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Policy Networks as Collective Action

ABSTRACT

One important contribution to the policy sciences, and interorganizational research in particular, has been the introduction of the so called *policy network approach.* Despite the fact that the network approach has produced a multitude of concepts, it still lacks a theoretical scaffold. As a consequence, there is a tendency to regard, for example, policy communities, iron triangles, or implementation structures, and other network constructs as deviations from the *real* processes of policy making, i.e. those supposedly triggered by formal political decisions. This reflects a failure in realizing the difference between social and political order. One way out of this dilemma is to regard different empirical appearances of network concepts as expressions of *collective action.* Consequently, these types of collective action must be explained with reference to adequate theory. Referring to something called "network theory" is hardly a fruitful way. But, accepting that units other than formal organizations can be understood as variants of collective action increases our ability to understand the ongoing processes of the creation of social *and* political order in society. This also advances our ability to deal with an extremely important question: How can contemporary "multi-actor-societies" be governed?

Networks, and Text-Book Policy Making

Traditionally the field of policy analysis ramifies in two main directions, analysis *of* policy making and analysis *for* the purpose refining the process. Harold Lasswell's view of policy orientation of political science encompasses both branches; knowledge of as well as the improvement of the processes of policy making (Lasswell, 1968). Since the 1950th policy sciences has searched new ways influenced by the line of inquiry that Lasswell initiated and as a subdisciplin policy analysis has grown very fast (Dunn and Kelly, 1992). The past twenty years has been vital period that might be characterized by a reconceptualization of the phenomenon policy making. The debate between top-down and bottom-up is an expression of this (Sabatier, 1986a). A major contribution during the past twenty years has been the introduction of the so called *network approach* within policy science (Kenis and Scheider, 1991).

This approach is developed as an antidote to a more traditional view of the process, *the text-book version* of policy making (Nakamura, 1987). The question is to what extent this development has advanced the frontier for political research and in what ways. In this article it will be argued that despite the fact that the network approach has produced a multitude of concepts, it still lacks a theoretical scaffold. As a consequence for example policy communities, iron triangles, implementation structures and other innovative constructs risk to be regarded as deviations from the *real* processes of policy making, i.e. those supposedly triggered by formal political decisions.

This situation can partly be explained by an inability to recognize the difference between social and political order. In this article it is argued that one way out of this dilemma to regard different empirical appearances of network concepts as expressions of collective action. Policy networks are concrete "systems of action" (Crozier and Friedberg, 1980:124) that take part in the ongoing process of establishing order in society. These types of collective action must be explained with reference to adequate theory. Referring to

something called "network theory" is hardly a fruitful way. There is no network theory of policy making that can explain or predict the outcomes of policy making in contemporary society. But, accepting that collectively acting units other than formal organizations, e.g. policy networks, exist opens up for the possibility of understanding ongoing processes of creation social and political order in society.

This article is organized as follows. First the text-book version of policy making is compared with the network approach. Second shortcomings of the latter approach is discussed. Third, collective action theory is introduced as a possible way of advancing the network approach beyond its multitude of concepts and metaphors. Finally, it is argued that this line of inquiry advances our ability to discuss the governability of contemporary society.

Textbook Policy Making

The "textbook" version of policy making describes the process as a rational activity (Nakamura, 1987). Conscious policy makers; i.e., politicians, are assumed to be closely connected to the societies they govern. Presumably, they are able to scan the opinions held by people, not only at election day, but also afterwards. These opinions are aggregated to a collective level where procedures of collective choice take place. According to this image of the policy making process, the aim of a democratic, political system is to refine opinions, and to transform them into deliberate outcomes. For this purpose, open political elections, political parties, and a state apparatus containing legislative and executive units, are needed. The political *system,* is supposed to be reinforced, and recreated, on the basis of itself, e.g. via the ballot.

The stage model of policy making covers this description of the process. According to this model the process can be partitioned and analyzed as a sequence of separate activities: "Agenda setting, problem definition, formulation, implementation, evaluation and termination" (Kelly and Palumbo, 1992: 651). This model,[1] which actually reflects a certain image of political governance, is regarded as a "dominant paradigm of the policy process—the stages heuristic" (Sabatier, 1991b: 31). In order to make this model a logical reflection of the reality, an underlying assumption of political hierarchy is necessary. According to the stage model, policies are decided, created, and implemented, and this will logically require superior and subordinated units; i.e., the presence of a commando structure (Carlsson, 1996).

The fact, that this is a misspecification of the policy process, has been understood for a long period of time (Maclver, 1947: 303 ff.; Lasswell, 1956; Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973; Dunn and Kelly, 1992; Wildavsky, 1993). It can also be argued that Alexis de Tocqueville, more than 160 years ago, made an observation which was quite congenial with these later observations. In his assessment of the American democracy, Tocqueville observes, that it is not the formal political skeleton which holds the North American political system together, and which makes it work. It is three other causes: "The first is the

[1] I deliberately use the term model, not heuristic. The reason is a tendency within political sciense to treat the stage heuristic as if it were a model of political governance. This is discussed latern in the paper. See also Carlsson, 1996 for a lengthy argumentation.

peculiar and accidental situation in which Providence has placed Americans. Their laws are the second. Their habits and mores are the third." (Tocqueville, [1835], 1988:277).

What Tocqueville emphasizes is that a democratic, political order is context dependent. Since the environment varies, people must, if their aim is to govern themselves, adjust to given circumstances. "Providence" is a contextual variable! Accordingly, we can hardly expect one single type of democratic order to prevail. A multitude of systems is more likely to reflect the very idea of democracy, i.e., pluralism. Therefore, the stage model of policy making hardly represents a *general* algorithm for democratic governance. The second theme Tocqueville is addressing, is that the process of governance, is connected to deliberate systems of law. He also notice that these laws are based on an authority beyond the laws themselves. Tocqueville refers to the habits and mores of the people as the basis for this authority.

Tocqueville's approach is far away from the textbook approach of policy making, which assumes that a single rule of law exists in order to guide the process of policy making through distinct phases towards a predefined end, characterized by policy termination. According to the stage model of policy making, the logic, namely, requires that new policies will replace the old ones, e.g. that the skeleton of the political system will be the same, at the same time as the substance of policies is supposed to change.

With reference to Tocqueville's diagnosis, however, it must be underscored that systems of law, "law making, law enforcing, and law adjudicating" (V. Ostrom, 1991: 108) normally are connected to different processes all of which are supposed to reflect local circumstances such as resource configurations, belief systems, etc. Therefore, the ways "[h]ow these structures and processes are both differentiated and linked to one other in a more general process of governance is subject to considerable variation in different systems of governance" (ibid.).

To summarize, both on theoretical grounds and with reference to empirical findings, the textbook approach is misleading. It refers to a normative view of policy making rather than reflecting how contemporary societies are governed. Presumably the policy network approach will serve as an alternative to this image?

A Network Perspective on Policy Making

The network perspectice rejects the rational model of policy making. Typical for the attitude is a reluctance to predict specific outcomes on the basis of policy programs or decisions. The label policy network, however, is very general, and will among other cover such disparate attitudes as the *implementation structure approach* (Hjern and Porter, 1983); the *advocacy coalition framework* (Sabatier, 1991a; Sabatier and Jenkins_Smith, 1993); *interorganization approaches* (Hanf and Scharpf, 1978), and Charles Lindblom's theory of *policy-making-systems* (Lindblom, 1965). Can these constructs be understood as representing the same underlying phenomena, are they models of, or do they only serve as metaphors for interrelated activities? Without judging in this debate, and for the purpose of this paper the following

statement will do. The policy network approach represents "a decentralized concept of social organization and governance" (Kenis and Schneider, 1991:12).

In order to understand how policies actually are created in society, proponents for the network perspective argue, one has to search for problem solving structures, rather than to focus on formal, political authorities, their decisions and programs. For example, an *implementation structure* can be understood as a group of individuals occupied by the endeavor of solving a common policy problem. An *issue network* consists of actors sharing some basic knowledge related to some specific problem area, etc. Whether political decisions, programs or agencies are relevant for this problem-solving process is consequently an empirical question. The organizing principle is some problem to be solved, not a political administrative structure. According to this view, the formal political skeleton has to prove its importance, not be taken for granted. This is the ultimate departure from the stage model of policy making, which regards a single political decision or a single policy program as a natural point of departure for the analysis.

There are, however other network concepts that explicitly recognize the primacy of political agencies and decisions. Thus, an *iron triangle* is viewed as a stable relation between a governmental agency and other groups while *advocacy coalitions* supposedly try to influence governmental institutions.

For example, the implementation structure approach has been criticized because of its affiliation with bottom-up techniques of data collection. The substance of the critique is, that; even though bottom-up research has generated a great number of case studies, these studies have made few contributions to theory (Sabatier, 1986b). Moreover, it has also been argued that implementation research in general have had a very limit impact on real life policy making (Heclo, 1972; Wittrock, 1982; Palumbo, 1987). This is, indeed, also the case with other approaches explicitly adopting a policy network perspective. Consequently, we still lack good theories of policy making in contemporary society. Can network approach provide a firm base for a such development.

The flora and fauna of policy networks

One way of conceptualizing policy networks is to define them as: "cluster[s] or complex of organizations connected to each other by resource dependencies and distinguished from other clusters or complex by breaks in the structure of resource dependencies" (Benson, J.A., in Rhodes, 1990: 304). The term policy network can be understood as a broad generic category with a great number of sub-categories. The term policy network presupposes the existence of two main features, links and actors, viewed in from horizontal rather than a vertical perspective. But, how can a link be understood and what exactly is an actor? What constitutes the very existence of a policy network? These questions cannot be answered with reference to network characteristics only.

Describing cars as consisting of "parts" attached to each other does not have any descriptive or explanatory power. It can neither be explained how they work, nor why there are cars, or how they might effect society. Moreover,

viewing policy networks as a clusters of *organizations,* as the quotation above indicates, is only one way of defining the phenomenon. Hanf and Scharpf has use a wider definition that leaves the field open for a line of inquiry based on methodological individualism. "the term 'network' merely denotes, in a suggestive manner, the fact that policy making includes a large number of public and private actors from different levels and functional areas of government and society" (Hanf ans Scharpf, 1978: 12) Note the difference between this and the previous definition by Benson. In the first definition the nodes of the network are organizations, according to the latter, actors might also be viewed as individuals. Whether they "represent" a corporate actor or not is not part of the definition. This is an empirical question, not an analytical one.

Having this remark in mind, how can the network perspective on policy making be summarized? Let me suggest the following characteristic. The network perspective can be distinguished by its 1) non-hierarchical way of perceiving the policy making process, 2) its focus on functional rather than on organizational features and, finally 3) its horizontal scope. Does not this criteria also apply to corporatism? No, "the characteristics of corporatism such as the aggregation of interests, licensing of groups, monopoly of representation and regulation of members" is not typical for policy networks (Rhodes, 1990:303). Obviously, the notion policy networks captures something else than pure corporatism, and something different than pluralism. Nor, the phenomena it represent can be understood within the Marxist or elitist frameworks. How can these phenomena be understood then? One basic question is to what extent different appearances and notions connected to the network perspective captures the same phenomenon. What is the difference between subgoverа-ments, issue networks, policy communities, etc?

Policy Networks can be regarded as a broad generic category. "A policy network is described by its actors, their linkages and its boundary. It includes a relatively stable set of mainly public and private corporate *actors.* The *linkages* between the actors serve as channels for communication and for the exchange of information, expertise, trust and other policy resources. The *boundary* of a given policy network is not in the first place determined by formal institutions but results from a process of mutual recognition dependent of functional relevance and structural embeddedness. Policy networks should be seen as integrated hybrid structures of political governance" (Kenis and Schneider, 1991:41-42, italics in original).

This broad category can be grinded into numerous of sub-categories. ***Sub-governments*** can be understood as "small groups of political actors, both governmental and non-governmental that specialize in specific issue areas (Rhodes, 1990:297). ***Iron triangles*** represent "a closed and stable relation ship between an interest group(s), a Governmental agency and a US congressional committee. All participants have compatible goals and their activities are mutually supportive" (Jordan and Schubert, 1992:21).

Policy Community serve as a label for "shared experience, common specialist language, staff interchange, and frequency and mode of communication" (Hogwood in, Jordan, 1990:327). A policy community is "a special type of stable network which has the advantages in encouraging

bargaining in policy resolution. In this language the policy network is a statement of shared interests in a policy problem: a policy community exists where there are effective shared 'community' of views on the problem" (Jordan, G., 1990:327).2

These concepts can be compared to ***Epistemic communities,*** "network[s] of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area" (Haas, 1992:3), or ***Issue Networks:*** "shared-knowledge group[s] having to do with some aspect (or, as defined by the network, some problem) of public policy" (Heclo, 1978:103).

Explicitly focusing on the implementation side of the policy process an ***Implementation Structure*** is understood as a group of actors trying to solve a common policy problem. This unit of analysis is not understood by reference to political administrative logic. An implementation structure is mapped by its participants (Hjern and Porter, 1983). Finally, presumably constituting relevant parts of a political subsystem ***Advocacy Coalitions*** are supposed to be important units of analysis in understanding policy change over time. These coalitions consist of "actors from mainly public and private organizations at all level of government who share a set of basic beliefs (policy goals plus casual and other perceptions) and who seek to manipulate the rules of various governmental institutions to achieve those goals over time (Sabatier, and Jenkins-Smith 1991:152). Indeed there are many other concepts developed within the policy network approach.[3]

More recently a more postmodern attitude to policy making and public administration has added new concepts, e.g. ***Public Energy Field*** "the playing field of political discourse; here is where public policy gets created and re-created. [...] *energy* implies that the field is sufficient charged with meaning and intention" (Fox and Miller, 1995:1). Whether these latter concepts can be captured by the network label is not obvious. It can be suggested that they represent a more discourse analytic tradition within political science.[4] Here, they are assumed to represent the same underlying phenomena as the other networks constructs do, and thus expressing *a non-hierarchical view of policy making.* How can different network constructs be distinguished?

Different ways of comparing the concepts have been used (Dowding, 1995; Jordan, 1990; Jordan and Schubert, 1992; Rhodes, 1990; Rhodes and Marsh, 1992; **Warden,** 1992; Yishai, 1992). For example, Marsh and Rhodes (1992), distinguish between policy communities and issue networks by using characteristics such as membership and dergree of integration. Policy communities are found to be smaller, more integrated and hierarchical than issue networks. Using the creation of health policy in Israel as an illustration, Yael Yishai (1992) introduces the idea of a sequence of concepts. When the new state of Israel was formed, Yishai argues, no public health policy was yet developed; a *policy curtain prevailed.* In a second phase actors constitute an

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[2] See also Campbell's, et al., afterword in the special issue of *Governance* on policy communities, *(Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration,* Vol. 2 No. 1, January 1989, pp. 86 -94.

[3] For recent overviews over this terrain, se Dowding, 1995; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993, chapter 1 and 2 and Hill, 1995.

[4] See also, Blunden and Dando, 1995; deHaven-Smith, 1990; and Bogason, 1996 forthcoming)

iron triangle, in the third an *issue network* and in the beginning of the 1970th a *policy community* is formed. Finally the creation of a health policy has ended up in a situation Yishai labels as an *iron duet*, i.e. a mixture between the three latter network concepts. Each one of the concepts is described by two variables, dependence among actors and the possibility of exclusion. Se figure 1. For example, issue networks are characterized by a low degree of exclusion and dependence, an so forth.

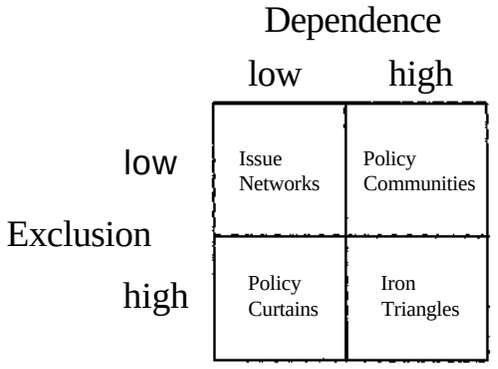

Figure 1. Typology of policy network concepts.

Questioning the fruitfulness of these kinds of descriptive approaches, Dowding, 1995 advocates a more formal analysis in which properties of networks supposedly can be explained. However, he concludes that "to promise that network analysis will eventually go beyond demonstrating general features of networks will ulitmately lead to disappointment" (Dowding, 1995:158).

But, this is exactly the aim of a policy analysis adopting a network perspective. If policy making is assumed to be performed by something called networks of actors rather than by formal political units this is the same as to say that the creation of politics and its outcome will differ depending on how a policy area is organized. Supposedly issue networks will produce other results than policy communities? If these kinds of reasoning cannot be deduced from the logic of the network approach our line of argument must take another direction. Two alternative exist. The first would be to accept that the policy network approach lacks explanatory power and therefore represents a dead end street within policy sciences. Another conclusion would be that the network approach to a considerable extent encompasses a hidden assumption regarding the primacy of formal political agencies and their decisions. Presuambly, the stage heuristic, with its predefined sequences, is still the normative yard-stick; issue networks, implementation structures and advocacy coalitions and other constructs only capture different ways of *describing deviations from this ideal procedure.*

If we accept the idea that distinct network concepts distinguish between different ways of producing policy we must try to explain these differences. However, all explanations require theory, but the processes of policy making in society is multifarious and no single theory can capture this complexity. Keith Dowding has argued that the attempts to develop theories of the policy process based on network approach have obvious shortcomings. Especially when they

try to build bridges to approaches where the state itself is characterized by network features (such as advocacy coalitions etc.). These attempts; "will fail to produce fundamental *theories* of the policy process. They fail because the driving force of explanation, the independent variables, are not network characteristics *per se* but rather characteristics of components within the network. These components explain both the nature of the network *and* the nature of the policy process" (Dowding, 1995: 137).

The textbook approach of policy making over-emphasizes formal political structures, it anticipates that the society is ordered on the basis of its *formal* political structure. The network approach, on the other hand, is unclear and has a tendency to neglect the reality that every society, in fact, *is* rule ordered, even if this may not be an obvious conclusion to make on the basis of empirical findings (for instance telling us that outcomes frequently deviate from political intentions). The problem is to scrutinize the "rules of the game" (North, 1990), i.e. what lands institutional arrangements that exists in a society perceived as mezzy and occupied by networks and other soft units.

One solution to this problem of analysis is to explicitly connect network analysis to the "state", and to establish "meso-level" theory between micro and macro. This reliance on the "state" would, presumably, provide the order we search for. According to Dowding, however, even these attempts will fail; thus, the big hurdle seems to be the image of the state.

> A true theory must be generalizable to all objects to which it is supposed to be applicable. It should be able to explain variance between those objects as well as explaining similarities. Too often state theories are about different types of state -thus some states are seen as more pluralist than others, some as more elitist than others, some as more autonomous than others. But if this is so then none of the 'theories' is about 'the state'. You cannot have a theory about dogs which only applies to alsatians and not poodles, then study two dogs and conclude that one is more poodle-like and another is more alsatian-like. That is not a theory; it is a system of classification. Any theory of the state must specify how we expect different actors (institutions, people, groups or whatever) to behave *under different institutional arrangement.* Few extant so-called theories of the state do this. (Dowding, 1995: 141)

An other way of connecting network analysis to the concept of a ruleordered society is the idea of "empirical constitutionalism" (Hjern and Hull, 1982). According to this approach the summation of activities performed in a society will create a constitutional base, i.e., rules specifying the terms and conditions of governance would emanate from the activities themselves. Taking these ideas as a prescription of how to perform policy analysis, will, however, cause other types of problems.

The task of political science is to explain how people's daily activities constitute an order which holds society together, but also to explain how this order can be inheritable. Since day to day activities are more fleeting than the underlying rules which specify the terms and conditions for these activities, the activities themselves cannot provide a sufficient base for political theory. If society only is looked upon as a mixture of loosely coupled activities, political science will be trivial, and in the worst case only devoted to enumeration's of activities. Then, the criticism by Paul Sabatier and others, will be supported by,

even more, case studies with limited contribution to theory. Some theory of political governance is needed. (See also Kiser and Ostrom, 1982.)

Networks, Social and Political Order

The phenomena the network approach captures are factual ways of organizing problem areas in contemporary society not deviations from some ideal procedure of governance. Beyond a more metaphoric level and apart from, sometimes, exhaustive exercises in concepts and notions, the policy network approach tries to apprehend situations where actors act collectively in relation to joint problems, challenges, or tasks. For example, what an issue network actually represent is ways of *organizing* problem areas by specific forms of *collective action.* One way of advancing the policy network perspective would therefore be to explicitly refer to collective action theory. How can this be done and what would the advantages be of such a development?

Being a "decentralized concept of social organization and governance," the network perspective, appreciates the difference between social and political order in society. For example, by using the implementation structure, or the advocacy coalition concept the analyst reveals how actors, private as well as public, organize a problem area independently how these problems are supposed to be solved according to some political administrative logic. Or, to be very clear; implementation structures create social order within some specific sphere of society, advocacy coalitions structure distinct policy areas, issue networks organize particular topics, and so forth. This might not be a matter of perverting democracy, it is ongoing processes of establishing social order in society, for good or for bad. Many forms of order exist in society, and the actual role of *political agencies* in this drama is an empirical question.

> Political government is one form of social regulation, but by no mean the only form. This point must be remembered when we raise questions about the origins of government. Regulation is a universal aspect of society. Society means a system of ordered relations. The system may be informal, folk sustained, uncentralized and without specific agencies, or may be highly organized. But social regulation is always present, for no society can exist without some control of the native impulses of human beings. Political government appears when social regulation is taken over or begins to be presided over by a central social agency. (Maclver, 1947: 22)

Only to the extent something called the government "make rules binding as enforceable laws" (V. Ostrom, 1991:41) within a specific area we can talk about political order or government by "the state" in this area. However the findings from decays of policy research tell us that the state is a fuzzy concept. "[All] Western democracies have recourse to systems of governance that always imply multiorganizational arrangements. Something called "the government" or "the state" is either a misnomer or is being used as a proper name to identify some particular entity in a more complex configuration of rulership that exists in such societies" (V. Ostrom, 1985: 14). The network approach illustrates this. For example, the notion issue network is short hand for the creation of order beyond something called the state. They reflect the fact that institutional arrangements are established independently of the existence of

written policy programs and political decisions. Organizing of society is an ever ongoing process but these processes may not end up in the establishment of organizations. Organizing and organization are not the same. This is a very important distinction when dealing with policy analysis.

Collective Action with Many Faces

Policy networks are involved in the creation of policy in society. Primarily, they ought to be understood as organized entities or as institutional arrangement, not as organizations. The label 'policy network' indicates an *organized* field activities. This is the same as to say that common rules are established by processes of information management. Thus, organizing is not equivalent to organization. If this would be the case, no organizing would be possible outside organizations and no policy communities or implementation structures would exist. Organizing is an unabigous concept. "Every organized human activity, from the making of pots to the placing of man on the moon, gives rise to two fundamental and opposing requirements: the division of labor into various tasks to performed and the coordination of these tasks to accomplish the activity. The structure of organization can be defined simply as the sum total [...]" (Minzberg, 1979: 2).

In rare cases policy networks can be regarded as organizations, i.e. "a system of consciously coordinated activities of forces of two or more persons explicitly created to achieve specific ends" (Downs, 1967: 24). But, this is not common.

Organizations, in turn, must be separated from institutions, which are defined as system of rules (Kiser and Ostrom, 1982: 184; North, 1991). The main prerequisite for labeling organized arrangements as institutions is the existence of the possibility of sanctions of infringements. Policy can be defined as, "a set of ideas and the practical search for institutional arrangements for their realization" (Hjern, 1987:3). Consequently, this definition indicates conscious *efforts* to establish systems of rules. In empirical settings, however, it is not evident that such institutional arrangements actually are, or will be, established.

Finally, what is collective action and how does this notion correspond with the principles of organizing and the network perspective on policy making? Generally, collective actions can be defined as "actions taken by members of a group to further their common interest" (Bogdanor, 1987: 113). This definition, however, narrows the possible appearances of the phenomenon. People can act jointly without common interests, and they can definitely pursue common enterprises outside the realms of formal organizations. Collective action is not a unitary concept. Figure 1 indicates this. The figure illustrates the relation between degree of coordination among actors, and to what extent their interests are common. Coordination is defined as, "an intelligent conformity"; i.e., a mutual adjustment in a system of activities (Kaufmann, 1986: 221 ff).

In box two, we find the ideal-typical form of collective action, different individuals unified by common interests into a single organization. People join the organization because of their common interests, and the organization provides a high degree of coordination among its members. A great number of

authors assume that organizations are functioning this way. The most famous theory of collective action, *The Logic of Collective Action,* is based on this assumption (Olson, 1971). However, this box also fits network constructs such as epistemic communities, policy communities and advocacy coalitions. Actors with common views coordinate their activities in order to pursue their interests.

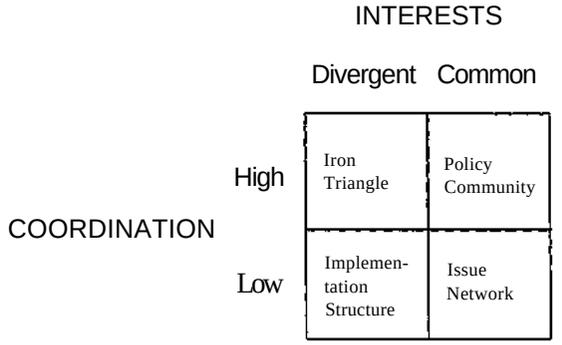

Figure 2. The relation between degree of common interest and coordination of actors; different instances of collective action. (The figure is inspired by Meyer and Zucker, 1989:99.)

In the fourth box we find a quite different form of collective action, people unified by some common interest, but although their interests coincide, formal coordination is lacking. Issue networks have these characteristics, they are loosely coupled and have low degree of formal coordination. In the third box we identify another type of collective action may be best illustrated by using the example voters in a election. Voters have different interests, and their individual behavior, i.e., on whom they cast their ballot, is not a subject of coordination. For an illustration see, for instance, Anthony Downs' (1957)\ *An Economic Theory of Democracy.* Implementation structures may fulfill the same criteria. Although lacking formal coordination, actors with divergent interest direct their activities in order to solve a particular policy problem.

Box one, finally, illustrates a form of collective action closely related to the previous discussion about the general characteristics of policy networks. For example, iron triangle consist of actors whose activities are adjusted to one another, but at the same time individual participants in these networks can have quite disparate interests. Their interests are compatible but not common. The coordination of actors, however, can be regarded as fairly high. Two actors can, for example, without interacting directly with each other, be coordinated by a third actor. This is typical for policy networks. See, for example, Charles Lindblom's (1965) *The Intelligence of Democracy.*

Note, however, that the concept of coordination is quite ambiguous. What do we mean by coordination? Luther Gulick, for instance, makes a distinction between coordination, "by organization", and "by dominance of an idea" (Gulick, 1937: 6). Also, "meaning, rules and interactive problem-solving", can serve as sources of intelligent conformity among people (Kaufmann, 1986: 215). In Figure 1, coordination "by organization" is the definition used. If, however, we reinterpret the matrix, and use *dominance of an idea* as the indicator of coordination, our discussion will turn out different. Using this

definition of coordination, the participants in a issue network, or in an implementation structure, can be said to be coordinated by the their common ideas, a shared view on their task, etc.

The conclusion of this discussion is that all instances of collective action possess the qualities of being organized and coordinated, independently whether the participating actors have common interests or not. This is important to stress, both if we regard policy making as an activity primarily performed by political agencies, or if we rely on descriptions made by proponents for the network approach. Independently of attitude to the process of policy making, collective action is its basic feature; i.e., people acting together in order to achieve some desirable outcomes, although not all the same. Since collective action have many different appearances, consequently, also policy making does. This is elaborated further in the next section.

Concepts Need Adequate Frameworks

Connecting theory of collective action to the policy network perspective requires a theoretical framework. However, there is no single theory of policy making and it is unlikely that there will ever be one. The policy making process is multifarious and requires a great number of theories to be understood. These theories must be incorporated in some broader framework. A framework is a less developed theory, i.e. a broad conceptualization of problems under focus. Frameworks are contributive in identifying elements and relations between them. They help us to organize our thinking an thus, our investigations. A framework provide a general list of variables and can serve as a help to generate questions that have to be addressed (Ostrom, Gardner and Walker, 1994, chapter 2). Frameworks are no theories, however.

With reference to the previous discussion it can be underlined that, for example, the advocacy coalition framework is a framework and not a theory of policy change. The same way it must be emphasized that the stage heuristic of policy making is a heuristic, not a model and definitely not a theory of political governance. The problem is that this is frequently forgotten. *Frameworks* should be understood as broad conceptualizations, *heuristics* "provide aid or direction in solving of a problem but is otherwise unjustified" (Websters Collegiate Dictionary), *models* are precise assumptions about specific relations between variables and their outcomes, while *theories* can be described as deductive systemes of hypotheses or propositions.

A *concept*, on the other hand can be conceived as "a regularity in events or objects designated by the same label" (Nowak and Govin, 1990:4), "a mental device for interpreting a unit in the stream of sensations that we experience" (Robertson, 1994:25). Concepts are "packages of meaning" (Pines, 1985:108). Thus a processes of *conceptualization* would be the same as "the creation and/or adoption and preservation of symbolic meaning" (ibid.).

Let me suggest the following. The policy network approach embodies a multitude of concepts, i.e. devices for interpreting regularities in a stream of inter-organizational activities. Precisely what appearances these activities might form and what kinds of outcome that can be associated with them cannot be scrutinized without reference to a coherent framework. The Institutional

Analysis and Development (IAD) framework is the most distinguished and tested framework for policy analysis (Oakerson, 1992; E. Ostrom, 1995, Ostrom, Gardner and Walker, 1994; Sabatier, 1991a; Bogason, 1994). It is based on a limit version of rational choice and it is sufficient broad to be compatible with lots of theories, for example, collective action theory, transaction cost theory, game theory and constitutional choice theory. The framework is described in detail elsewhere and these descriptions will not be recapitulated here. For a comparison with other frameworks, se Sabatier, 1991a and Sproule-Jones, 1993)

The IAD Framework and Theory of Collective Action

The focal point of the IAD framework is a specific action arena, e.g. an irrigation system, policing, or forestry. Action arenas are supposedly composed by two bunches of variables: 1) an *action situation* involving participants, positions, actions, information, etc. and 2) *actors* who have preferences, information-processes capabilities, and so forth (Ostrom, et al.,1994:29ff).

Actions arenas are assumed to be understood by reference to the problems to be solved not by reference to political decisions or programs. The congeniality to the network approach is that the IAD framework enables us to capture both social and political order. Using the bottom-up methodology of the framework can in fact result in the conclusion that the action arena under focus is organized without any intervention from formal political agencies. What is found is an example of social order, i.e. institutional arrangements defined as rule ordered activities. Thus, if an action arena is found to be governed solely by political agencies, this would be the result of empirical observations, not a presumption.

According to the IAD framework, action arenas are affected by three "factors," "attributes of the physical world" "attributes of community" and "rules-in-use." All together this complexity of relations can be observed as patterns of interactions. These activities generate specific outcomes and these outcomes can be assessed by the analysts using some evaluation criteria.

Assumptions of precise relation between single variables cannot and should not be deduced from the framework. Such assumptions require specific models and appropriate theories. Like all frameworks, also the IAD framework is compatible with a multitude of theories. Consequently, also collective action theory can be used within the IAD framework. This is discussed in the next section.

Policy Making as Collective Action

Different policy network constructs can be understood as instances of collective action; therefore some theory of collective action that captures this complexity is needed. Research dealing with *collective behavior* is an old tradition within social science, and some of the literature on collective action is covered by this label. Brown (1968: 728) refers to authors like Le Bon and Blumer who have written about "the crowd" and similar phenomena. The separation between *collective behavior* and *collective action* is not always logical. It is logical, only if the first refers to behavior in a biological sense, and

the second to "human behaviors for which the acting individuals attaches a subjective and instrumental meaning" (V. Ostrom, 1995: 7). Most writings of collective behavior, however, are applicable to the latter category. This is the case with Smelser (1965) for instance whose *Theory of Collective Behavior* rather is a theory of collective action.

Smelser defines collective behavior as, "an uninstitutionalized mobilization for action in order to modify one or more kinds of strain on the basis of a generalized reconstitution of a component of action" (Smelser, 1963: 71). He considers collective behavior as processes occurring in order to change society in some desirable way, before relevant organizational features and resources have been devised for the purpose of solving the actual problem. This is the reason why Smelser defines collective behavior an uninstitutionalized activity; obviously he refers to organization not to institution, in the sense it earlier has been defined.

The reason why Smelser's theory is relevant for this discussion of policy making is twofold. Since policy making is a mixed business, it is not acceptable to use a theory of collective action which excludes other appearances than those based on the idea that collective action is equivalent to *organizational* behavior; also implementation structures, issue networks, etc. are parts of the business. Smelser's theory does not contain this fallacy.

One of the puzzles of policy making is that outcomes have a tendency to deviate from political intentions. Smelser's theory provides some analytical tools which are useful for the understanding of why collective action, normally, evolves with quite different qualities. The logic is that, if we, given the fact that collective action is a basic characteristic of policy making, can explain why collective action has a tendency to follow different tracks, we are then in a better position to answer the question why policy outcomes differ from intentions. However, it cannot be concluded that Smelser's theory is the only suitable, but it can serve as suggestion.

A "Policy-Network-Theory" of Collective Action

As demonstrated in Figure 1, the substantial activity of collective action have many faces. Smelser's theory provides six general determinants for collective action. Depending on how these determinants are filled with substance, different types of collective action will evolve, riots, social movements, etc. (Smelser, 1963: 18 ff.). The six determinants are:

- (D1) Structural conduciveness
- (D2) Structural strain
- (D3) Growth and spread of a generalized belief
- (D4) Precipitating factors
- (D5) Mobilization of participants for action
- (D6) The operation of social control

What relevance have these determinants for policy analysis adopting a network perspective? Policy making is hardly equivalent to riots, etc. Let us assume that a "government" is occupied by the endeavor of creating policy. The

problem to be solved by this policy is how to prevent and turn an ongoing decline in local economies, characterized by unemployment, weakening social services, outflow of youth to the cities, etc. This is not a simple problem to tackle but the example is quite illustrative. Social problems *are* complex, and most of them have no self-evident solution.[5] In order to circumvent this problem, however, the government has approved a policy program containing lots of devises in order to support local industries, to stimulate new entrepreneurs, etc. However, if this policy will be more than words, action must take place; things must happen on the local level. That is the same as to say that collective action must take place.

Smelser's determinants can be used to demonstrate that the likely outcomes of such a policy will be a tremendous variation between different localities and groups of people, but also that it would be highly surprising if the outcomes would correspond with the intentions held by politicians and administrators. Moreover, the theory also demonstrates that the more precise outcomes that are anticipated, the greater the deviation will be. If a policy program for example stipulates a 10,000 US $ subsidize for every new enterprise, or a 1,000 US $ grant for every youth taking computer courses, lots of different outcomes can be expected. Some enterprises will never start, some will start but will not survive. Others, on the other hand, will be quite prosperous, etc. Some youngsters, granted for taking computer courses, will find themselves a way to a new carrier within computer science—they will perhaps move away—some will never fulfill their assignments, while others just will take the opportunity to have a good time on the cost of the taxpayers, etc. Smelser's determinants provide an analytical screen for the understanding of such varieties of outcomes.[6] This is demonstrated in the next sections.

What Determines Collective Action?

Contextual factors constitute the base for all types of collective action. Smelser uses the term, *structural conduciveness.* The term refers to different types of factors such as demography, belief systems, resources, etc. These circumstances will indeed vary between societies, groups and places. Some qualities in this context will be more conducive for specific types of collective action, for instance, the existence of a local tradition of self-governing. Without elaborating further on this theme, it can be stated that every instance of policy making is depending on the milieu, i.e., on local circumstances.

The existence of *structural strain,* the second determinant, is an important cause of action. Collective action always take place on the basis of some problem to be solved. Relevant actors must regard the "problem" as a problem otherwise no collective action will occur, no networks will be formed. Do, for instance, relevant actors in the policy example above agree there is a problem?

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[5] This might be explanation enough for understanding the emergence of policy networks in contemporary society.

[6] Smelser's theory is more developed, and is not primarly constructed for policy analysis. The theory also explains how different types of collective behavior are related to differens resources for action, for example, values or norms. Smelser describes how action which aims at reconstructing systems of norms will lead to "norm oriented movements", etc.

Are they talking about the same problem, and if so, are problems labeled the same, necessary the same for each individual? Thus, the notion problem does not only refers to the substantial problems people have, but also to needs, challenges and strains.

The *growth and spread of a generalized belief* is part of a phenomenon we use to name, mutual understanding. In order to organize a solution to a problem, the establishment of mutual understanding is essential. Collective action is based on some understanding concerning which types of action are regarded as good, bad, acceptable, possible, etc. This problem touches the earlier described question of 'making priorities' as a part of the organizing process. Even the making of priorities must be organized, and prioritizing is always based on some type of mutual understanding among those involved in the process.7

Structural conduciveness, structural strain and *growth and spread of a generalized belief,* however, are not sufficient prerequisites for collective action to take place. Collective action, and accordingly not policy making either, is not automatically triggered. *Precipitating factors* will make the process start. The typical way of triggering activities of policy making is to make political decisions, for instance, the launching of a policy program. But, this "mechanism" is not so self-evident as it may look like. Thus, with reference to the example above, in some problematic geographical areas people will organize themselves in order to create local economic development, without any guidance of policy decisions taken in order to trigger such activities. Consequently, political decision is only one method to trigger collective action, and, moreover, even if political decisions are taken, the result can be that no action will take place.

Since most problem areas are complex, in the sense that no single solution is sufficient, recourse to different types of actors is a necessity. Therefore *mobilization of actors*—Smelser's fifth determinant—is one of the crucial points for the process of problem-solving in society. Mobilization can be done in different ways. Some actors can possess the role of formal "mobilizers". With reference to our example above, some one in charge of the fulfillment of the policy program will perhaps make other actors contribute to the "implementation" of the program, aimed at developing local economies. Is also possible to identify other more spontaneous forms of mobilization. People can, as indicated above, organize themselves in order to solve problem they regard as urgent. This is frequently done in society. Even in such more unofficial forms of organizing, definitions of problems and priorities are made, resources are mobilized, and evaluations are accomplished.

Implementation structures, issue network and epistemic communities have these characteristics, they are specifically "designed" in order to solve particular problems. This design, however, does not emanate from a single

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[7] This focuses a very substantial problem, namely the question of rationality which is often defined as a matter of transitivity. The concept of transitivity can be explained as a logic order of preferences eg. A is preferred to B and B to C, logically A is preferrably to C. If people engaged in monetary transactions for instance, do not act according to rules of transitivity each one of them can be the object for "money-pump". Consequently, it is logical to assume that same basic level of understanding among interacting people is essential in order to make joint priorities.

source of authority or a mobilizer; the structure is the outcome of conscious processes of problem-solving among different individuals. As a contrast, policy communities, iron triangles and other constructs might be the result of conscious design. Altogether these variants of collective action illustrate different institutional arrangements and presumably they also reflect different incentive structures.

Finally, every instance of collective action is subject to *social control*—the last determinant. Even operations of social control, however, can vary. Within the process of policy making it is not unusual that political administrative authorities devise special arrangements in order to execute formal control of activities and resources. In the example above, restrictions like 10,000 dollar for every new enterprise will serve this purpose. If money are distributed on the basis of discretion only, no formal control is possible.

Social control is closely connected to coordination. Some authors actually argue that it is the same phenomenon, e.g. an intelligent conformity in a system of actions (Mintzberg, 1979: 3, note 1). Thus, control can be regarded as mechanism within the single individual, or as emerging from the processes of interaction between individuals (Wirth, 1986: 598). Independently of definition, however, control imposes a limit on collective action. The determinants decide how fast, and how far, collective action evolve (Smelser, 1963: 17).

The tentative application of determinants of collective action to the processes of policy making have indicated that every determinant can be filled with substance in a great number of ways. This is the reason why Smelser can explain the emergence of different types of collective actions. According to Smelser, collective action reconstructs the very situation which has produced the action; this situation is recreated in a new form (Smelser, 1963: 68). However, for the purpose of this paper, it is sufficient to observe that collective action varies and that it is possible to combine the network perspective with this theory of collective action.[8] One final question is to be answered: Can theory of collective action explain different variants of networks? Why sometimes iron triangles and on other occasions policy communities or issue networks, and does it matter if a policy problem is "handled" by one type or the other?

Networks and Rational Choice

As indicated previously the context is the starting-block for all types of collective action, therefore, this determinant is especially important. This has persuasively been demonstrated by Robert Putnam (1993). Also Lasswell focuses on the contextuality of the policy making process (Torgersson, 1985). Different environments contain different social and cultural qualities. Expressed with the use of IAD framework terminology, *action arenas* are always different. Actors involved are constrained and enabled by different kinds of rules and resources. Culture reduces our choice set (North, 1995), and

[8] An empirical application of the theory is perfomed in Carlsson, 1995. See also Carlsson, 1996.

this combined with, or reflected in specific sets of rules and resources provide presumptive actors with a particular incentive structure.

Let me therefore suggest, that to the extent concepts like issue networks, implementation structures, and policy communities reflect some empirical reality, these can be understood as reflections of different incentive structures. Thus, specific constellations of incentives constitutes issue networks as well as constrains the actors forming them. Only stating that issue networks are different from policy communities is not particularly enlightening. Dowding (1985) discusses this and comes to the conclusion that the features of the actors ought to be scrutinized. Presumably, this would teach us more about the variances between policy networks. Why is that?

All actors carries rules and resources otherwise they would not be actors. Thus, it is not possible to be an actor in a vacuum (Giddens, 1984). Starting the analysis with the presumption that policy networks solely are formed by corporate actors may delude this. Individuals are the only ones that can dedicate meaning and purpose to their behavior. They are the basis of corporate entities and therefore the activities they perform must be scrutinized. This is the meaning of methodological individualism as it is reflected in the IAD framework. This does not mean that corporate actors are unimportant, but organizations act to the extent single individuals act. These individuals may draw upon rules and resources that are bounded in their organizations, but if or how this is done is not clarified by enumeration of actors, such as "the government," "the bureau of health" and "the county board." Networks understood only as systems of organizations that fraternize misses this point.

Individuals are faced with different kinds of incentives to act in particular ways. Thus, the German introduction of videotex differs from the French because the federal structure gives the German industrial actors more degrees of freedom (Schneider and Werle, 1991:108). In the 1960th the Israelian iron triangle dealing with health service is replaced by an issue network because the resources of the National Medical Association had accumulated (Yishal, 1992:101). Small firms in the Borken County behave different than those in Paderboren, because the implementation structure is different (Hull and Hjern, 1987). In Franco-Ontario separate advocacy coalitions (Mawhinney, 1993) reflect different cultural heritages that encompass particular core beliefs guiding people how to act with regard to education policy, and so forth.

Conclusion

The network perspective on policy making is "straggly." This is reflected in its multitude of concepts. However, it can be assumed that these concepts reflects a grappling with the same underlying problem, namely, how to conceptualize and understand processes of policy making in contemporary society. One way of advancing the approach is explicitly to apply collective action theory. This requires two things. First, a theory that encompasses instances broader than acting wholes, i.e. organizations. Smelser's theory of collective behavior fulfill this criteria. Second, the incorporation of the theory in a broader framework. The "Bloomington School" of policy analysis provides such a scaffold, namely, the IAD framework. Within this frame of

analysis different policy network constructs can be reduced to instances of collective action emanating from specific contexts. Each context may be understood in terms of specific incentive structures affecting particular action arenas.

This mode of analysis is the core of methodological individualism, as it has been performed by analysts since Hobbes (1668). Via the study of individual attributes, social systems can be scrutinized and understood. One of the main problem with this type of reasoning, however, is to explain how individual behavior can constitute systems. If this problem only was a matter of aggregation, the task would be easy. The development of markets, for example, are sometimes explained this way; i.e., as a summation of transactions. A democracy, however, is no market, it consists of a great number of other activities which are also to be explained, such as, systems of norms, political institutions, etc. An alternative way of performing policy network analysis in society is to keep the discussion on the macro level. But, by doing so the understanding how individual behavior constitute system solutions, is disregarded. This is precisely the case with a type of policy network analysis that use policy decisions and programs as organizing principle. Then, falsely, the analysts do not have to bother how, or if, the democratic system is recreated by individual behavior on the micro level.

The idea that some source of power, like "the government", is the sole creator of policies, and implement these through a line of steps, is misleading, but even if it was possible to discriminate between separate steps in the policy making process, *political* intentions are but some, among a multitude of ideas. In every policy area, either local economies, social services, education, or others, a great number of instances of collective actions are likely. All these forms are determined by a great number of factors. Some *determinants,* for example the huge cluster of variables we use to label *the context,* will always differ from one setting to the other. The same applies to definition of problems, the making of priorities, etc. As if this would not provide complexity enough, we also have to pay attention to the fact that there exist interdependencies among all the determinants of collective action. This makes it understandable why outcomes frequently deviate from the intentions held by central politicians, as these aims are reflected in policy decisions and programs.

This divergence, however, is not primarily a question of bad methods of governing, or that the political steering systems ought to be refined (which is sometimes indicated by research based of network approach). The conclusion is, that single authorities cannot govern in a way which is presumed by the theory of sovereign, political authority. If they could, however, we no longer are talking of democracy, i.e., societies where individuals govern themselves. Democracies based on the concept of sovereignty are particular vulnerable. Findings from the policy network approach illustrates this.

Taken this into account, how can modern society be govern? First it must be stated that the reason why contemporary democratic societies are kept together is not the existence of a single source of power. Societies are always ordered, but they are kept together by other sources. The emergence of "networking" in the processes of solving societal problems reflect this.

> There are other forms of order than the simple uni-centered order. There is order of the balance and inter-adjustment of many elements. The conception of the all-inclusive all-regulating state is as it were a pre-Copernican conception of the social system. It appeals to the primitive sense of symmetry. As we explore more deeply the social universe we must discard it and frame a conception more adequate to social reality. In this exploration we learn, among other things, to understand better the nature of the multi-group society of modern man. (Maclver, 1947: 316)

Liberal democracy is based on the idea of a single source of law presumably emanating from the *will* of the people. However, due to division of labor in generally, but also division within and among formal political authorities, this source of law is fragmented. In such a system different collectivities can, at the costs of other groups, pursue their own interests quite well, simply by adopting an "holdout strategy". If all groups behave like this we will have a classical case of prisoners dilemma. "A highly fragmented political system without substantial overlap among its many jurisdictions is especially vulnerable to this form of institutional failure" (V. Ostrom, 1991: 193).

The alternative would be a system built on an explicit strategy of distributed decision making, i.e., a federal system implying a covenantal democracy, not a liberal democracy. The qualities and problems with systems explicitly built on this approach, i.e., a theory of a compound republic, have been elaborated elsewhere (V. Ostrom, 1987, 1989, 1991), and is not the subject of this paper. It can be noted, however, that the theory of a compound republic presumes the existence of overlapping units of government. This theory does not regard fragmentation as a by-product. On the contrary, diversity is regarded as a main feature in society, and consequently this diversity is the quality upon which the political system is to be constructed. Accordingly, in a compound republic there are many legitimate sources of power, and therefore it would hardly be a subject of astonishment when one observes that policy making is a mixed business. Mixture and diversity is only regarded as a problem if we use uniformity as our yardstick.

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