'transparency', 'political independence' and 'trust' to (a) create a new self-understanding and (b) structure a new relation-ship with the public?

3. Deliberative practices: (i) What new mechanisms were set in place and how can we categorize the different formats in terms of deliberative governance prac-tices? (ii) What can and cannot be said in instances such as open board meet-ings? How much space is there for negotiation and contestation of meaning? How are participants chosen, who is considered to be a legitimate 'stake-holder'?

Theoretical perspective

In order to account for the radical changes in policy-making styles (e.g. open board meetings in the case of FSA and EFSA), the concept of *dislocation* will provide some further insights, in that it hints at the ways in which meanings and identities are fundamentally shattered at certain moments or 'processes in which the contin-gency of discursive structures is made visible' (Howarth, Norval & Stavrakakis, 2000). The BSE crisis constituted a crucial dislocating moment in which the contin-gency and constitutive incompleteness of contemporary food discourses became evident. Across Europe, the element of *risk* suddenly became an element of our ways of thinking about food and 'the certainty which supported our way of life, which made our way of life possible – an integral part of that way of life was the consumption of meat – were not privileged and undeniable truths – as almost eve-

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[2] For instance: citizens' juries, written consultations, open board meetings (cf. Hajer & Laws, 2003). *Food for Thought: Organizing Deliberative Governance*. ECPR Workshops, Edinburgh.

ryone was led to believe – but social constructions with limited duration and validity' (Stavrakakis, 2002: 3).

Approach and methods

The *dramaturgical approach* aims to shed light on the 'performative' dimension of policy making by examining (a) *the setting* in which deliberation takes place; (b) the particular *staging* of that setting; (c) the ways in which *roles* are differentiated; and (d) the *norms* that are expressed in the process. By portraying institutional processes as sequences of staged performances of conflict and conflict resolution, one can open these practices to analysis (see Hajer, 2004).

It becomes possible to examine, for example, how the design of the institutional setting affects what is said, what can be said, and what can be said with influence. The ability to ask such questions in discriminate ways makes it possible to account for variations in institutional performance that have resisted explanation, for instance regulatory arrangements that fail to satisfy both governments and the public.

Finally, this approach provides a new framework in which to understand policy learning that offers direct insights into how the democratic quality of policy arrangements can be sustained and enhanced in responding to new problems.

Elaborating on Lynch (1991), Edelman (1964), Burke (1969) and Benford and Hunt (1992) the project will employ the following concepts (Hajer & Laws, 2003; Hajer, 2004):

- *Scripting:* those efforts to create a setting by determining the characters in the play ('Dramatis Personae') and to provide cues for appropriate behavior;

- *Staging:* refers to the deliberate organization of an interaction, drawing on existing symbols and the invention of new ones, as well as to the distinction between active players and (presumably passive) audiences;

- *Setting:* the physical situation in which the interaction takes place, including the artifacts that are brought to the situation;

- *Performance:* the way in which *the contextualized interaction* itself produces social realities like understandings of the problem at hand, knowledge, new power-relations.

Concretely, this requires the researcher to do a detailed document-analysis of the newly created regulatory regimes, in-depth interviews with key actors, media analysis of the reception of various statements. Where possible the project will use video monitoring of institutional 'events'. Further research methods will include ethnographic methods like participation in and observation of interactions, and discourse-analytic techniques to interpret written and spoken material.

Societal relevance

The project addresses a key issue in high modern societies: how to deal with the latent social turbulence that is inherent in policy domains relating to medicine, health, food, biotechnology, energy, and environmental policy. The issue of institutional trust does not only apply to the case of BSE but also speaks to the developments around issues such as genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in food, genetic testing, stem cell and cloning research or nuclear safety and indeed has gained interest even beyond these fields. These policy issues are particularly interesting as they have a high potential for political 'explosiveness' and bring out a whole range of new uncertainties. They indicate the rise in importance of ethical, moral, and, in general normative considerations in political decision-making, and illuminate the limits to many existing institutional arrangements meant to keep problems under governmental control.

The recognition of the lasting role of uncertainty, the rising importance of deep-going value conflicts in society with respect to key governance areas, the need for constant monitoring and adjustment, as well as the recognition of the limits to the knowledge capacity of state institutions makes research into the institutionalization of trust after crisis extremely relevant.

Relation to and relevance for policy-makers

The outcomes of the project should contribute to enhancing the reflexivity of governing and the strengthening of the legitimation of governance in the complexities of a multi-level European polity. The results can be applied to the rethinking of governance but will most likely also be of great interest to businesses and civil society actors in the sphere of the regulation of food and the adjacent policy domains as described above.

In terms of the interaction between the researcher and policy-makers, two elements are important to note. First, in-depth interviews with policy-makers will constitute a crucial contribution to my empirical analysis. Secondly, the methodology to be employed in this research project directly relate to the very idea of interaction. To be more precise, the institutional practices set in place, in particular deliberations, will be closely examined and subsequently further investigated by means of interviews. This will serve to gain important insights as concerns the interaction between policy-makers and 'civic stakeholders', which has become a wide-spread phenomenon in contemporary politics.

Contact details:

Katharina T. Paul, MA
Amsterdam School for Social Science
Research (ASSR)
Universiteit van Amsterdam
1012CX Amsterdam
tel. +31 (0)20 5254816
k.t.paul@uva.nl

Project supervisors:

Prof. Dr. Maarten Hajer (Head of Department Political Science; UvA)
Dr. Anne Loeber (Department of Political Science: UvA)
Universiteit van Amsterdam
Afdeling Politicologie
O.Z. Achterburgwal 237
1012 DL Amsterdam
tel. +31 (0)20 525 2169

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THE POLITICS OF TRANSPARENCY IN THE DUTCH PORK AND FARMED-FISH SECTORS

Agni Kalfagianni

Definition of the problem[3]

Consumers in the industrialized world are confronted with an abundance of food products in their everyday consumption choices. Increases in welfare for the average consumer have made these products available to the largest part of the industrialized world's population. At first glimpse, this increase in welfare and plurality of choices is a desirable consequence of the liberal world economy. Whereas meat was considered a luxury good some forty years ago, privilege only of the rich, nowadays it is an affordable every day meal for most consumers in the industrialized countries. In addition, consumers nowadays have the option to choose between foodstuffs coming from exotic countries, taste cuisines from all over the world in their own home country, buy ready-to-eat convenience meals and so on. More fundamentally, the problem of food security in the industrialized countries is solved.

Scholars and practitioners, however, urge for a shift in the current levels and patterns of food consumption alongside with changes in the conventional food provisioning and distribution systems towards more sustainable practices. Indeed, the intensive forms of agriculture promoted for a long time by national governments as well as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union (EU) have had severe consequences for both the environment and human health. Moreover, food consumption patterns currently tend to support destructive forms of food production (Halweil & Nierenberg, 2004). Studies show, for instance, that the regular consumption of certain food products (in particular meat) has a considerably higher environmental impact than that of other food products (i.e. vegetables) (Gerbens-Leenes et al., 2002; White, 2000; Carlsson-Kanyama, 1998; Goodland, 1997; Penning de Vries et al., 1995).

Moreover, intensive animal production methods have been found to foster the outbreak of different kinds of animal diseases, such as pig plague, salmonella,

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[3] This section has been part of the paper "Transparency as a condition for sustainable development: vision and politics in the food chain" prepared for the Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association, Honolulu, Hawaii, Marc 1-5, 2005 (Doris Fuchs and Agni Kalfagianni).

chicken pest and Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE). Especially BSE led to a massive killing of animals and a significant number of human deaths[4] caused by beef consumption. Consumers started to question the ability of the modern food system to provide safe food (Smith & Riethmuller, 2000; Tansey & Worsley, 1995; Yeung & Moris, 2001) and called for more attention to environmental and health problems and animal welfare concerns. As a result, a shift in policy objectives regarding agriculture and food took place. In particular, the concept sustainable development gained prominence as a core element of national and regional (EU) policies. Today, agricultural and food policies have to consider environmental and social consequences, in particular food safety, besides economic ones and food security. Policy makers have realized that agricultural policies should not only concentrate on securing an income for producers and sufficient food for society, but also take into account environmental and health aspects.[5] Moreover, politicians as well as the public demand that food chain actors need to be held accountable for their decisions.

The difficulty of this task, however, cannot be underestimated. Globalisation with the associated liberalisation of trade, and capital mobility and concentration, have led to the development of extremely complex product chains. The Uruguay round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), in particular, focused on a reduction of barriers to trade in agricultural commodities, a development which continues under the World Trade Organisation (WTO) today. Likewise, multinational corporations (MNCs) created global production, marketing, and distribution networks integrating the various stages of the product chain while spreading their activities across a multitude of geographic locations. Consequently, knowledge and responsibility is so diffused among the relevant actors that no one really feels responsible (Heiskanen & Pantzar, 1997).

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[4] It is estimated that 139 human deaths have occurred due to consumption of beef infected with BSE (source: BBC news of 08.04.2004).

[5] This is illustrated, for instance, in the two reforms of the CAP (1992, 2000) which aimed at the adoption of measures that encourage "farming practices compatible with the increasing demands of protection of the environment and natural resources and upkeep of the landscape and the countryside" (Council of the European Communities, 1992). In addition, the adoption of a number of Directives in the area of environmental policy that supplement some of the provisions of the reforms are also illustrative of the shift that is being realized in agricultural policies. Important examples include the Directive 91/676/EEC concerning the protection of waters against pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources, which aims to limit the spreading of fertilizer containing nitrogen and to set the limits for the spreading of livestock effluent; the water framework (1999), which sets the aim to achieve good quality status for all waters by 2015; the IPPC (Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control) Directive with the aim to prevent or minimize emissions to air, water and soil, as well as waste from industrial and agricultural installations in the community; and the Pesticide Directive (1991/414) concerning the placement of plant protection products on the market.

The combination of the rise of sustainability as a pivotal objective for agricultural and food policy and the globalization of food production and consumption have highlighted the urgent need for transparency in the food chains. Currently, much information is lost between the various stages of production and consumption, due to the complexity of the supply chain. Transparency can help fill the informational distance created by globalization, create trustworthy relationships among the actors in the food system, and create options for sustainable food consumption choices along the supply chain.

The aim of this research project, then, is to explain the potential for improving transparency in conventional food chains, from a policy perspective. The project conceptualises transparency in two dimensions: a vertical one that relates to the ability to trace a product backwards and forwards through the whole production chain (traceability); and a horizontal one, that relates to the inclusion of sustainability related information in traceability systems.

Research methodology

The project pursues its aim using a policy network approach. In policy network approaches, actors are not just elements of the policy process but connected with the network within which these processes occur. Networks are patterns of formal and informal contacts and relationships, which shape policy agendas and decision-making, as opposed to the interplay within and between the formal policy-making organisations and institutions. In political science, we can distinguish two strands of network approaches: one in pursuit of the identification of ideal network types (i.e. Atkinson & Coleman, 1989; Marsh & Rhodes, 1992; Jordan & Schubert, 1992; Van Waarden, 1992) and one in pursuit of empirical assessments of actual network characteristics based on formal methodology (i.e. Laumann & Knoke, 1987; Stokman & Van den Bos, 1992; Stokman & Zeggelink, 1996, Pappi, König & Knoke, 1995).

The main difference between the two strands, and the advantage, at the same time of the methodological one, is the limited number of assumptions that guide the models of the latter. Specifically, the only assumption made concerns the behavior of actors (who are considered boundedly rational, although the degree of rationality can differ in different models), while the characteristics of the relationships among the actors in the network are an empirical question and do not have to be fit in fixed categories, as with the "ideal networks" approach. In addition, compared to the first strand of policy network research, the methodologically focused strand has proven more fruitful and, not surprisingly, remains much more prominent today. The approach followed in this project, then, belongs to the second strand of policy network approaches, namely the formal methodology one.

More specifically, we view the formation of policy outputs concerning transparency in food chains, as a result of the interaction between actor and network

characteristics. Policy actors in this study are both private (food chain actors), public (governmental organisations) and civil society organisations. Their inclusion in the network analysis depends on whether they advocate, select and pursue policy positions on the issue of transparency (traceability and provision of sustainability related information).

The project emphasizes the role of actors' resources and salience as well as the communication and trust relationships they have with each other in order to explain the formation of policies concerning transparency. Specifically, the project argues that aactors need resources in order to be able to influence the political decisions concerning transparency, and drive them as close as possible to their own policy positions. Resources include financial resources, but also political authority and legal rights, expertise, as well as legitimacy. However, the mere possession of resources does not guarantee that actors will actually use them in order to influence the policy process. Indeed, actors need also be interested (have salience) in the issue of transparency in order to be willing to mobilise their scarce resources to influence that issue. Hence, salience is considered to act as a discount factor, which determines the actual amount of influence actors are prepared to assert in order to influence decisions concerning transparency.

In addition, actors are connected with each other with specific types of relationships, which constrain or facilitate their efforts to influence decisions. We are specifically interested in the patterns of communication in the issue of transparency as well as the patterns of trust relationships among the actors. Actors communicate with each other in order to exchange information and, more importantly, to influence policy outcomes. We argue that communication is a condition for influence among actors with different policy positions. In addition, communication is a condition for obtaining support for one's own policy position. Apart from communication, trust that the other actors will abstain from opportunistic behaviour is also important, for attraction of support from similarly minded actors. In addition, the project argues, actors' ability to influence other actors' policy positions, is weakened if they are not trusted, and hence, trust is also important for influence between differently minded actors.

Empirically, the project focuses its attention on the pork and farmed-fish sectors in the Netherlands. The Dutch pork sector is particularly intensive with 12.6 million pigs producing approximately 20.3 million piglets annually (PVE, 2002). Pig farming is concentrated in the south and east parts of the country, which have been characterized as two of the most concentrated pig farming areas in the world (Pluimers, De Leeuw, Smak, Elbers & Stegeman, 1999). As such, the environmental pressure from the range of activities associated with pig farming and processing is extremely high. Moreover, the large concentration of animals increases their susceptibility to diseases and the quick spread of diseases among the animal (and possibly human) population. Finally, the intensive character of pig farming and pork

production makes concerns about animal welfare particularly pertinent. Hence, the Dutch pork sector is an ideal case for the purposes of this study.

With regards to the farmed-fish, the issue is also very relevant. Even though, at the moment farmed-fish represents a very small sector of the market in the Netherlands, the government wants to improve its development. The restrictions placed in the open sea fishing quotas by the Common Fisheries Policy is an important driver behind those governmental plans. However, intensive fish farming in large scale has equally severe consequences for the environment and human health as any other form of intensive farming (UNEP, 2000). Hence, the Dutch farmed-fish sector represents an important case for this study as well.

Social relevance

The issue of transparency in food chains is highly salient from a societal perspective. The current food production, distribution, provision and consumption system is proven unsustainable, both from a human health and environmental perspective. Incidental provision of information on food products and processes, i.e. in the face of crises, does not seem to have a permanent impact on consumer behavior. The project argues that the creation and distribution of sustainability related information in traceable conventional food chains could help to sustain environmentally desirable behaviour in the long-term.

Contribution to policy-making

The analysis is highly relevant for policy-making. The results indicate that the patterns of communication and trust in the respective policy networks have a substantial impact in the formation of policy outputs. In the pork network, for instance, the marginalization of pro-transparency actors by governmental actors as well as the major economic actors has led to extremely low prospects for improving transparency, in particular with respect to sustainability related information. By identifying the networks in which actors operate, as well as the patterns of relationships that have evolved in the network, the analysis uncovers relevant intervention points for the government.

Contact details:

Researcher:
Agni Kalfagianni
Centre for Clean Technology and
Environmental Policy (CSTM)
University of Twente
P.O. Box 217
7500 AE Enschede
The Netherlands
A.Kalfagianni@utwente.nl
+31534891157

Supervisors:
Doris Fuchs
Leipzig Graduate School of Management
and Wittenberg Centre for Global Ethics
Collegienstr. 62
06886 Lutherstadt Wittenberg
Germany
Doris.Fuchs@hhl.de

Hans Bressers
Centre for Clean Technology and
Environmental Policy (CSTM)
University of Twente
P.O. Box 217
7500AE Enschede
The Netherlands
J.T.A.Bressers@utwente.nl

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