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Abstract

This paper compares three theoretical frameworks that may contribute to our understanding of implementation processes, and assesses their relative strengths and limitations. Policy Network Analysis, Discourse Analysis, and Historical Institutionalism draw our attention to the relevance of resource dependencies, conflicting discourses and path dependencies respectively. The largely complementary character of these frameworks will be illustrated with a policy innovation in Dutch water management: the development and implementation of the new Space for the River policy, which is aimed at creating more space for the Dutch main rivers. It will be shown, that new policy ideas shape new interdependencies, and hence new patterns of interaction. Within the newly developing governance practices, however, the development of shared perceptions and perspectives is hindered by a struggle for discursive hegemony between the water management discourse and the spatial planning discourse. Finally, the deeply rooted river management institutions hinder the choice for a different institutional path, which is necessary for realising policy innovations.

Key-words

Policy implementation, Policy Network Analysis, Discourse analysis, Historical Institutionalism, river management.

Introduction

The subject of policy implementation has in the last few years received increasing attention (Barrett 2004; deLeon 1999; Hill and Hupe 2002; O'Toole 2000 and 2004), and some even plead for a 'revival of implementation studies' (Barrett 2004). Most contemporary implementation studies, which are sometimes indicated as the 'third generation of implementation studies' (Goggin *et al*. 1990; deLeon 1999), address the complex institutional setting in which policy implementation takes place, and the nature of the interactions taking place in the process. Rather than focusing on the conformity of policy outcomes with policy objectives, policy implementation, then, is conceived of as a problem of inter-organisational cooperation (O'Toole 2000 and 2004; Schofield and Sausman 2004). Parties involved in policy implementation have different values and perceptions, and try to influence the way in which policies are carried out. During these multi-actor implementation processes, policy makers may learn about the impact of their policies, and change their objectives and programmes. As a consequence, the boundary between policy formation and policy implementation is blurred.

In spite of the impressive amount of literature about policy implementation, any consensual or coherent theory is still lacking. DeLeon (1998 and 1999) is of the opinion that 'we should be satisfied (although not content) for the moment to understand - to explain without necessarily predicting - implementation'. Moreover, he argues that new perspectives, such as a post-positivist orientation, may contribute to a better understanding of policy implementation (deLeon 1999). If possible at all, the development of a sound explanatory framework for policy implementation is still far away. Rather than attempting to integrate theories in order to develop a coherent theory of policy implementation, multi-model analysis may be a more fruitful way of increasing our knowledge about policy implementation. A multi-model analysis produces different interpretations of the same implementation process, which enables us to compare the strengths and weaknesses of the models used (Allison 1971). Moreover, it makes it possible to use multiple frameworks in the same case study, even though they are based on different ontological or epistemological viewpoints (Hassard 1991). Beforehand, we know that none of the frameworks is able to

explain fully the implementation process and outcomes. We may expect, however, that the use of different theoretical frameworks, which shed light on different aspects relevant to understanding policy implementation, will contribute to our understanding of this complex social phenomenon.

The three frameworks (models) that we include in our analysis of policy implementation are Policy Network Analysis (Hanf and O'Toole 1992; Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan 1997; Marsh and Rhodes 1992; Marsh 1998), Discourse Analysis (Torfing 2005; Howarth 2000; Hajer 1995) and Historical Institutionalism (Kay 2005; North 1990; Pierson 2000). Although all three frameworks acknowledge the analytical importance of inter-organisational relationships for understanding policy implementation, each framework puts the emphasis on a different aspect of these relationships, and therefore produces a different account of policy implementation. Policy Network Analysis (PNA), which is frequently used in contemporary implementation studies, sheds light on the importance of resource dependencies for understanding the patterns of interaction between parties involved in policy implementation. Although Discourse Analysis (DA) has become rather popular in policy science in the past decade, it is not particularly associated with the subject of policy implementation. By pointing to the conflicting discursive structures within a policy domain, however, DA contributes to our understanding of the difficulties involved in developing shared problem perceptions and perspectives in the implementation process, and the need to develop discourse coalitions for realising policy innovations. Finally, Historical Institutionalism (HI) draws attention to the path dependent development of institutions (the 'rules of the game'), and hence the relatively limited array of alternative courses of action which parties playing the implementation game may choose from.

The central aim of this paper is to compare these different accounts of policy implementation, and to explore their relative strengths and limitations. We do this by using these frameworks to analyse the implementation process of a policy innovation in Dutch water management, the 'Space for the River' policy. This case study entails the elaboration and implementation of a new policy concept. Space for the River aims at creating more space for the Dutch main rivers in order to enlarge their discharge capacity. This is a break with the history of Dutch water management, which is mainly characterised by 'fighting

water' with dunes, dikes and other special flood defences. The case study is based on analyses of existing accounts of contemporary Dutch river management (e.g. Dicke 2001; Disco 2002; Meijerink 2004 and 2005; Van Hemert 1999; Wiering and Driessen 2001; Wiering and Immink Forthcoming), analyses of the content of policy documents, eight semi-structured interviews with key players in the Dutch Space for the River project, and participatory observations made by one of the authors in 2002 and 2003.[1] Space for the River is an ongoing process. In 2006 the national government will take a definite decision on the policy measures needed to enlarge the discharge capacity of the main rivers. By describing and analysing the implementation process for the Space for the River policy so far, we compare the analytical power of PNA, DA, and HI, and assess the merits of each framework.

In the following, we first introduce the basic concepts and arguments of PNA, DA, and HI, and compare their accounts of policy implementation (Section 2). Next, in Section 3, we introduce shortly the background, objectives, and organisation of the Space for the River project. The three interpretations of the implementation process presented, thereafter, are at the core of this paper. In Section 4 the main theoretical conclusions are given, and an agenda for further research is presented.

Three lenses on policy implementation

Policy Network Analysis

The concept of policy networks refers to the fact that 'policy making and implementation involves a large number and wide variety of public and private actors from the different levels and functional areas of government and society' (Hanf and O'Toole 1992, p. 169). In general, policy networks are defined as 'more or less stable patterns of social relations between interdependent actors, which take shape around policy problems and/or

[1] In that period, Sander Meijerink was employed at the Province of Overijssel and participated in the Space for the River project.

programmes' (Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan 1997, p. 6). Central concepts of the network perspective are *actors* and *interdependence* (or mutual dependence).

Usually, actors do not possess all the resources they need for solving the problems they perceive. Financial resources, formal decision making power or knowledge generally are distributed amongst a wide range of actors (Marsh and Rhodes 1992; Goverde and Van Tatenhove 2000). By employing different types of strategies, actors try to reduce or to manage their resource dependence on other actors. Policy making and implementation thus are the result of a *strategic* interaction process. Or, as Marsh (1998, p. 10) puts it: 'networks reflect patterns of interaction and resource exchange between agents and it is those resource exchanges which determine outcomes'.

According to O'Toole (1997), there are two main reasons why the implementation of policy innovations in complex networks is highly complicated: threats from uncertainty and a lack of institutionalisation. Others have tried to combine these two elements, and argue that there basically are three types of uncertainty in implementation processes: substantive, strategic and institutional uncertainty (Bueren *et al*. 2003). Parties involved in policy implementation, however, are able to learn and by that to reduce uncertainty. Substantive learning takes place if problem perceptions or perspectives are changed because of new available knowledge or because parties have learned from other parties' knowledge and insights. Strategic learning refers to learning about the interdependencies within a policy domain, about other parties' preferences, and, finally, about the effectiveness of network strategies used so far. Finally, institutional learning is about the development of new game rules to regulate interactions better, such as new arrangements for information exchange, monitoring or dispute settlement.

The distribution of resources and the resulting strategic interaction processes create serious problems for government's capacity for problem solving (Hanf and O'Toole 1992). Relatively independent actors have to work together in one way or another, while possessing different bits of information, representing different interests and pursuing different interests through separate, often conflicting courses of action (*ibid*.). At the same time, governments are increasingly facing problems of integration concerned with crossing sectoral boundaries as well as local, regional and national borders (*ibid*.). Therefore, part of

the PNA-literature deals with the role of governments as 'network managers' (O'Toole 1997; Bueren *et al*. 2003). It is their task to manage and facilitate collective decision making processes aimed at consensus building or reaching negotiated agreement. In other words, they should enhance processes of substantive, strategic and institutional learning (Bueren *et al*. 2003). A crucial aspect of this network management is the selection of the parties to be involved in decision making. The number of different perceptions and preferences, and hence the complexity, increases with the number of participants. On the other hand, parties which have not been given the opportunity to participate, but disagree with the outcome, may mobilise their resources to frustrate policy implementation.

Discourse Analysis

Building on the 'linguistic turn' in the 1970s, today the social sciences are undergoing a 'discursive turn' (Torfing 2005): there is an increasing recognition of the need to study discourse (see e.g. Howarth and Torfing 2005; Van den Brink and Metze Forthcoming 2006; Whetherell, Taylor and Yates 2001a and 2001b). Discourse analysis emerged as an attempt to overcome the limitations of mainstream positivist approaches to social science, primarily by grounding itself on different ontological and epistemological foundations. As Howarth (2000, p. 128) puts it: 'discourse theory is concerned with understanding and interpreting socially produced meanings rather than searching for objective causal explanations'. As distinct from place, actors, interests and institutions, which can be examined with all kinds of qualitative and quantitative methods, discourse analysis pays attention to meaning and arguments, and can therefore be useful to analyse another layer in policy implementation processes that 'transcends simple conflicts of interests' (Hajer 2005). The aim of discourse analysis is to show how language shapes the construction of reality; it is a tool to describe how actors and organisations (re)frame their interests and arguments in order to solve a policy problem or achieve a policy objective.

Generally, 'discourses' are characterised as systems of meaning, which constitute a more or less coherent framework for what can be said and done. Torfing (1999, p. 85) for example defines a discourse as 'a differential ensemble of signifying sequences in which meaning is constantly renegotiated'. And Hajer (1995, p. 44), following Foucault, describes

discourse as 'a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that are produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities'. Discourses constitute the identities and strategies of actors, as well as public access to the problem at hand and problem selection and perception. Thus understood, discourse analysis brings out a particular discursive structure in terms of which a certain issue is discussed, *and* it identifies the practices in which the discourse gets reproduced. The notion of 'discursive practice' (e.g. Howarth 2000) articulates the fact that discourse and practice are intertwined, that is, the discursive dimension is within practice.

As different systems of meaning make possible different forms of conduct, discourse theorists view politics (and hence processes of policy implementation) as 'a struggle for discursive hegemony in which actors try to secure support for their definition of reality' (Hajer 1995, p. 59). During this struggle for discursive hegemony, discourse-coalitions may be formed among actors who perceive their position and interest according to widely different discourses, but who are attracted to a specific set of story-lines (*ibid*., p. 65). Story-lines are narratives about social reality or symbolic references, which are evoked through e.g. the use of metaphors. It is precisely the open and metaphoric nature of these story-lines that provides the basis for the formation of discourse-coalitions. However, while struggling for discursive hegemony, it may not always be possible to relate previously independent practices to one another. The same open and metaphoric story-lines may hide enduring tensions between the actors involved, caused by their conflicting frames of reference. Hence, in order to restructure a particular discursive field (i.e. to solve the clash between competing discursive structures) it is necessary to find out what is hidden and what is revealed by the use of rhetoric.

Historical Institutionalism

Institutions have been a concern of different scientific disciplines since ancient times, but only recently, with the rise of the 'new institutionalism', have they been recognised as 'larger, considerably more complex and resourceful, and *prima facie* more important to collective life' (March and Olson 1984, p. 734). The new institutionalism does not

constitute a unified body of thought (Hall and Taylor 1996). It represents at least three different analytical approaches: historical institutionalism, rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism. Because we expect that the historical institutionalist framework in particular will produce insights which are complementary to the insights produced by PNA and DA, we confine ourselves to exploring the historical institutionalist account of implementing policy innovations.

The statements 'history matters' (North 1990) and 'the legacy of the past conditions our future' (Gains, John and Stoker 2005) characterise the distinctive perspective of historical institutionalists on policy continuity and change (Hall and Taylor 1996). The notion of 'path dependence' refers to the idea that preceding steps in a particular direction direct further movement in the same direction (Needham and Louw Forthcoming). Path-dependent developments often are explained by increasing returns (Gains, John and Stoker 2005). In an increasing returns process, Pierson (2000, p. 252) explains, 'the probability of further steps along the same path increases with each move down that path. This is because the *relative* benefits of the current activity compared with other possible options increase over time'. To put it differently, rational considerations of profit and loss often lead to the decision to continue the same practice. Hence, increasing returns processes are also described as self-reinforcing or positive feedback processes (*ibid.*). The costs of exit (that is, of choosing a different institutional path) rise with each step taken.

The usefulness of the concept of increasing returns in policy studies is the subject of debate. Kay (2005), for example, argues that increasing returns processes are sufficient but not necessary for path dependency. There are several other, non-increasing returns, mechanisms, which may explain a path dependent development of policies. Two of the various examples discussed by Kay (2005, p. 536) are that 'policies involve investments or disinvestments in administrative infrastructure; this transforms governmental capacity and the set of possible future policies that may be enacted' and that 'policies involve the establishment of formal or informal contracts with individuals which are costly to change'. Moreover, Kay points to the high transaction costs of agreeing another *type* of contract. The transaction costs of reaching agreement on a type of contract that parties are familiar with are considerably lower than that of a different type of contract. These mechanisms do not

rely on an increasing returns process, but have in common that they may cause 'high future switching costs' of a policy (*ibid.*).

What can historical institutionalists contribute to our understanding of policy innovations? Because policy innovation implies new policy practices, it requires the choice for a new institutional path. The concept of path dependence, therefore, is particularly helpful in explaining stability within a policy domain. The historical institutionalist account of policy change is less well developed. Most literature emphasises the continuity and persistence of institutional paths. A radical change would be possible only in exceptional cases of fundamental performance crises or external shocks (Knill and Lenschow 2001, p. 193). According to North (1990, p. 89), sources of such 'discontinuous institutional change' are wars, revolutions, conquests and natural disasters. Kay (2005), who explored the usefulness of the concept of path dependency for policy studies, proposes representing policy as 'a vector in policy space', that is, it has a velocity and a direction. Moments of crisis, then, may cause a change of velocity and/ or a change of direction. Building on this vector image, he argues that a seemingly small change of direction 'may turn out in retrospect to have been a critical juncture' (Kay 2005, p. 566).

Comparing the frameworks

Table 1 gives information on the main characteristics of each framework. Our comparison includes their (1) main research tradition, (2) main units of analysis, (2) conceptualisation of the relationship between power and institutions (4) conceptualisation of learning processes, and, finally, the sources of (5) policy implementation failure and (6) policy implementation success.

The three frameworks are embedded and developed in rather different research traditions. DA probably has the clearest position here, as this framework is strongly rooted in the social-constructivist research tradition. The basic units of analysis are policy discourses and discursive practices. HI, on the other hand, and the economically oriented literature particularly, has a positivist research approach. The main units of analysis are the institutional path and the actors who weigh the relative costs and benefits of continuing their path compared with choosing a different path. PNA could be positioned best

somewhere in between. Whereas most European literature concerns social-constructivist research, most American literature on policy networks fits into the positivist research tradition. The basic units of analysis are the policy network and the actors acting within that network.

All frameworks address the relationship between power and institutions. Whereas PNA stresses the importance of resource dependencies for understanding relatively stable patterns of interaction (networks), DA points to the struggle for discursive hegemony within a policy domain. Hegemonic discourses often are institutionalised in specific discursive practices, and such institutionalised practices may be called institutions. According to the historical institutionalists, institutions are the formal and informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions, which are embedded in the organisational structure of the polity or political economy (Hall and Taylor 1996). The main distinguishing feature of HI, however, is that institutions, hence power relations, are path dependent and thus shaped by history.

Besides the importance of power and institutions, all frameworks use the concept of learning. PNA-literature distinguishes between processes of substantive, strategic and institutional learning. DA draws our attention to the dynamic processes of meaning making, in which the perceptions of the parties involved may change, due to for example new experiences gained or the entrance of a new party. In HI, learning is conceived of as institutional learning, which generally is linked to clear performance crises or shock events. Following Kay (2005), we may distinguish between learning processes which induce a change of velocity of existing policies along a certain path, and learning processes which cause a change of path direction.

Exactly because of the different conceptualisation of the relationship between power and institutions and learning processes, the frameworks produce different accounts of the success and failure of implementing policy innovations. In PNA, implementation failure is mainly attributed to uncertainty, a lack of institutionalisation of the relevant networks, and/or a poor performance of network managers. Implementation success, then, is attributed to good network management, i.e. the constitution of a relevant network, and to an adequate facilitation of learning processes. DA explains implementation failure by the

co-existence of conflicting discursive structures, which hinder processes of shared meaning making. Chances for implementation success, then, could be increased by the formation of discourse coalitions. Finally, HI explains policy implementation failure by increasing returns and several non-increasing returns mechanisms, which make parties continue their path, while for realising policy innovations a new institutional path is needed. Implementation success, then, should be explained by institutional learning processes which induce a change of direction of an institutional path.

	Policy Network Analysis	*Discourse Analysis*	*Historical Institutionalism*
Main research tradition	Positivist and social-constructivist	Social-constructivist	Positivist
Unit of analysis	Policy network Actors	Discourse Discursive practice	Institutional path Actors
Conceptualisation of power and institutions	Resource dependencies shape patterns of interaction	Actors are involved in a struggle for discursive hegemony Hegemonic discourses are institutionalised	Institutions, hence power relations, are path dependent
Conceptualisation of learning processes	Substantive, strategic and institutional learning	Dynamic process of meaning making	Either a change of velocity of policy development along a certain path or a change of path direction (often linked to fundamental performance crises or shock events)
Sources of policy implementation failure	Uncertainty Lack of institutionalisation Poor network management	Conflicting discursive structures	Increasing returns and non-increasing returns mechanisms keeping parties on a particular institutional path
Sources of policy implementation success	Adequate network management aimed at: - Facilitating inter-organisational learning - Network constitution	Formation of discourse coalitions	Institutional learning which induces a change of path direction

Table 1: Comparing three accounts of implementing policy innovations: Policy Network Analysis, Discourse Analysis and Historical Institutionalism

The implementation process for the Dutch Space for the River policy

In 1993 and 1995 (near) river floods raised societal awareness of flood protection issues in the Netherlands, as well as awareness among river experts of the limits to controlling high water levels with higher dikes only. After lengthy controversies over several projects aimed at strengthening the dikes along the Dutch main rivers in the seventies and eighties of the 20th century - controversies which were about landscape, ecological and cultural issues - the Dutch government issued special legislation in 1995: the 'Delta Act for the main rivers'. This Act enabled the Ministry and the Water boards to realise a large scale dike strengthening program, the 'Deltaplan for the main rivers', within a relatively short time.

At about the same time, however, Dutch policy makers started to develop new flood defence strategies. To be able to cope with potential flood disasters in the future, that is, to anticipate impacts of climate change, sea level rise and increasing river discharges, they are now trying to elaborate and implement a new safety concept for the riverine areas, called 'space for the river' (Min. V&W 2000a and 2000b). The basic idea of this new safety concept is to enlarge the discharge capacity of the rivers by (temporarily and under specific circumstances) increasing the amount of space for the rivers (Wiering and Driessen 2001). The central objectives of the national Space for the River project are to develop and implement river-widening measures, which improve both the safety of the inhabitants, and at the same the spatial quality of the riverine areas (Min. V&W, Min. VROM and Min. LNV 2002). Setting dikes back, digging out old river branches or creating new ones (bypasses) are some possible measures.

For this project, the national government has formulated strict conditions beforehand. The present flood defence infrastructure is designed for a maximum Rhine river discharge of 15,000 m3/s, which corresponds with an estimated river flood frequency of once every 1,250 years. According to the new Space for the River policies, the Dutch Rhine river system should be able to accommodate a discharge of 16,000 m3/s in 2015 the latest, while in the long run (2050) it should even be able to accommodate 18,000 m3/s (without an increase of the estimated flood frequency of once every 1,250 years accepted now). In other words, short term river-widening measures (Space for the River project)

should fit within the long term safety strategy. The budget for a policy programme that can accommodate a Rhine river discharge of 16,000 m3/s in 2015 is limited to Euro 1.9 billion.

The national government now faces the challenge to develop and implement a coherent plan for the Rhine river and its branches *Waal*, *Nederrijn-Lek* and *IJssel*. For this reason it was decided first to organise the Space for the River project according to the legally prescribed procedure for large scale infrastructure projects, the 'PKB-procedure'.[2] This procedure consists of several stages: (1) an initiation stage, resulting in an inception report; (2) public consultation; (3) the drafting of a policy plan; (4) decision making by the Cabinet; (5) public consultation, and finally (6) the approval of the (modified) plan by Dutch Parliament. The PKB-procedure also comprises the preparation of a social cost-benefit analysis, and of an Environmental Impact Assessment.

Subsequently, the three main Ministries involved in the Space for the River project - the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management (initiator), the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality - decided to involve actively regional and local government agencies and NGOs in the initiation and policy preparation stage (stages 1-3 of the PKB-procedure). They asked the Dutch provinces, which have major competencies in the field of spatial planning, to issue a 'weighty' regional advice on a package of policy measures that meet the objectives set by the national government. In two Steering Groups, one for the Upper Rivers and one for the Lower Rivers, each chaired by a member of a provincial Executive, the provinces tried to reach a negotiated agreement with municipalities and water boards on a policy programme, while consulting NGOs and inhabitants of the flood prone areas at the same time. At the beginning of 2005, the two Steering Groups jointly issued the regional advice. In Spring 2005 the three Ministries and regions debated this advice, as the plans proposed did not meet the strict conditions formulated by the national government beforehand. The proposed policy programme exceeded the financial budget of Euro 1.9 billion. The central government then applied three different strategies to resolve that issue. First, it decided to use the budget, which was originally labelled for realising emergency flood polders, for implementing the projects proposed in the regional advice. Secondly, it

[2] PKB = Planologische Kern Beslissing (Strategic Spatial decision).

required the provinces to list possibilities for co-financing projects, and for developing public-private partnerships. Finally, in some cases cheaper alternatives, which often imply taking technical instead of spatial measures, were proposed.

In the following, we analyse the Space for the River implementation process in more detail. Using the frameworks introduced in Section 2, we first present three different interpretations of this process. We conclude this section with an assessment of the strengths and limitations of each interpretation.

Interpretation 1: New interdependencies in the river policy domain

Policy Network Analysis (PNA) draws our attention to the changing resource dependencies in the river policy domain, and hence to the changing patterns of interaction developing around these interdependencies. Because of the new substantive orientation of river policies, the national Ministry responsible for Water Management realised that, for the development and implementation of the Space for the River project, it had become increasingly dependent on the cooperation and competencies of other parties, such as spatial planners, NGOs and inhabitants of the areas along the main rivers. Therefore, the Ministry decided to ask the provinces to organise an interactive policy process, and to issue a 'weighty' regional advice. This can be interpreted as a deliberate attempt to manage better the increasingly complex networks the Ministry is coping with today, and by that to increase chances for policy implementation.

In the Space for the River implementation process, four types of (resource) dependencies play a crucial role, and it is precisely because of these dependencies that policy implementation requires adequate network management. The first important resource dependency is the division of formal decision making power. As the national government formulated strict conditions beforehand (16,000 m3/s, 2015 and Euro 1.9 billion), and the provinces were asked to prepare a regional *advice* that would meet these conditions, the national government has the ultimate decision making power. The choice to follow the rather centralistic procedure for large scale infrastructure projects indicates that the Ministry wants to keep formal decision making power in Dutch river management. As a consequence, the strategic interactions in the Steering Groups for the Upper and the Lower

Rivers take place within the 'shadow of hierarchy'. On the other hand, regional and local parties do possess many resources, such as competencies in the field of spatial planning, ample possibilities for litigation or access to the media, to frustrate the implementation of policies they do not support. Therefore, in spite of the unequal division of formal decision making power, the national government remains largely dependent on the cooperation of other parties. Now that the regional advice has been issued and the parties involved are discussing the further organisation of the Space for the River implementation process, the division of formal decision making power is being debated seriously. The provinces would like to have the lead, mainly because they have all the formal spatial planning competencies, which are needed for the actual implementation of river-widening measures. But so far, the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management prefers to keep the lead, as it feels responsible for realising the safety objectives. The Ministry is afraid that the provinces might attach more importance to issues of economic development or spatial quality than to safety.

The second resource dependency relevant to understanding the Space for the River implementation process is the distribution of financial means. The Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management brings in by far most financial resources (Euro 1.9 billion) for implementing this policy innovation. The two other Ministries involved, as well as the regional and local parties, bring in hardly any resources. It almost automatically follows that realising safety for the about 4 million inhabitants of the riverine areas is elevated to the first and most important objective of Space for the River. Less importance is attached, especially by the Ministry, to the improvement of the spatial quality of the river landscape, also because this is in most cases a very expensive operation. Regional and local parties, however, argue that the available financial resources are meant not only for realising safety, but also for improving the spatial quality of the riverine areas. Moreover, they do not accept that the financial budget is limited to Euro 1.9 billion, mainly because this budget is not based on any serious inventory of the costs which the creation of more space for the river entails. Nevertheless, the chances for increasing the Space for the River budget are relatively small. Due to the socio-economic situation in the Netherlands, budgets in all policy sectors are being cut. Only after the regional advice had been issued, did the

national government ask regional and local parties to inventory possibilities for co-financing river-widening measures.

The distribution of expert knowledge is the third important resource dependency. Regional and local parties may have the most and the best knowledge about possibilities for combining different functions (i.e. about spatial planning issues), and about chances for creating public support for specific river-widening measures, they clearly lack the more technical knowledge about river safety issues. As a consequence, the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management and its knowledge institute for Inland Water Management participated in all forums where policy measures were discussed. The presence and knowledge advantage of the Ministry made some regional and local parties feel that the Ministry, rather than the provinces, is leading the regional debate (Meijerink 2004). On the other hand, actually to create space for the river, the Ministry has to acknowledge the 'weighty' status of the regional advice. Without the help of regional and local parties, it will be very difficult to implement Space for the River.

Finally, it is important to note that, typically for the water policy domain, the dependencies take place within a river basin. Because of (cross-border) hydrological relationships, parties situated downstream are largely dependent on the strategies employed by the upstream parties. For this reason, in the European Water Framework Directive (EWFD) the notion of 'river basin management' has been introduced. The debate on the possible future Rhine river discharge, as well as the related debate on the construction of emergency flood polders, illustrate the impact which these hydrological dependencies may have on water policy making and implementation. The basic idea behind these polders is that, in case the Rhine river discharge should exceed the norm discharges of 15,000 m3/s (current situation), 16,000 m3/s (in 2015) or 18,000 m3/s (>2050) respectively, a few sparsely populated polders (after being evacuated) will be purposefully flooded to protect densely populated areas and/or cities downstream (Commissie Noodoverloopgebieden 2002). The regional planning agencies, most local governments and the affected parties have always strongly opposed the concept of emergency flood polders. They argue that the prediction of a possible future Rhine river discharge of 18,000 m3/s is unrealistic, because in that case immense river floods would occur in Germany, and, as a consequence, the

Rhine water levels in the Netherlands would decrease considerably. In spite of lengthy joint international research projects on the possible future Rhine river discharge, the key-parties involved do not yet have a shared perception of the problem. At the beginning of 2005, the State Secretary of Transport, Public Works and Water Management therefore decided to postpone the creation of emergency flood polders.

To conclude, as new parties entered the Space for the River policy arena, new patterns of interaction have developed. In 2003 and 2004, regional and local parties actively searched for possibilities to combine river-widening measures with other policy objectives, such as the enlargement of nature areas or the creation of possibilities for water recreation. Within the Steering Groups for the Upper and the Lower Rivers, and several related platforms, two distinct but interrelated processes took place. First, during the interactions, parties learned about the impact which various combinations of policy measures would have on the water levels in the main rivers. This substantive learning was supported by a Decision Support System, the 'Blokkendoos'. Secondly, the interactions entailed implicit and explicit negotiations. Parties tried to combine different and often conflicting perspectives, that is, they tried to develop multi-purpose plans acceptable to most of them. However, in spite of the rather innovative process design aimed at joint learning, and at creating administrative and societal support for an ambitious river policy programme, the real power of the regional parties should not be overemphasised. The Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management still possesses at least three important sources of power: the ultimate decision making power, expert knowledge about river safety issues, and Euro 1.9 billion.

Interpretation 2: New and competing discourses in the river policy domain

In the previous section we have seen that (resource) dependencies in the river policy domain have changed, and that new parties have entered the river policy arenas. Subsequently, Discourse Analysis (DA) helps us see that with the entrance of these new parties, a new discursive structure also has entered the river policy arenas, namely the spatial planning discourse. Now, both water managers and spatial planners have become attracted to the same story-line of creating more space for the main rivers, and hence they

have formed a discourse-coalition to develop and implement the various river-widening measures. However, the introduction of the Space for the River policy also entails a struggle for discursive hegemony between the water management discourse and the spatial planning discourse. Water managers as well as spatial planners want their framing and defining of Space for the River to be dominant.

The core of the water management discourse on Space for the River is summarised in the following statement: 'water is *the* ordering principle of spatial planning' (see e.g. Commissie Waterbeheer 21e Eeuw). For water managers, working at the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management, water boards, or at water departments of provinces, water safety should always come first. After all, without flood protection the Netherlands would be much smaller, and many land use functions would not be possible. In line with this, Space for the River is considered to be a crucial project: the only way of guaranteeing safety for the about 4 million inhabitants of the riverine areas is by increasing the discharge capacity of the main rivers. Realising water safety therefore is the first and most important objective of the Space for the River project. Consequently, for water managers, improving the spatial quality of the river landscape is the secondary objective of this project.

In principle, instead of raising and strengthening dikes, water managers want to create space for the riverbed itself (Immink 2005; Wiering and Immink Forthcoming), so that it can accommodate potential high river discharges. However, to implement this new water safety strategy, the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management formulated strict conditions beforehand: in 2015, the Dutch main rivers should be able to accommodate a Rhine river discharge of 16,000 m3/s, while in the long run (2050) these rivers should be able to accommodate 18,000 m3/s. The financial budget for this task is limited to Euro 1.9 billion. Underlying the safety norms is a technocratic risk perception. Water managers perceive flooding risks as measurable norms based on knowledge about physical cause-effect relations, that is, the probability of the occurrence of peak discharges and the strength and height of the dikes (Hoes 2005; Immink 2005; Wiering and Immink Forthcoming). By modelling the effects of river-widening measures, the potential influence of these measures on the river discharges can be predicted. Then, also from a cost-control

perspective, the traditional technical measures are the most effective and efficient to accommodate a Rhine river discharge of 16,000 m3/s in 2015. Furthermore, several long term reservations of areas (spatial claims) are needed for river-widening measures to be taken in the future, that is, after 2015 (Min. V&W, Min. VROM and Min. LNV 2005).

In order to reach the national flood protection goals, that is, to control the final impact of, and the coherence between the various river-widening measures, generally water managers are of the opinion that for the implementation of Space for the River a strong national direction is necessary (Min. V&W, Min. VROM and Min. LNV 2005). And as the Ministry for Transport, Public Works and Water Management has succeeded in this task for centuries, and also possesses all the required expert knowledge, this Ministry should be the only one responsible for realising water safety for the inhabitants of the riverine areas. Hence, the naming and framing of Space for the River by water managers can also be characterised as 'Space for the Engineer' (Van Hemert 1999).

Within the field of spatial planning, there is an increasing awareness of water management issues. In both the Fifth National Policy Document on Spatial Planning (Min. VROM 2001) and the National Spatial Strategy (Min. VROM 2004) the importance of water safety is acknowledged. The National Spatial Strategy even reserves space along the main rivers for river-widening measures to be taken in the future. However, as spatial planners are used to balance interests, for them water is *just one of the* ordering principles of spatial planning. It is one of the many claims on the scarce space. Other land use functions such as housing, agriculture, nature development and recreation are equally important. Hence, for spatial planners, employed at the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, or at spatial planning departments of provinces, Space for the River is just one of the many relevant developments. Spatial planners wanted to cooperate in the Space for the River project, and prepare a regional advice, primarily to improve the spatial quality of the river landscape. They oppose the traditional technical measures, and generally are enthusiastic about the creation of river bypasses and the replacement of dikes.

For spatial planners, flooding risks are not measurable norms but social constructions in the sense that they depend on the specific regional and local context, as

well as on the risk perceptions of the inhabitants of these riverine areas (Immink 2005; Wiering and Immink Forthcoming). In addition, they are of the opinion that retaining strictly the safety objectives, in combination with the offered limited budget, inevitably implies a choice for technical measures. As a result, spatial planners take a more flexible approach towards the safety norms as formulated by the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management. With regard to the short term safety objective, they have pleaded for a differentiation of the safety norms, as for some river sections it would be acceptable if the safety norm were to be reached not in 2015, but a few years later. In that case, the parties involved would have more time to search for supplementary resources to finance spatial measures. With regard to the long term safety objective, spatial planners do not like provisional (long term) reservations of areas. For that blocks the economic development in large areas, while at the same time the national Ministry is unable to guarantee that a specific project, for example a planned bypass, will ever be realised. Since we expect the Rhine river discharge will be more than 16,000 m3/s in the future, and as it is important to be able to react to new circumstances, according to most spatial planners it would be better to start with replacing dikes and creating bypasses right now, that is, to 'do it good at once' (Stuurgroep Bovenrivieren and Stuurgroep Benedenrivieren 2005).

To implement the various river-widening measures, instead of a strong national direction and control by the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management, spatial planners have suggested an alternative model in which there is space for different initiators. Depending on the type of river-widening measure, a province, a water board or the Directorate General for Public Works and Water Management ('*Rijkswaterstaat*') will be responsible for the implementation process. As *Rijkswaterstaat* and the water boards have always successfully raised and strengthened dikes and dredged rivers, these 'traditional' water managers are the most appropriate and logic initiators of the technical projects. However, as the provinces have the necessary spatial planning competencies, and most and best knowledge about possibilities to combine different functions and about chances for creating public support, they are the most logic initiator of the spatial projects. Hence, spatial planners advocate a differentiation in implementation procedures.

To conclude, with the introduction of the Space for the River policy, Dutch water managers and spatial planners have come closer to each other and formed a discourse-coalition. However, as they put a different emphasis on the main objectives of Space for the River, that is, name and frame this policy in a different way, the attempt to relate previously independent practices to one another has not succeeded yet. Water managers and spatial planners separately try to institutionalise (i.e. make dominant) their discourse on Space for the River.

Interpretation 3: The institutional path taken by the policy for river management

The dilemmas described in the previous section show that the clash between the water management discourse and the spatial planning discourse is far from over. To understand better this struggle for discursive hegemony, it is important to consider the institutional path taken by the policy for river management. Already in the 9th century, the Dutch started to fight the water with dikes, dams, dunes and other flood defences. Water managers continued this practice for centuries, and, accordingly, created the Netherlands. For the implementation of Space for the River, however, they have to stop fighting the water, and instead take a new substantive path. According to historical institutionalists this is not an easy task: once a particular path is taken, it is very difficult - if not impossible - to take a different path. To put it differently, as the water management discourse has been institutionalised during a long historical process, for spatial planners it will be problematic to make their discourse on Space for the River hegemonic. Three important factors keep the policy for river management on the existing institutional path.

Clearly, the implementation of the Space for the River policy is hindered by 'sunk capital', that is, the investments which have been made in dikes, dams, dunes and other special flood defences, as well as the investments made on the newly or the better protected lands. The argument here is twofold. First, as the physical infrastructure is already there, strengthening and raising dikes in most cases is relatively cheap as compared with the creation of space for the river. Moreover, these dikes have become a 'natural' part of the Dutch polder landscape. Secondly, exactly because of the flood protection infrastructure, investments on the new or better protected grounds have increased. And where new

investments have been made, there has been a growing demand for higher safety standards (higher dikes). This is a self reinforcing process, which keeps parties on the institutional path of constructing dikes.

Furthermore, there is a large body of expert knowledge and experience about how to fight the water. For centuries, water managers have designed high-tech solutions to prevent flood disasters. They are used to tackling problems by means of technical engineering, based on a rational scientific methodology. Until recently, the national governmental agency *Rijkswaterstaat* was called 'a state within the state', and the water sector was dominated by an epistemic community of Delft civil engineers (Disco 2002; Koot and Dobbinga 2004; Meijerink 2005). Even today, despite several organisational transitions, the Dutch water sector is known for its strong 'esprit de corps' (Dicke 2001). This water management culture has proven to be very successful in protecting the Dutch against sea and river floods in the past centuries. However, *Rijkswaterstaat* has often faced difficulties in adapting to new circumstances, such as an increased environmental awareness and processes of democratisation in Dutch society (Meijerink 2005).

Finally, the existing institutional arrangements (or administrative infrastructure) hinder the choice for a different institutional path. An example is the legally required procedure for large scale infrastructure projects, in Dutch: the 'PKB-procedure'. This procedure supports classical hierarchical decision making aimed at a rational optimisation of policies more than new interactive modes of governance (Deelstra *et al*. 2003; Nooteboom and Teisman 2003), such as the process leading to the 'weighty regional advice' from the Dutch provinces.

In spite of these various sources of institutional inertia, there is no lock-in. External shocks, such as the Rhine and Meuse near river floods in 1993 and 1995, have paved the way for several institutional learning processes. Whereas the rapid implementation of the Delta plan for the main rivers can be interpreted best as a more speedy implementation of policies on the same institutional path, other observations seem to indicate a change of direction of this path as well. First, by requiring the provinces to issue a regional advice, the Ministry has initiated an innovative and interactive policy process. As we have seen, the new parties entering the river policy domain introduced a new policy discourse as well.

Secondly, the draft governmental decision on the Space for the River policy programme, which was taken in April 2005, contains various proposals for creating more space for the river, even though in the short run the measures proposed are more costly than strengthening the existing dikes. Thirdly, water managers are now developing new methods for determining safety standards (Project FLORIS - Flood Risks and Safety in the Netherlands). Whereas in the current approach, safety standards are based on flood frequency, which for the riverine areas should not be more than once every 1,250 years, the 'flood risk approach' also takes into account the potential damage (deaths and damage to real estate) which river floods may cause. It is generally expected that this new approach will replace the 'old' safety standards in the Embankment Act (Wet op de Waterkering) in the near future. In sum, various developments seem to indicate incremental changes in the institutional path which has been followed within the river policy domain in the past centuries. Although it is too early yet to conclude whether these changes signify a critical juncture, practices are changing in the Dutch river policy domain.

Conclusion

The central aim of this paper was to compare three different accounts of policy implementation, and to explore their relative strengths and limitations. Policy Network Analysis (PNA), Discourse Analysis (DA) and Historical Institutionalism (HI) have all contributed to our understanding of the implementation of the Space for the River policy. As we have seen, the three frameworks shed light on different aspects of policy implementation, and hence they produce different accounts of the success and failure of policy implementation.

Policy Network Analysis sheds light on the changing resource dependencies within the river policy domain. These new dependencies explain why there is an urgent need for cooperation between water management agencies, spatial planners, NGOs and the inhabitants of the riverine areas, if they want to improve water safety for these inhabitants. The Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management has recognised this need,

and therefore decided to involve new parties in the debate about policy implementation. By requiring the provinces to issue a regional advice, the Ministry tried to manage the increasingly complex networks which are shaped around river issues, and with that tried to increase chances for successful policy implementation. With its focus on resource dependence, however, PNA underexposes the ideational dimension of the policy process. It fails to specify why it is so difficult to realise a consensus between the interdependent actors. Here, both DA and HI offer useful complementary insights.

Unlike PNA, Discourse Analysis pays attention to the naming and framing of the new river policies, and to the formation of discourse-coalitions based on open concepts, metaphors or story-lines. The new story line of 'Space for the River' indicates that a new discourse-coalition is developing within the river policy domain. Exactly because of the competing discursive structures, however, this coalition is still rather weak. Diverse observations indicate that there is an ongoing struggle for discursive hegemony between the water management discourse and the spatial planning discourse on Space for the River, which explains why parties face difficulties in developing shared perceptions of the problems and shared perspectives on the Dutch river landscape. With a focus on resource dependencies and processes of naming and framing respectively, PNA and DA are largely complementary, and together they offer a rather comprehensive account of policy implementation and implementation failure. Still, it has proven to be useful to include another interpretation in our analysis.

Historical Institutionalism points to the path-dependent development of institutions, and explains why it is difficult to choose a different institutional path, that is, to realise a policy innovation. Over the past centuries, the path of development has been to tame the river water by constructing dikes. The creation of more space for the river, therefore, implies the choice for a new path. However, the construction of dikes stimulates new investments on the new and better protected lands, and because of these investments higher safety levels are demanded. This self-reinforcing process makes parties continue the institutional path which was chosen in the past. Other sources of institutional inertia, which we have distinguished, are the available expert knowledge and experience, and existing regulations.

The largely complementary insights produced by these frameworks underline the usefulness of multi-model analyses in policy science. Discourse Analysis particularly, by emphasising the naming and framing of policy issues, is a relatively new method in implementation research which may be helpful in understanding some of the complexities of joint implementation efforts. As regards future implementation research, one of the main challenges will be to learn more about how parties actually struggle for discursive hegemony, and how some parties are able to develop new practices, which do not fit the hegemonic and institutionalised discourse. Finally, theories of path dependence are rather successful in explaining continuity or inertia, hence the failure to implement new policy. They do, however, lack a credible account of policy change. Here, our case analysis has demonstrated that both Policy Network Analysis and Discourse Analysis are helpful. It has shown that, in spite of the difficulties involved in changing policy practices, the Ministry of Transport, Public Works has been able to employ new strategies of network management, and that a new discourse-coalition is developing within the river policy domain. Moreover, several concrete plans for creating space for the river have been developed. These observations could be interpreted as an incremental change of institutional path, which in the long run may turn out to be a critical juncture.

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