

Political Modernisation and Policy Arrangements: A Framework for Understanding Environmental Policy Change

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Abstract Since its emergence in the early seventies, the environmental policy domain has substantially changed in terms of its content, organisation and instrumentation. Hitherto these changes have been studied primarily as strategic responses of the actors involved. This article aims to conceive recent changes in environmental policies in terms of political modernisation on the one hand, and in terms of the renewal of policy arrangements on the other. Political modernisation refers to structural processes of changing interrelations between state, market and civil society, and to new conceptions and practices of governance. Policy arrangements refer to the substance and the organisation of policy domains in terms of policy discourses, coalitions, rules of the game and resources. This analytical framework aims to do justice to policy dynamics caused by both strategic and structural factors. It therefore provides new perspectives on the understanding of recent changes in environmental policy and also proves to be helpful in improving those policies.

Introduction

Environmental policy is a much studied policy area in the Western world, also in the Netherlands. Dutch research so far has particularly focused on the strategic, instrumental and organisational modernisation of environmental policy. These reforms have chiefly been studied as the strategic responses of players acting rationally, especially of players involved in the policy field itself. Less attention has been paid to structural political changes and their impact on environmental policy and other areas. The approach presented here aims to link structural political

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changes and strategic policy renewal. The concepts of ‘political modernisation’ and ‘policy arrangements’ offer a conceptual framework that should allow a more fruitful analysis of the renewal of environmental policy (although the authors are convinced that the framework is suitable to be applied to other policy domains than the environment as well, inside and outside the Netherlands).

This article presents that conceptual framework. The next section focuses on the most common approaches to analysing environmental policy, which naturally leads on to the formulation of a number of desirable alternative approaches. The third section sets out the key concepts and scientific background to these approaches. The fourth section examines the concepts of ‘policy arrangements’ and ‘political modernisation’ in more depth. Finally, the last section indicates how this approach can be used for empirical analyses and policy development and discusses our experience with it up to now.

The Scientific Study of Environmental Policy

Environmental policy is a field that has been the subject of thorough research investigations in the Netherlands, even more than in other countries. Even a strictly defined selection quickly produces tens of Ph.D theses and a multitude of other publications (see Schuddeboom, 1990; Smits and Ringeling, 1997; Leroy and Nelissen, 1999). The most important explanation for the volume of published research can probably be found in the normative and empirical attraction of this young and ambitious policy field and the relatively generous resources available in the Netherlands for research on the environment and environmental policy. Whatever the reason, environmental policy has been an interesting practice ground and research field for policy-makers and academics working in policy studies since the early 1980s.

More interesting than the volume of scientific research on environmental policy are the material objects studied and the theories employed in this context. In its choice of objects and theories, environmental policy research over the last 20 years has shown a remarkable parallel with the development in environmental policy on the one hand and with general changes in thinking about policy and administration on the other hand. The eighties were characterised by an emphasis on evaluation and implementation, a choice that was partially justified by the implementation and enforcement problems in environmental policy (Schuddeboom, 1990). Solutions were brought up based on predominantly rational synoptic policy models. The disasters in Enschede (explosion of a firework factory in the city centre) and Volendam (fire in a discotheque with lots of casualties) have brought these themes back into the Dutch public arena again, albeit in a different way. In the late 1980s and especially in the 1990s, the research subject and approach shifted to questions of instrumentation, interorganisational networks and procedure. This shift was demonstrably bound up with reforms in The Hague and at international level, where partly as a consequence of discussions on the changing role of the government in environmental policy, new forms of governance were being sought. The Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment, in particular, repeatedly developed new policy instruments, policy organisations and forms of process in that period. The permits, levies, subsidies, communication instruments, area-based policy networks, forms of consultation modelled on the polder in target

group policy and participative procedure in local environmental policy reveal a kaleidoscope of research subjects offered by politics and policy. A selection of Ph.D theses in the subject area illustrate this clearly (see Smits and Ringeling, 1997; Leroy and Nelissen, 1999).

A parallel development of scientific and policy agendas can be observed therefore. However, reforms in environmental policy have mainly been studied as strategic responses to problems that have been raised in administration. Less attention has been paid to the fact that these reforms, like the target groups policy, integrated area-based environmental policy and local environmental policy, are also expressions of political changes, for instance, a movement and expansion of politics, administration and policy beyond the current formal institutional frameworks (Bovens et al., 1995; Duyvendak, 1997 and Witteveen, 2000). As a consequence of increasing interwovenness of state, market and civil society, steering and the pursuit of policy are increasingly taking shape in expanding areas of transition or interference zones between these three subsystems. Their respective logics (hierarchical steering, competition and solidarity) which have been incompatible up to now, are now accepted as an ontological or logical plurality and are an essential part of the current philosophy of steering (see Pestman and Van Tatenhove, 1998; Hajer, 2000).

These structural social and political developments and their impact on steering and pursuit of policy have received relatively little attention in the study of environmental policy. Of course, there are major differences between the theories used in research on environmental policy, many nuances and gradations, varying from strongly action-oriented approaches, via approaches geared to organisational and interorganisational change to approaches geared to long-term structural change. Despite this diversity the public administration science perspective predominates, with the suggestion of a unilinear trend from rational, hierarchical steering and pursuit of policy to governance, network steering and contextual pursuit of policy. The demand for research that is relevant to policy and the ambition to improve the effectiveness of policy through the use of new insights, have contributed to the ascendancy of an instrumental view of policy and prescription-based analyses in public administration science. Twenty years of public administration-based environmental research has therefore produced a treasure-trove of empirical analyses and recommendations for strategic policy action. At the same time there has been a relative overrepresentation of analyses of problems and processes defined by policy-makers themselves. These various factors have led to relatively little attention being paid to more structural and long-term developments in environmental policy itself, and a fortiori in politics and society.

We have drawn attention to this relative distortion in the theoretical and empirical focus of Dutch environmental policy research before (Van Tatenhove, 1993; Van Tatenhove and Leroy, 1995), in connection with bias in the network approach. At that time we also noted a preponderance of analyses of policy processes in the here and now, an unbalanced approach to the interaction between actor and structure, an overexposure from a prescriptive public administration science perspective, and a relative neglect of structural, social and political developments (*ibidem*: 141).

In discussing and further developing concepts such as discourse coalitions, configurations, policy instrumentation, policy networks, advocacy coalitions and so on, and partly based on sociological and political science insights into change

processes, we have been working since then on a programme of theoretical and empirical environmental policy research. The aims and aspirations of that programme are implicit in the points already made: (a) to make a connection between all kinds of everyday policy processes and long-term developments; (b) to do justice to the interaction between actor and structure, meaning the relationship between (the impact of) the strategic action of actors and structural developments; and (c) to do justice to broader social and political developments that are also, but not exclusively, influential in the environmental policy domain. However, that means that insights from public administration science must be extended and combined with insights from general sociology and political science. We published a volume on our research (Van Tatenhove et al., 2000) and are preparing a new one (Arts and Leroy, [forthcoming](#)). Meanwhile the programme has progressed. In this article we present a synthesised summary. As stated above, the next section discusses the basic principles and concepts. These are then further developed and illustrated based on the empirical research carried out so far.

Basic Concepts, Background and Positioning

The argument presented above clearly shows that we hope to heed the continual interaction between traditional and new initiatives in the pursuit of policy and steering. Traditional initiatives are sometimes replaced, but frequently different definitions of problems, approaches to solutions and forms of steering coexist. Continuity and change both result partly from strategic innovations in environmental policy in practice and partly from more comprehensive social transformation processes. The policy arrangements approach was developed to assist understanding of the synthesis of stability and dynamism in environmental policy. It is based on three connected theoretical concepts: institutionalisation, policy arrangements and political modernisation.

The concept of *institutionalisation*, in keeping with general sociological tradition, refers to the phenomenon whereby patterns arise in people's actions, fluid behaviour gradually solidifies into structures, and those structures in their turn structure behaviour. When applied to policy processes, institutionalisation refers to the fact that relatively stable definitions of problems and approaches to solutions gradually arise in and around policy, more or less fixed patterns of divisions of tasks and interaction develop between actors, policy processes develop in accordance with more or less fixed rules and so on. The concept, therefore, incorporates the development of structures, stabilisation and change: institutions, no matter how stable they appear at first sight, are subject to continual change and adjustment, deconstruction and reconstruction. The perspective of institutionalisation is a very good perspective from which to study the development of environmental policy, in the Netherlands and elsewhere, over the longer term (see Van Tatenhove, 1993).

Policy arrangements are defined as the temporary stabilisation of the content and organisation of a policy domain. The shaping and structuring of a policy arrangement in terms of content and organisation—to be understood as the institutionalisation of policy arrangements—is in continual flux. This is especially so when one realises that policy arrangements, due to processes of internationalisation, cannot really be coupled to a particular policy level: they take on, almost by definition, a multi-level character, which makes them more dynamic. The main aim

of this approach is to understand and analyse this on-going institutionalisation of policy arrangements, as a result of the interplay between the interactions of actors participating in putting policy into practice on a daily basis on the one hand, and processes of social and political change (political modernisation) on the other hand. It is precisely this interplay between the level of action and the structural level that produces a specific analysis and interpretation of policy arrangements and of innovative forms of steering.

The concept of *political modernisation*, as stated, refers to structural processes of social change and their impact on the political domain. As a consequence of all kinds of social, economic and political processes such as individualisation, Europeanisation and globalisation, new relationships are coming into being between state, market and civil society, new power relationships between these subsystems, and different ideas and practices on steering and policy. Phases can be distinguished in that political modernisation, which is seen as a structural process, and we will return to these phases later. Another important claim is that political modernisation, as a structural process, manifests itself in all kinds of day-to-day policy practices, which in turn influence this 'grand' process (although indirectly, in a diffuse manner and in the longer run, generally speaking). Political modernisation, being a comprehensive change in the whole political domain, also affects all areas of policy in principle. This means that political modernisation, like policy arrangements, is a concept whose application need not be confined to environmental policy. This aspiration to develop an approach with a fundamentally broader relevance is a deliberate choice.

The concepts of policy arrangement and political modernisation will be explained in more detail below. However, they are concepts that deserve to be looked at from the perspective of a certain theoretical context, as our approach has been developed in debate with and inspired by other recent movements and debates in general sociology, political science, science of public administration and environmental sociology. It will be clear from our argument so far that, by defining the concept of policy arrangement at the level of social practice (Giddens, 1984) or figuration (Elias, 1982), we regard the institutionalisation of policy arrangements as a consequence of the duality of actor and structure.

Our approach has also been inspired by recent opinions in general sociology on post-modernity, post-materialism and reflexive modernisation, both in a general sense and in relation to politics and policy (see, for instance, Albrow, 1996; Beck, 1986; Giddens, 1990; Beck et al., 1994; Inglehart, 1995). However, these authors vary in their approach to and appreciation of these developments and what they call them. Nevertheless they all think that our Western societies have reached a new, qualitatively different, form of modernity. We feel greater affinity with authors who describe various phenomena as late or reflexive modernisation, than with the post-modernism of, for instance, Albrow. This is because we see this as a continuous process of political modernisation rather than a radical break, a shifting rather than a fundamentally different role for the nation state.

Although almost all the authors mentioned cite environmental problems as an manifestation of present-day modernity, environmental sociologists, especially those coming from the perspective of ecological modernisation, ascribe a catalytic role to environmental problems and the approach to solving them in this process of social and political modernisation (Jänicke, 1993; Mol, 1995; Spaargaren, 1997). Environmental issues are seen as an outstanding manifestation of and challenge for a different modernity and a different political and social capacity for change and steering.

As already indicated, we have also been inspired by recent theories on new forms of steering and ‘multi-actor policy pursuit’ in networks, coalitions and configurations (Bekkers, 1996; Godfroij and Nelissen, 1993; Kooiman, 1993; Kickert et al., 1997; Marsh and Rhodes, 1992; Sabatier, 1987; Teisman, 1995). This literature has also been an inspiration to many colleagues in the field of environmental policy and has contributed to the development of new insights into steering, relative controllability and changing relationships, including power relationships, between state, market and society. The sketch in the first section should make clear that we see the often rather voluntary nature of Dutch public administration science in particular as a problem. The emphasis on actors, interactions and processes, in other words on actors acting strategically, tends not to do sufficient justice to the duality of actor and structure, that is it tends to undervalue the impact of structural variables like rules, power and so on.

In the third place we have drawn inspiration from a number of recent theoretical and empirical studies in which, from a strong or moderate social-constructivism or from a discourse analysis approach, attention is concentrated entirely on the content of problems of policy, the social and political processes of ‘naming’ and ‘framing,’ and their impact on policy processes (see Hannigan, 1995; Dryzek, 1997; Hajer, 1995; Dicke, 2000). These approaches, no matter how diverse, not only offer to offset an overconcentration on instrumentation, development of organisations and procedure in the content of policies, but also allow us to analyse and understand the social processes behind shifting perceptions, definitions of problems and approaches to solutions. We are not opting for radical social-constructivism here, that tends to completely reduce action to discursive interaction, and in which structure and power are only deemed relevant via the perceptions of actors. While it is true that structures are formed and transformed through continual interaction, they in turn also give structure to that interaction.

Finally, recently developed theories on internationalisation, Europeanisation, transnationalisation and globalisation on the one hand, and insights into the phenomenon of *multi-level governance* on the other hand have been used (see Andersen and Liefferink, 1997; Kohler-Koch and Eising, 1999; Liefferink et al., 1993; Risse-Kappen, 1995; Scharpf, 1985; Wallace and Wallace, 1996; Waters, 1995). These theories show that the study of political modernisation and policy change within the model of the nation state and confined to one level of policy pursuit has been superseded. Policy arrangements are created and develop on different levels and are mutually influential. This means that policy arrangements take on a multi-level character, as illustrated by the role of Brussels in Dutch policy practice, the influence of the World Bank on the policies of developing countries, and the allowance made for international treaties in Dutch climate policy. The concept of ‘transnationalisation,’ moreover, makes clear that the role of non-state actors is increasing (see Risse-Kappen, 1995): in addition to nation states, international organisations, multinational companies, scientific communities and NGOs are playing an increasingly important role in the pursuit of policy at international level. However, these trends must by no means be seen in absolute terms: the nation state is not disappearing nor is it going to do so in the near future (Van Kersbergen et al., 1999).

In short, our approach has been developed through debate with diverse recent trends in the social and political sciences. Our position in that debate has constantly been inspired by the desire to do justice to the duality of actor and structure on the

one hand, and the desire to do justice to the balance between content and organisation of social, political and policy processes on the other hand. This position is therefore also expressed in the details of the development of the concepts of policy arrangements and political modernisation.

Policy Arrangements and Political Modernisation Clarified

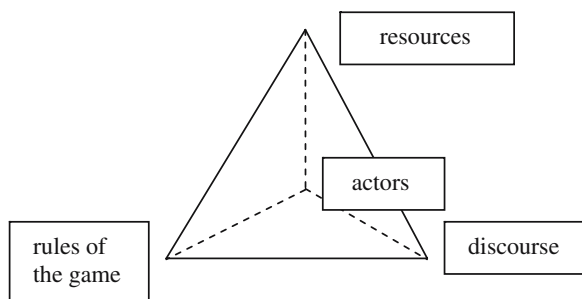
We have already defined the concept of a *policy arrangement* as the temporary stabilisation of the content and organisation of a policy domain (Van Tatenhove et al., 2000: 54). Stability and change in arrangements and the driving forces behind them are the crux of analysis. We describe and analyse the design of the environmental policy domain, or parts of it, in terms of its content and organisation with the aid of four dimensions. These are:

- the *actors* and their *coalitions* involved in the policy domain;
- the division of power and influence between these actors, where *power* refers to the mobilisation, division and deployment of resources, and *influence* to who determines policy outcomes and how;
- the *rules of the game* currently in operation, both in terms of actual rules for political and other forms of interaction, and in terms of formal procedures for pursuit of policy and decision-making; and
- the current policy discourses and programmes, where the concept of *discourse* refers to the views and narratives of the actors involved—in terms of norms and values, definitions of problems and approaches to solutions—and the concept of *programme* refers to the specific content of policy documents and measures.

These four dimensions of a policy arrangement are inextricably interwoven. This means that any change on one of the dimensions induces change on other dimensions. This relationship is symbolised by the tetrahedron, in which each of the corners represents one dimension (Fig. 1).

An analysis of an existing policy arrangement, including its problems or sticking points, concerns all four dimensions of the concept. The methods for mapping out the relevant actors, their coalitions and oppositions are familiar from network analysis. Methods are also available for assessing power relationships. Then existing rules of the game in the arrangement have to be reconstructed: Who decides on the agenda? Who participates in the policy game? Who is excluded? Who takes the decisions? ‘Discourse analysis’ provides systematic instructions for analysing the fourth dimension: What are

Fig. 1 The tetrahedron as symbol for the connections between the dimensions of an arrangement



the main concepts in policy discourse and the policy programme? What are the basic assumptions of the policy? What do relevant policy documents contain? How do the various players in the field interpret the policy concepts and basic assumptions?

A change to a policy arrangement, whether unintended or a deliberate intervention, can result from changes on any of the dimensions. The appearance of new actors, a change in the composition of coalitions, the broadening or breaking up of existing coalitions are often occasions of dynamic change to a policy arrangement. Well-known examples of this are the entry of a new market party in the waste sector, or the participation of an environmental organisation in an area-based project. They may be ‘discovered’ after the event, or considered and deployed beforehand as a strategy to energise the arrangement. (We will return to the capacities of the approach that are geared to intervention in the last paragraph).

As symbolised by the tetrahedron, the appearance of new actors or the changing of coalitions necessarily implies a change in the power relationships. However, this dimension can itself also be the cause of dynamic change; for instance by adding or mobilising external or internal means of exercising power or resources (money, knowledge, skills), or by changing perceived power relationships (for instance, as a result of information campaigns or actual interaction).

Similarly, changes in the rules of the game can also lead to innovation in policy arrangements. A policy innovation at a higher administrative level can mobilise a change in policy arrangement at a lower level, as is often the case in the relationship between the EU and the member states, but it can sometimes also consolidate a policy arrangement at a lower level, as is often the case in internal administrative relationships.

Policy innovation can also be brought about by the introduction of new policy concepts, new definitions of problems or the presentation of new approaches to solutions. Concepts like ‘sustainable development,’ ‘public–private partnership,’ ‘ecological modernisation,’ ‘corporate social responsibility,’ ‘biodiversity’ and others are examples of discourses and policy concepts which have had variable degrees of success in energising policy arrangements. Naturally such discursive innovations aim not only to present new perceptions, but also to bring about new coalitions, free up new resources etc.

To sum up, change, whether internal or external, can be initiated from each of the four dimensions and will then set off a chain reaction that affects the other dimensions in ways that need to be determined empirically. A crucial aspect of the policy arrangements approach is the establishment of the dynamism and the stability within the field of environmental policy concerned and the search for an explanation for this, assuming interaction between strategic and structural level. In other words: how do changes on one of the dimensions resulting from innovations in practice work through to the other dimensions? What structural processes influence change on the dimensions of a policy arrangement in a particular period or in a particular political and social context? And what options for policy interventions are therefore desirable and legitimate (and therefore have a greater chance of leading to an improvement in policy)?

Dynamic change and stability in a policy arrangement can only be understood from the interaction between the level of action and the structural level. Changes in coalitions, rules of the game, use of resources or the innovation of discourses—as well as the continual institutionalisation of policy arrangements—result not only from strategic actions and interactions of actors involved in the day-to-day pursuit of

policy, but are also influenced by structural processes of social and political change, in other words: by political modernisation.

The concept of *political modernisation* refers to a comprehensive process of changes in the political domain of society. These changes in the political arena are a consequence of or are connected with developments in the economic, social and cultural arenas, such as reflexive modernisation internationalisation, commercialisation, individualisation etc. (Van Tatenhove, 1999). We are focusing on the consequences of this for views and practices in relation to both governance, on the one hand, and relationships, including power relationships, between state, market and civil society, on the other hand. Discussions about, for instance, governance, the role of the state, its core tasks, facilitative government rather than the welfare state, responsibility of the market, social responsibility of citizens and industry belong to the former. They are matched by shifting relationships between state, market and civil society. Some of these political developments are spectacular and have been the subject of much comment, such as the privatisation of tasks that used to be carried out by the government and the shift of power to Brussels. Other shifts are much less visible, more insidious, such as the formation of all kinds of quasi autonomous non-governmental organisations (quangos) in the environmental and other fields, which have a political role and responsibility that is often scarcely amenable to steering.

The concept of 'political modernisation' as we use it has a purely analytical meaning and has nothing to do with programmes (see Leroy and Van Tatenhove, 2000a; Arts and Leroy, forthcoming). As an analytical concept, it allows us to distinguish three phases in the political development of Western states since around the time of the Second World War: early modernisation, anti-modernisation—especially important for the development of environmental policy—and late modernisation. Each of these phases is characterised by dominant views about politics, steering and policy, certain relationships between state, market and civil society, and also particular views on the role of science and technology. There is not the scope in this article to go into these matters in depth. In brief: *early modernisation* was dominated by optimistic views on government steering. The state was deemed to be empowered to bring 'the good society' closer by pursuing good policies. Statist and neo-corporatist arrangements provided a sufficiently reliable thread linking state, market and civil society. Scientific knowledge and technology, including planning, were important strategic instruments in this phase. *Anti-modernisation* cast serious doubts on that optimism and has been rightly characterised as a phase of 'public mistrust in government and science' (Jamison, 2001). There has been a crisis of legitimacy in Western countries, of protest against external costs of the welfare state that have not been taken into account in terms of poverty, oppression, the arms race and degradation of the environment. Anti-modernity or the 'de-modernising consciousness' (Berger et al., 1973) was supported by a whole range of new social movements, a small part of whose ideas have been gradually adopted by politicians and policy-makers. Participation has been set against the power of the state, counter-expertise has been set against expertise (Leroy and Van Tatenhove, 2000b). Environmental impact reporting and technology assessment are typical examples of how these ideas have been given institutional shape. Finally, *late modernisation*—because it is so recent it is still not possible to evaluate this properly—is characterised by a discourse of governance, interdependence and inevitable cooperation between government, market and

society. There can be no monopoly of knowledge, problem-solving, or steering capacity. Divided responsibility, which takes many forms, is cited as an inherent risk of late modernity.

The limited scope of this article means that this sketch cannot be more than an impression. Some further development of this idea, however, which we have systematised from the literature, shows that the political development can be distinguished and classified into consecutive phases over the longer term. Each phase has its own more or less dominant views on steering, politics and state and its own preferred policy styles. These views and styles and accompanying relationships between state, market and civil society form the structural framework within which 'policy' is formed. Each phase has its own dominant type of policy arrangements (in Weber's terminology: *Wahlverwandte*).

While political modernisation allows more or less consecutive phases to be distinguished and classified in political development, in our view this by no means implies—as much literature suggests—a unilinear development from early to late modern. The suggestion of a unilinear development needs to be rejected for two empirical reasons. First, political modernisation proceeds in uneven tempos and follows different patterns in different countries and in different policy areas, as international comparative and cross-sector research has demonstrated. This conclusion provides a reason for further empirical research into the different forms of institutionalisation of environmental policy and of specific policy arrangements in different countries, whether or not in relation to other adjacent policy areas (see De Jong, 2000).

Second, the following on of one of the phases distinguished through analysis by another does not in any sense mean that that phase is 'closed'. The process of institutionalisation of politics and policy itself leaves behind congelations from an earlier phase. These are sometimes very much alive alongside newer policy forms. In addition to a gradual shift of preferred policy styles over time, there is also a juxtaposition or coexistence of policy that 'belongs to' different periods. This offers another potential area for interesting research into, for instance, how co-existing 'command and control' policy and participative policy based on consensus-forming relate to each other. The policy areas of spatial planning and infrastructure offer fine examples of this (see Pestman and Van Tatenhove, 1998; Pestman, 2001).

In short, the suggestion of a gradual, unilinear development, often found in literature about modernisation, requires empirical correction, which means that there is a clear need for the impressionistic sketch outlined above to be refined. Enough leads can be found in the literature, fragmented though they may be. For this reason historical analyses of, for instance, views on seering must be cross-linked with institutional analyses of the relationship between state, market and civil society, with analyses of shifting views on the role of scientific knowledge for policy purposes and so on. We have offered such an interpretation of the changing views and practices with regard to 'environment and participation' elsewhere (Leroy and Van Tatenhove, 2000b). Current research projects, for instance, those relating to recent developments in policy on the natural environment in various countries, or the role of scientific knowledge in policy processes, form starting points for these kinds of analyses. Furthermore, the *overall* process of political modernisation for different empirical fields must be broken down into different, more concrete, demonstrable processes that can be studied (Arts and Leroy, forthcoming). A study of the position and future of organic agriculture in the Netherlands, for instance,

found the following important processes for which there was empirical evidence: (some) diffusion of power away from the state, internationalisation, increased scientific input in policy, ecological modernisation of production and consumption, and an increase in postmaterial values (Arts et al., 2001).

The Policy Arrangements Approach: Interim Conclusions and Evaluation

The concepts of political modernisation and policy arrangements have been developed first of all in recent years as theoretical concepts and made operational for empirical research. The theoretical position has been reported on at length elsewhere (Van Tatenhove, 1999; Van Tatenhove et al., 2000; Leroy and Van Tatenhove, 2000a). These concepts have also been used and further developed concurrently in all kinds of empirical research on various environmental policy fields: international policy on nature conservation, climate change, planning and infrastructure, area-based policy, organic and conventional agriculture, water management and coastal policy, corporate environmental management and target group policy (Arts and Van der Zouwen, 1999; Arts and Van Tatenhove, 2000; Arts and Leroy, *forthcoming*; Pestman and Van Tatenhove, 1998; Wissershof, 2000; Arts et al., 2001; Pestman, 2001; Van Tatenhove and Hajer, 2001). This research has produced in the first place a number of comprehensive empirical conclusions, the most important of which are discussed briefly below. Secondly it has allowed us to take provisional stock of our conceptual framework and clarify which points deserve further attention.

Some Conclusions

The first general conclusion is that there is an *increasing variety* of arrangements in environmental policy: statist and neostatist, corporatist and neocorporatist, liberal and neo-liberal arrangements at the national level as well as intergovernmental, transnational and supranational arrangements at the international level. As stated earlier, *traditional* arrangements with classic forms of pursuing policy (a dominant government, top-down control, institutionalised representation of interests etc.) coexists with more *innovative* arrangements (with a government that negotiates with market parties and civil society, bottom-up steering, interactive policy processes etc.). Far more than a unilinear development in one direction, as is often unquestioningly assumed in the debates on government/governance, instrumentation and organisation, unlike policy arrangements coexist. Moreover, policy domains, both within and bordering on environmental policy in a strict sense, sometimes show real differences in their dominant policy arrangements. That impedes coordination and integration on the one hand, while in contrast integration trends or aspirations often lead to innovation. A similar observation of the juxtaposition and mutual stimulation of policy arrangements applies to policy on and between different administrative levels.

Second, it is precisely this plurality of policy arrangements that is responsible for a *diffusion of political power*, partly because the role of the nation state is being redefined in all kinds of new policy arrangements. Some private actors seem to have particularly benefited from the displacement and diffusion of politics and the political space opened up by that. Their position of power seems to have been

strengthened, for instance, in all kinds of covenants entered into between government and market parties, and in some new arrangements for public participation. The diffusion of political power also implies that the common view of a relocation of power from the nation state to Brussels is an oversimplified picture. It seems far more likely, as indicated here, that multi-level governance produces new but differentiated power relations, which (partially) empowers the state in some cases, (partially) dis-empowers it in other ones. Nonetheless, ambitious and enterprising non-state and sub-national actors might manage to occupy decisive positions, or to determine the standard in actual coalitions with Brussels. Discursive strategies, armed with concepts like ‘sustainability’ and ‘integral policy,’ serve to legitimise such changes in power relationships, resources and rules of the game.

A Provisional Evaluation

The policy arrangements approach is still ‘in development’ and would benefit from further theoretical, methodological and empirical development, as indicated in our more extensive publication (Van Tatenhove et al., 2000; Arts and Leroy, [forthcoming](#)). It is too early to reach a considered judgement. Nevertheless this conceptual framework has proved inspirational and fruitful, first and foremost via the concept of political modernisation, for an analysis and classification of a number of structural political developments *and* for assessing the impact of these long-term processes on the main developments and changes in environmental policy of the past 30 years. This general analysis also allows us to gain a better understanding of developments in more specific areas over periods of 10–20 years.

Meanwhile the concept of policy arrangements and its four dimensions has proved equally fruitful in a broad range of policy areas. The analytical distinction of four dimensions while simultaneously emphasising their inextricable connectedness facilitates a thorough analysis of processes of stabilisation and change in policy making. Apart from that there are plenty of operational research prospects for students in this area.

Meanwhile some experience has also been gained with the prescriptive and intervention-oriented capacity of the approach (Arts et al., 2001). As it allows dynamic processes in arrangements to be analysed from the perspective of the distinction and the connections between the four dimensions, this conceptual framework offers considerable opportunities to identify pretexts for improving policy. After all, these are sought not on one aspect or dimension alone (instrumentation, activation of coalitions etc.), but on four. That not only generates a richer variety of possible policy interventions but, as the connections between the dimensions are also brought into the picture, also a view of the likelihood of success of particular interventions. Finally, the connection between certain types of policy arrangements and certain structural developments allows formulated proposals for intervention to be tested over the long term. While policy options may look promising in the short term, they may be contrary to the structural trend (or the other way round).

There still remains theoretical and empirical work to do. The interaction between actor and structure requires a more precise definition of the (two-way) relationship between political modernisation on one side and types of policy arrangements and each of their four dimensions on the other side. Initial attempts indicate the need to develop a clearer typology of policy arrangements. Meanwhile the dynamics have

been mapped out to some extent for some policy areas, especially where they result from the friction created when policy has to be integrated in fields such as the environment, nature, water and spatial planning. The dynamics arising from the pursuit of policy at different levels (both international and internal) have been mapped out to a much lesser extent. Some current projects are specifically aimed at combining our conceptual framework more explicitly with insights from literature on multi-level governance. Findings of these projects will be published soon (Arts and Leroy, [forthcoming](#)). Finally, the many completed and on-going analytical research projects should allow us to strengthen the policy arrangements approach as a basis for intervention.

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