

Chapter 1

Institutional Dynamics in Environmental Governance

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This book is the third in a series that results from the research programme of the Department of Political Sciences of the Environment at Nijmegen University, the Netherlands. This research programme is entitled ‘new arrangements in environmental policies’. The programme was initiated in the late 1990s, building upon a longstanding experience and expertise in environmental policy issues. It essentially deals with innovation and tradition in environmental policies, and aims at an interpretation thereof from an institutional dynamics’ perspective.

When launching this programme, we were driven by a variety of empirical observations on the one hand and inspired by a series of theoretical considerations on the other. We enumerate some of the thought provoking empirical observations in the first section, while the second section sets out our theoretical sources of inspiration. By then we will also have identified the starting points and the main ambitions of our research programme, while indicating its gradual development hitherto. We conclude by sketching the outline of this volume, which is to be considered yet another step in the research programme’s further development. The main question in all chapters of this volume is how to interpret the institutional dynamics in recent environmental governance. The ultimate chapter summarises some answers to this and related questions, and indicates our further research endeavours.

SOME EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS

As many other scholars in the field, we observe some considerable changes in the environmental policies since the 1990s, as compared to the initial stages of this policy domain in the 1970s and 1980s. From the early 1980s onwards we have been engaged in a series of both fundamental and policy oriented research projects on issues such as (national and European) waste

policies, nature conservation, groundwater policies, environmental policies towards industries, region-specific environmental planning and the like. These projects, although limited and specific in some cases and more encompassing in others, revealed some overall changes in environmental policies from the late 1980s and early 1990s. One can list these changes, more or less arbitrarily it seems, as follows:

- The introduction and the increasing use of concepts such as ‘sustainability’, ‘biodiversity’, ‘integrated assessment’, ‘environmental quality’ and others, reflect a discursive turn in environmental policies. This discursive turn indicates a substantial change in the definition of the problems, in their naming and framing, and in the preferred ways to tackle them. In short, environmental problems have been increasingly linked to other fields of societal concern, such as social, economic and technological issues and, accordingly, their solution has been increasingly linked to other policy domains, such as agriculture, infrastructure, traffic, technology etc. Hence the responsibility for their solution was no longer with environmental policy departments and agencies solely. In brief, from the 1990s onwards environmental policy gradually became a *multi-sector* field, appealing for shared responsibilities among different policy domains, and raising issues about policy co-ordination and policy integration.
- These discursive changes and their implications were paralleled by the introduction and the relative success of a second set of concepts: ‘stakeholders approach’, ‘shared responsibility’, ‘integrated management’, ‘co-production’ and the like. These concepts explicitly pointed at (or appealed to) the renewal of roles and responsibilities of the agencies involved, and on new configurations and coalitions between them. In its initial stages, environmental policy was largely state dominated. Now it became a matter of shared responsibility. And this wasn’t lip-service solely, but led into new social practices as well. We observed the increasing environmental concern - *con amore* or *à contrecœur* - with industries and their efforts towards private standard setting on the one hand, the active involvement of formerly opposing environmental action groups in different policy processes on the other. In brief, environmental policies increasingly became a *multi-actor* field. This not only meant the (quantitative) widening of the circle of the actors involved. Moreover it led to qualitative changes in the roles and interrelations of the agencies involved, in their sharing of responsibilities, etc.
- Inspired and legitimised by these new substantial and strategic concepts, the interplay of a wider arena of agencies gave rise to the

emergence of new forms of interaction and new practices in policy making. Environmental policies not only were state dominated initially, they also mainly built upon regulatory strategies and were managed in accordance with the formerly predominant blue print planning principles. From the late 1980s onwards, however, we observed a variety of regional and local initiatives and projects with stakeholders engaging in different sorts of negotiations, we witnessed the emergence of new participatory approaches, and we observed state-industry as well as industry-NGO-negotiations, often resulting in voluntary agreements or private-public partnerships (Mol et al., 2000). We will not assess here whether or not these new styles and practices of policy making actually increased their legitimacy and their effectiveness (Leroy, 2002). We restrict to the observation that environmental policies display an increasing variety in their processing, organisation and management. Hence one could label environmental policies as *multi-process or multi-rule*, referring to this multitude of projects and processes, each of them having its own rules for accession, interaction and decision-making, either paralleling or even -- as it seemed in some cases -- replacing classical, constitutional patterns and rules of policy making.

- Finally, we point at the increasingly transboundary and transnational character of environmental policies. While the European Union gradually developed its own environmental policy, both local and transnational operating private companies and NGOs urged the nation-states concerned to co-ordinate their policies on, for instance, the Rhine and the North Sea. It is just one example to illustrate the interplay of top-down and bottom-up initiatives, of governmental and non-governmental actions that contributed to a rapid internationalisation of environmental policies. Internationalisation, however, in itself does not mean a decreasing role for the local level and an ever growing importance for the global level. Rather do we observe the *multi-level* character of environmental policies. The latter means that policies increasingly are designed, discussed and implemented at different levels of government simultaneously. As these levels employ different definitions of the problem, allow different agencies to participate, and operate along different rule systems, it is most likely that they come up with different approaches and with possibly conflicting strategies, but also create new opportunities for interest groups to intervene at different levels. Hence, once again, the need for policy co-ordination.

As mentioned, we observed these changes and analysed them in articles and reports on a variety of environmental issues and environmental policy subdomains in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and at European and global level (Arts, 1998; Bouwer and Leroy, 1995; Bouwer, 1997; Leroy, 1994; Liefferink, 1996; Van Tatenhove, 1993). Many other scholars reported similar changes and shifts in environmental policies in other European countries (Jänicke and Weidner, 1997; Jordan, 1993; Paehlke and Torgerson, 1990). Although these changes have been listed and labelled differently by different authors, they consent that these changes relate to both policy content and policy strategy, to both policy ruling and policy organisation. Therefore our ambition was to develop a framework for the common understanding and interpretation of these changes, based upon a thorough empirical analysis, and yet starting from a clear theoretical positioning. That is what our research programme is all about, that is what this book is all about.

SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As said, similar changes in environmental policy making were observed and reported in different European and other western countries in the early 1990s. They were analysed by different scholars in varying terms of interpretation by for instance Weale (1992), Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993), Jänicke (1993), Jänicke and Weidner (1997), Lascoumes (1994) and many others who provided inspiring explanatory schemes and approaches. Although these approaches from abroad were well discussed and appreciated, Dutch environmental policy research in the 1980s and 1990s tended to regard the changes one observed as mainly strategic and instrumental in character. Over time of course Dutch scholars evolved in their preferred approaches, and we even observed a paradigm shift in Dutch environmental policy research (Leroy and Nelissen, 2002). Nevertheless, reviews of PhD theses and textbooks from the 1980s and early 1990s on the environmental policy domain reveal a certain bias towards a strategic interpretation of the renewal of environmental policy (Glasbergen, 2002; Leroy and Nelissen, 1999). These approaches were primarily, although largely implicitly, based upon a rational choice paradigm, respectively on rather synoptic views on (environmental) policy making. Only a minority of studies paid attention to the political, institutional or otherwise labelled 'context' (Frouws, 1993). Although it is speculative, one might relate this bias to the fact that many of these environmental policy studies were commissioned by governmental authorities, emphasising self-evidently the

practical relevance thereof, and thus inducing a ‘management’ bias (Leroy, 1995). Anyway, Dutch environmental policy analyses from the 1980s primarily conceived changes and reforms in environmental policies as the strategic responses of agents, mainly public agencies, aiming at greater effectiveness and efficiency, at increased legitimacy etc. Moreover, most of these studies had a restricted scope, highlighting changes in the environmental policy domain whilst somewhat insulating it from its wider societal and political context.

As said, the predominant approaches to environmental politics and policies gradually evolved in the Netherlands and abroad (see below), and so did ours. With our research programme ‘new arrangements in environmental policies’, we aimed at capturing both policy substance and policy organisation aspects, both strategic and institutional aspects of the changes we observed. In the remainder of this section we will gradually elaborate our ambition, by positioning ourselves in the midst of different sources of inspiration. It should be clear, however, that we did not (and do not) aim at a grand theory. Rather do we aim at a practical ‘meso level theory’ or approach.

A double ambition

First, inspired by classical sociology on the one hand and by its recent reformulation by Giddens (1984, 1990), we essentially wanted our approach to restore the balance between the meaning and impact of rational behaviour by agencies involved on the one hand, and structural factors that drive (or block) policy innovation on the other. Our institutional dynamics’ approach aims at a mid-position, doing justice to agencies and structures.

Secondly, inspired by contemporary environmental sociology (Beck, 1992; Buttel, 1997; Lash, Szerezinsky and Wynne, 1996; Redclift and Woodgate, 1997; Yearley, 1996; and many others), we wanted to link the events and trends on environmental issues to more encompassing societal and political trends that we thought of great importance. We regard the environmental issue as an example *par excellence* of the problems that highly modernised societies face, and that they have to respond to (Barry, 1999; Irwin, 2001). In our view, environmental problems thus largely represent more fundamental and more encompassing issues of late modern societies, and should be analysed and dealt with accordingly. Environmental policies, therefore, have to be regarded from a broader perspective than, for instance, classical public administration approaches tend to do.

Consequently, we opted for a research programme with a double ambition:

1. to analyse recent changes (and patterns of stability) in environmental policies as institutional dynamics,
2. and to relate these 'specific' changes in day to day environmental policies in a plausible way to current structural and encompassing societal and political trends.

This double ambition urged for the gradual development, the application and the sustained testing and elaboration of a theoretical position and an analytical framework. Concepts such as 'institutionalisation', 'political modernisation' and 'policy arrangements' became pivotal in our approach. We will explain these central concepts below, as we gradually developed, operationalised and tested them over the years. In retrospect our first book (Van Tatenhove, Arts and Leroy, 2000) roughly sketched our approach and applied it to the empirical evidence that we had gathered at that time. The second book (Arts and Leroy, 2003) reported the mainly theoretical debate we had with some colleagues on the validity, the applicability and the added value of our approach. In the meantime we further refined and nuanced our approach theoretically, and elaborated and applied it empirically in a series of articles, reports and PhD-dissertations. To restrict to the latter here, we refer to the dissertations by Boonstra (2004), Bogaert (2004) and Van der Zouwen (2006), who all contributed to this volume as well.

Sources of inspiration and main concepts

The central assumptions and concepts of the approach are discussed at full length in the chapters 2 and 3 of this volume, while chapter 4 draws upon them to develop an evaluative perspective. Here we will only summarise their quintessence, whilst indicating their theoretical backgrounds and foundations. The latter originate from a series of authors and debates in current sociology, political sciences, public administration and international relations, either in general or with regard to environmental issues in particular. Without going into the details of every single issue and debate, we enumerate these sources of inspiration below, while elaborating the starting points of the research programme. As said, three concepts are pivotal: institution, modernisation and policy arrangements.

First, we refer to a basic concept of sociological tradition: *institution*. The concept has been defined, discussed and redefined a thousand times from classical sociology till our time, and the emergence of neo-institutionalism in the 1980s and 1990s has refuelled the debate recently

(Hall and Taylor, 1996; March and Olson, 1989; Scott, 2001). Without ignoring the different issues and the subtly varying stances therein, the concept is crucial to us since it refers primarily (a) to the phenomenon whereby over time day to day actors' behaviour solidifies into patterns and structures, whereas these patterns in turn structure day to day actors' behaviour. As a consequence and secondly, the concept refers (b) to the gradual sedimentation of meanings into rules of behaviour and organisational structures, that in turn reproduce and recreate these meanings. In other words, the concept of institution marks the crossroads of the actor-structure duality -- largely addressed by Giddens, and discussed in detail in chapter 2 -- on the one hand, and the substance-organisation duality on the other, recently addressed by a series of authors from either social constructivism or new institutionalism (Hajer, 1995; Hay and Wincott, 1998). Both dualities, or dialectics, have been well known since classical sociology, the first in a sometimes caricaturised Durkheim-Weber opposition, the second in a similarly virtual and often caricaturised Marx-Weber opposition.

The first duality, the so-called duality of structure, has been addressed extensively by Giddens (1984, 1990), in a reaction to the persistent dualism in social sciences. Some theories, he argues, pay a lot of attention to the intentions, reasons and motives of acting agencies, thereby underestimating the 'structured', better, the institutionalised or rule-directed character of these actions. Other theories, to the contrary, focus on institutions and their dominance, largely ignoring the impact of (un)intended actions and of rule-altering behaviour, and the opportunities of institutional change. Essentially, Giddens points at the sustaining intentionalist-structuralist divide in social sciences. The second duality, the so-called substance-organisation duality, is classic to social sciences as well. It essentially goes back to two opposing schools of thought in (social) philosophy: an idealistic approach, that largely builds upon ideational mechanisms to explain social change, human progress (or the lack thereof), opposed to a materialistic approach, that ascribes social stability and change mainly to material circumstances and variables.

Not only classic, but also recent institutionalism reflect both dualities, as some authors regard institutions mainly as the solidified outcomes of common knowledge and beliefs (discursive or cognitive institutionalism) (Hajer, 1995), whereas others emphasise the integrative and regulatory roles of institutions, paying attention primarily to their autonomy and dominance (historic institutionalism) (Hay and Wincott, 1998). Other authors distinguish actor-oriented institutionalism from structure-oriented institutionalism (and all positions in between these extremes), and yet they claim a mid-position for themselves, aiming at

reconciling differing positions and bridging one or both dualities (Hirsch, 1997; Scott, 2001).

Given these sometimes furious academic debates, we risk to oversimplify things, and yet it is attractive to think of these two dualities or divides as the extremes of two continua. In brief: from actor to structure, and from discourse to organisation (Figure 1.1). We then, with a lot of other scholars, deliberately position our conception of ‘institutions’ in the midst of these crossing continua.

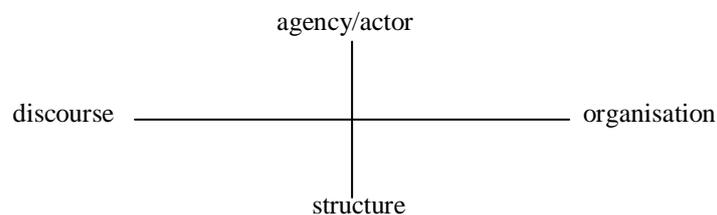


Figure 1.1. Crossing dualities in social sciences

The advantage of such presentation is that it allows to position a series of paradigms and approaches, in the social sciences in general, and with regard to environmental policy analyses in particular. Let us restrict to the actor-structure duality first. Approaches laying emphasis on the agencies’ behaviour and capacities largely build upon rational choice theories, assuming agencies to be rational, knowledgeable, well-informed etc., and behaving accordingly. From this perspective, environmental issues primarily appear as ‘tragedies of the commons’, ‘prisoners dilemmas’ and the like, in brief as market failures and due to the unintended outcomes of aggregated individual behaviour. Environmental policy then should mainly correct these market failures, but still build upon the rational choices a *homo economicus* is assumed to make (Weale, 1992). Approaches emphasising the ‘structure’ or the ‘system’, to the contrary, do regard environmental issues as the (inevitable) outcomes of (the combination of) a capitalist production system, a one-sided, solely instrumental process of (technological) modernisation, and the lack of capacity of the political system to control these. With both Weale (1992) and Barry (1999) we refer to authors originating from critical theory and/or from (neo-)Marxism, such as Habermas, Bahro and Gorz. Schauberg’s ‘treadmill of production’ offers a well known metaphor and analysis (Schnaiberg, 1980). These authors are sceptical, to say the least, on the capabilities of environmental policy measures which they regard as ‘reformist’, as these do not address the real driving forces, i.e. the ‘systemic’ causes of environmental degradation.

When bringing in the ideational-organisational or the discursive-material duality, the four quadrants that emerge are helpful to further characterise predominant approaches in recent environmental policy analysis, and to understand their relative positions. The upper right quadrant is quite well represented in Dutch environmental policy analyses from the 1980s, as we discussed above, with both policy instrumentation approaches (Bressers and Klok, 1987) and policy networks approaches (Glasbergen, 1995; Kickert et al., 1997). Both paid attention to strategies to overrule the negative outcomes of rational behaviour (or as it was labelled: environmental unfriendly behaviour), by altering it either by a smart instrumentation or through the creation of inter-organisational interdependencies. Ideational, discursive, cognitive and interpretative approaches with emphasis on agency have their place in the upper left quadrant, labelled by Weale (1992) as the 'discourse idiom'. As Dutch environmental policy analysis was largely dominated by public administration approaches that, to a large extent, neglected ideational aspects, approaches that fit into this quadrant were almost absent in the Netherlands. Over the last decade, however, it has been populated, in the Netherlands and at international level, with a series of (moderate or radical) social constructionist approaches that reaffirmed the role and relevance of discourses as constitutive elements in (environmental) policy making (De Jong, 1999; Dryzek, 1997; Termeer, 1993). As far as one conceives discourse coalitions or socio-cognitive configurations as more or less intentionally built 'devices' in order to realise a strategic discursive turn (in environmental policies), agencies are still pivotal. Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993) do pay attention to discursive elements as well, but they rather belong to the bottom left quadrant, as they insist on longstanding coalitions and the relative stability of belief and knowledge systems as constituencies of environmental policies. Hajer (1995) in turn addresses the ideational-organisational duality, when assessing the relative success of 'ecological modernisation' and other innovative concepts and their impact upon the organisation of and strategy in environmental policies. In social sciences in general, the bottom-left quadrant should be populated by a Foucauldian school of thought, emphasising the structuring character of hegemonic discourses, e.g. of discursive fixation. In environmental policy analysis this paradigm is not well represented, although Sairinen's analysis of Finnish environmental policy combines traditional policy analysis with a 'governmentality' approach (Sairinen, 2000). Finally, the bottom-right quadrant, as indicated above, mainly accommodates authors inspired by critical theory, and again there is but a small sample of them in environmental policy analysis. One can point at publications from the

1970s and early 1980s by Bahro, Boockchin and Gorz, but in retrospect these are rather political statements than empirical analyses of environmental politics. In a way also (some interpretations of) Beck's analysis of our 'risk society' fits in well, as he describes environmental and other high consequence risks as intrinsically linked to processes of 'simple' modernisation.

In conclusion: as said we deliberately opt to position our conception of 'institutions' in the midst of these crossing continua, between intentionalist and structuralist approaches on the one hand, and between ideational and organisational ones on the other. That is not to say that we pretend to bridge all these different perspectives, and yet our conception is developed in dialogue with them, since we would like to build upon each of them. We do so, *per negativum*, to avoid one-sided approaches that do not do justice to the complexities of social reality; *per positivum*, to attempt to capture as much as possible of their theoretical and methodological richness.

Inspired by this richness and when applied to politics and policy processes, our concept of institutionalisation refers to the gradual stabilisation of definitions of problems and approaches, of strategies and solutions in and around specific policy domains. It also refers to the more or less fixed patterns of divisions of tasks and interactions that develop between the actors involved, to the stabilisation of more or less fixed rules of the game etc. From this perspective, we analysed and reconstructed the institutionalisation of Dutch environmental policies and some of its subdomains in our first book (Van Tatenhove and Leroy, 2000). In brief: we made clear that also the institutionalisation of environmental politics comprises cognitive, interactive, regulatory and normative dimensions. We referred to the gradual solidifying of institutional patterns in each of these dimensions, which in turn constrain day to day political behaviour, and create mechanisms of path dependency that agencies cannot easily overcome.

We look from a similar institutional perspective in this book, paying attention to the change and stability environmental politics displays, either in substantial and organisational matters, and induced by either agency or structure. It is the analysis, interpretation and characterisation of these patterns of stability and change that we envisage with the concept of 'policy arrangements', which will be discussed at full length in chapter 3 of this volume, and which we will return to below.

Before that, however, we turn to our second pivotal concept and source of inspiration: *modernisation*, either related to society and politics in general, or restricted to environmental politics particularly. As to the first, a series of scholars suggest that our western societies have reached a new,

qualitatively different stage or form of modernity. We refer to Beck (1992), Giddens (1990), Lash et al. (1996) and many others. Here again, we are well aware of the subtle variety and divergences in their and other interpretations. Yet we believe they all point at processes of change that give a new direction to the long term modernisation of western societies. This new turn is said to be caused by technological, economic, societal, political and epistemological changes and, simultaneously, to have an impact on our economic, societal, political and scientific institutions. Scholars refer to processes such as globalisation (Castells, 1996-1998; Yearley, 1996), to the dematerialisation of our economies and the growth of non-material fluxes by ICT, others refer to high consequence risks, to the irreversibility of their environmental consequences (Spaargaren et al., 2000), and still others claim a growing and structural scientific uncertainty about complex issues, depriving science from its (presumed) former role as a legitimising institution (Irwin, 1995; Wynne, 1996).

It is striking that almost all authors in the modernity debate point at environmental issues as the manifestation *par excellence* of present-day modernity and the problems it provokes. Even before the 'risk society' thesis was widespread, scholars from environmental sociology and political sciences of the environment claimed environmental issues to have a catalytic role in societal, economic and political changes. Whether they labelled these changes as political modernisation (Jänicke, 1993) or as ecological modernisation (Mol, 1995), they regard recent societal responses to environmental issues as outstanding manifestations of a new modernity, including the building of new political and societal institutions that can organise the capacity (Jänicke and Weidner, 1997) and the legitimacy (Irwin, 2001) needed to adequately deal with these issues.

Chapter 2 will deal in more detail with this concept of modernisation and its challenges and consequences. We restrict our attention here to some political consequences that seem linked to this presumably all-pervading process of modernisation. Although quite different in scale, status and impact, all the processes referred to above (from globalisation to ecological modernisation) are said to provoke the erosion of the role of some long standing key institutions of our societies. The institutions affected comprise, as said, the formerly authoritative and legitimising role of science and technology (Irwin, 1995; Wynne, 1996), but it mainly affects the role of the nation-state.

We cannot and will not discuss the extensive debates on this latter issue, but just indicate some insights from political sciences that have been thought-provoking to us, and that in a way link our first concept, institutionalisation, to our second, (political) modernisation. Political scientists

indeed have labelled a series of recent changes in western politics as *shifts in governance* (Van Kersbergen and Van Waarden, 2001). In general 'governance' refers to the fact that steering no longer is the privilege of governmental agencies, but is *de facto* (and in many cases also *de jure*) the common responsibility of a variety of agencies, representing governmental bodies, market agencies and civil society organisations. Although the phenomenon of multi-actor governance is not a new one – (as the tradition of neo-corporatist decision-making in some European countries makes clear), one witnesses either their transfer to new policy domains -- one of which is the environmental -- and the emergence of new forms thereof. Therefore, governance is a multi-dimensional concept as well, referring to (new) steering concepts and beliefs, to new policy practices, to rulings on processing, organisation, interaction, etc. Empirically the new roles and interaction patterns between governmental bodies, market representatives and civil society organisations as referred to above, the variety of negotiations, covenants and agreements between public and private actors, and other 'new phenomena' referred to in the opening section of this chapter, suggest their rapid proliferation in the environmental field. In other words: the empirical observations we made there, apparently represent a more encompassing change, observed and analysed by political scientists outside the environmental field as well. Some of these scholars suggest the new patterns of governance would or could provide more steering capacity than their 'government' predecessors. We think, however, it remains to be assessed in practice and from empirical evidence whether and to what extent these forms of multi-actor governance do indeed represent changes in legitimacy and responsibility, and do increase our society's problem solving capacity.

Simultaneously, scholars from political sciences refer to multi-level governance. Originating from European studies (Marks and Hooghe, 1996), the interpretation of the concept has been widening since. It now stands for the very fact that (multi-actor) policy making evolves at different levels of policy making simultaneously, that these levels might interfere, differ and conflict, and that agencies might find opportunities to play their role at different levels. The concepts of institutionalisation, modernisation and multi-level governance come together when scholars refer to the fact that, for instance, local environmental groups get in touch with experts and policy makers at European level, passing by their national governmental level and decision making procedures, thereby *de facto* creating new political spaces (or: political institutions in the making). Again, the examples of governance practices from politics in general come close to the empirical observations from the opening section of this chapter. Again, we

thus deal here with changes that go beyond the boundaries of environmental politics solely. Still we will restrict to analysis and assessment of their character in empirical research in the environmental field.

Earlier on we have stressed our double ambition: (1) to look at environmental policy processes from an institutional perspective, balancing between agency and structure, and doing justice to substantial as well as to organisational aspects of policy processes; and (2) to take into account long term processes that characterise contemporary society, first captured under the umbrella concept of 'modernisation'. Recalling these ambitions bring us to our third pivotal concept: *policy arrangements*. As we did in our first and second books, we define a policy arrangement as the temporary stabilisation of the content and organisation of a particular policy domain at a certain policy level or over several policy levels -- in case of multi-level governance. This definition implies two assumptions. (1) Based upon our institutionalisation concept we suggest that day to day policy processes and the interactions between the agencies involved gradually develop into more or less stable patterns, which we label policy arrangements, while these institutionalised patterns or policy arrangements comprehend both substantial and organisational matters -- and their interplay (2) Based upon the idea of modernisation and its composing processes as constituent for late modern societies, we suggest policy arrangements not only to be the result of strategic behaviour, but also to reflect long term contextual societal and political trends and processes.

Policy arrangements, thus, is an institutional concept. As such, the concept does not aim at explaining day to day policy processes, but aims at the analysis of institutional patterns of change and stability in the mid term. Our main goals then are, first, to describe and characterise arrangements -- in many cases in a comparative perspective -- and second to interpret and understand their relative stability or change, and the mechanisms behind these dynamics. In order to capture the assumptions mentioned above, we distinguish four dimensions of policy arrangements, each of which are equal sources of change and stability:

- the *actors* involved in the policy domain, and their *coalitions* (including their oppositions);
- the division of *resources* between these actors, leading to differences in *power* and *influence*;
- the *rules of the game* within the arrangement, either in terms of formal procedures or as informal rules and 'routines' of interaction; and

- the policy *discourses*, entailing the norms and values, the definitions of problems and approaches to solutions of the actors involved.

Although the former three dimensions primarily refer to organisational aspects and the latter one to the substantial aspects of a policy arrangement, their combination aims at capturing the ideational-organisational duality. At the same time we aim at bridging the agency-structure duality. Chapter 3 comprises a full elaboration of these four dimensions of the concept, their interrelations, their equal status in terms of explanation and *explanandum*, and the added value of looking at a given policy arrangement from each of the dimensions. Chapter 3 thus sets out the methodology of our approach.

INSTITUTIONAL DYNAMICS: TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE?

It might be clear from the above by which authors, scholars and debates we have been inspired, and yet these theoretical foundations are not taken for granted. Even though they might provide us with the conceptual ammunition that we look for while deploying our own research perspective, they provoke a series of theoretical, methodological and empirical questions that deserve closer reading and in-depth debate. The first part of this volume (chapters 2 to 4) mainly faces these theoretical and methodological aspects.

As announced, the next chapter discusses what ‘(political) modernisation’ does mean, while avoiding any normative or prescriptive connotation, as we want to. The chapter looks at the implications for policy making in general and in the environmental field in particular (chapter 2). Chapter 3 covers rather operational and methodological questions: How can we use and operationalise the concept of ‘policy arrangements’ for empirical research, while doing justice to the actor-structure and substance-organisation dialectics? Chapter 4 then questions whether and how we can assess and evaluate the output and outcome of these new environmental policies, while overcoming classical policy evaluations’ methodologies and shortcomings?

Although theoretical and methodological in character, each of these three chapters draws some empirical evidence and illustrations from one case: the (rather poor) position of Dutch organic farming. The project that we carried out on this very issue is looked upon from three different angles in these three consecutive chapters: from a ‘political modernisation’ perspective (chapter 2), as an example to be analysed from the four

perspectives offered by the ‘policy arrangements’ concept (chapter 3), and as a topic for policy evaluation (chapter 4).

The following chapters of this volume (chapter 5 to 12) are mainly empirical in character, although and self-evidently, they all build upon the arrangements approach developed so far. Although dedicated to varying subdomains, they all cover some general empirical questions arising from the theoretical foundations mentioned above: is there any empirical evidence for substantial and organisational changes in policy making in general? Do we observe an actual shift ‘from government to governance’ in environmental policy making in particular? To what extent do we observe changes that, although spectacular in specific cases, tend to be ephemeral as well? Is there any empirical evidence for suggestions on changes towards multi-actor and multi-level policy making? Under what circumstances are these changes likely to institutionalise, or to fade away rapidly? And: do these changes increase society’s capacity to deal with the complex environmental problems we face?

To deal with these and more specific questions, chapters 5 to 12 draw empirical evidence from research that has been set up along the lines of our approach and analysis, either at our department or within a short distance. It covers environmental domains such as water management, nature conservation policy, cultural heritage, region-specific environmental policies, and policies vis-à-vis or within industrial sectors. The chapters mainly cover empirical evidence from the Netherlands and Flanders, in some cases in a comparative perspective, but in other cases also at European level and even beyond.

Chapters 5 and 6 do have a similar, comparative approach of the Netherlands and Flanders, covering water policies and nature conservation policies respectively. Both chapters investigate how similar discourses, ‘integrated water management’ and ‘nature development in ecological networks’ respectively, do develop in quite different institutional contexts. The chapters are not restricted to differences in implementation processes, but look at the legitimacy and impact of innovative discourses, and on the different ways pre-existing institutions are affected by and react to these changes, partly induced by European initiatives.

Chapter 7 takes the comparative perspective one step further, as it compares nature conservation policies in traditional ‘nature areas’ in Spain, the UK and the Netherlands. It makes clear that multi-actor policies in some cases seem to take hold and persist for long periods of time, whereas in other cases traditional patterns of governmental decision-making still prevail. Multi-level governance, similarly, emerges in some cases, whereas other national policy practices successfully resist transnational interference.

Chapter 8, on cultural heritage policies, to the contrary, establishes a growing influence of international discourses on national policies and rulings in this relatively new field. Empirical research in the US (Arizona), Norway and the Netherlands points at the mechanisms of transnational interference and institutionalisation: formal regulations, but also exchanges of practices between professionals and experts from governments and NGOs in the field.

Dutch region-specific environmental policies, as it developed throughout the 1990s, is at stake in chapters 9 and 10. Chapter 9 looks at three regional projects thereof, establishing the how's and why's of the changes the renewal induced by these very projects will institutionalise over time. 'Congruency' with already existing institutional arrangements seems to be the crucial factor. Chapter 10 also pays attention to the way these region-specific policies reflect 'political modernisation', e.g. principles and patterns of multi-actor and multi-level policies. Maybe even more, though, these policies have been coloured by 'new public management' principles. The latter, in some cases, do contradict the former, resulting in rather hybrid institutional arrangements.

Chapters 11 and 12 deal with the emergence of new policies towards and within industrial sectors. The former chapter does so while comparing initiatives, efforts and results of corporate environmental management in the Netherlands and the Czech Republic. The very comparison of developments in these two quite different economic and political contexts does reveal the main driving forces of these strategies and their likely institutional impact in each of these countries. Chapter 12 illustrates the interplay between traditional government practices towards industries on the one hand and the changes induced by a so-called target group approach in Flemish environmental policies on the other. Despite the lip service paid to the latter, the former seems to get the bulk of political and administrative support, and therefore seems to survive any attempt to change the existing government-industry relations.

Chapter 13, finally, presents an overall assessment. First, we compare and integrate the empirical evidence gathered in the previous chapters: Do the policy arrangements that have been analysed throughout the volume point at institutional dynamics indeed, or do they rather indicate lasting stability? Can we draw some empirical conclusions on 'political modernisation' from these cases? A second cluster of conclusions to be addressed is more theoretical and methodological in character: does the policy arrangements' approach allow us to identify the driving forces of change and stability? Which of the suggested driving forces seems decisive? To what extent can we assess their level of steering capacity? All

this leads us to a critical assessment of the research done so far, and opens perspectives for the work still to be done.

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