# THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

Power, Argumentation and Democracy

Edited by

RICCA EDMONDSON

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ROUTLEDGE

# The Political Context of Collective Action

The study of social and popular movements continues to attract great interest, but little is known of political activity which takes place outside of traditional political structures. This volume looks at informal political action which arises when conventional frameworks are in crisis or decline. In such settings the usual expectations about political action may not apply, so what actually goes on?

A specific emphasis on context—in particular the link between power and knowledge and public argumentation in a given setting—is used to trace the development of collective action. Key issues are addressed, such as how informal political collectives come to define their aims, what communication processes take place within them, how far their action responds to that of other political bodies, and how far these processes affect the results of what they do, and how they impact on democratic processes.

Discussion is based around a range of empirical case studies, and we are shown that informal collective action is more widespread and significant than many realise, and that it often occurs in fields which appear to be non-political—as in Swiss neighbourhoods, welfare-state organisations in Holland or within technological research as well as in social movements.

Greatly exanding the scope for research into collective action, this volume will be of profound interest to students and researchers in politics and sociology interested in this important area.

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# The Political Context of Collective Action

Power, argumentation and democracy

Edited by Ricca Edmondson

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**Part III   Collective action: knowledge, power and democracy**

# Series editor's preface

It goes almost without saying that Collective Action is a crucially important concept in Political Science. Not only because Collective Action occurs and takes place at all levels of politics in any society, but also because it is the basis for understanding the emergence and viability of formal as well as informal types of political action. However, it must be noted that most theories and analysis of types of Collective Action in relation to the working of politics in a democratic society tend to focus almost exclusively on well-established actors in political systems: parties, encompassing interest organizations, special interest groups, trade unions, business associations, etc. These types of socio-political actors are—in particular in liberal democracies—*integrated* into the systems and may well be explained on the basis of, for example, rational choice theories and neo-institutional approaches. Partly, this is a consequence of their being part and parcel of the formal structure of those democracies. Hence, there appears little need to focus on their *external* relations (i.e. outside the political system), since their societal basis (members, voters, supporters, etc.) are formally organized and—almost by definition—regulated by means of the institutional devices that make up such a system. Yet, however valuable these studies and concurrent analyses are, they tend to overlook, or even exclude types of Collective Action and related political action which take place *in* civil society on the meso-level of public life and related types of informal, more or less spontaneous types and forms of Collective Action. In other words: many of the extant approaches to understanding the important linkage between Civil Society and Public Governance appear to neglect a large part of (f)actual *politics in society* and therefore are not capable of understanding how, when and where non-established informally driven and sometimes non-recognized Collective Action occurs and takes place.

This volume in the European Political Science Series is an attempt to fill this apparent gap in the literature. It does not only take issue with existing approaches and concurrent concepts of Collective Action, but it also offers alternative theoretical and methodological insights as well as empirical evidence on the basis of qualitative case analysis. In doing so we can not only learn more about what is going on the *meso*-level in societies regarding political action and its eventual outcomes, but also about what implications these manifestations of Collective Action have for the use of social power and its ramifications for existing theories on, for instance, processes of democratization and related generation of power resources in civil society.

The crucial point of departure of this collection of essays is that the societal context—specified in terms of cognitive beliefs, cultural features, knowledge and argumentation available to (groups of) individuals in society—is the foundation for understanding political action. Hence, not only 'rational' or 'routinized' behaviour is sufficient for explaining various types of Collective Action, but rather the existing 'room to manoeuvre' for (groups of) individuals to actually exert *political action* is what matters.

This line of reasoning is followed and applied in all the contributions to the volume. In Part I the relationship between context and action is elaborated with special attention to its methodological implications. It appears to be important in this respect to pin down the causal mechanisms of political action before investigating the generation of (group) interests and developing power resources. Hence it seems vital to view the relation between context and action as fundamentally interdependent and reciprocal in nature. Therefore empirical evidence is a *conditio sine qua non* to establish the building blocks for analysing the relationships between Collective Action and Political Behaviour within a society.

This approach constitutes the focus of analysis of the contribution in Part II of this volume. The case studies presented here are not primarily intended to inform us about politics in various countries, but rather to demonstrate that fixed concepts of Collective Action in relation to given political contexts need not be conducive to pre-determined outcomes. Rather the opposite appears to be the case if one allows the specific (societal) context to tell the story of (organized) action. The case studies presented demonstrate that related outcomes are in fact *pluri-functional,* i.e. similar actions may well lead to different types of behaviour and, more often than not, to unintended or unexpected outcomes. This observation may then well imply that rules are important, but cannot be considered as the sole causal mechanisms *per se* with respect to Collective Action and political behaviour.

Another lesson the contributors draw from their qualitative case analysis in Part II is that—by employing this type of analysis on the meso-level of observation—it allows for an inspection of what democratic governance really means for those directly involved at that very level. In other words: this type of approach allows for a 'bottom-up' perspective on democratic practices and therefore avoids the *macro*-level biases of investigating politics from a 'top-bottom' perspective: the former approach demonstrates neatly the dynamics of political *interaction,* whereas the latter tends to (over) emphasize the consequences of *intra-systemic* political interactions.

In Part III of this volume an attempt is made to combine the results of this alternative approach to Collective Action and democratic politics and the results of the empirical evidence from the case studies. Three topics emerge from this discussion and are subsequently addressed: one, reflections on the *interdependence* of 'local' knowledge and political problem-solving; two, whether or not these processes, i.e. context and action, can be defined in terms of *general* rules; three, the role of knowledge and argumentation in terms of a (genuine) 'public debate' with respect to the generation and exercise of *power resources*. Although, of course, no definitive answers are given, the authors strongly believe that their ideas, evidence and reflections have made clear that approaching political reality from a *contextual* perspective is a promising direction in political science. This appears especially to be the case—so they argue—if such an approach is founded upon qualitative case analysis and discursive techniques.

To conclude: students of political behaviour, and of Collective Action in particular, will benefit from this collection of essays in order to improve their understanding of the role played by social movements and other political actors in the informal world of politics.

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# Tables

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# Introduction: the context of collective political action

*Ricca Edmondson*

This collection focuses on a type of political action which falls outside conventional patterns: it does not deal with party or governmental politics, but with action which has evolved outside these channels in response to specific aims or needs, uniting participants who would otherwise be dispersed. Political scientists are now devoting increased attention to social and popular movements, but this collection expands the area in which collective political action can be detected. Starting from protest movements, we find that collective action can also be discovered in fields which may appear non-political—such as technological research—and in unexpected aspects of conventional public settings: welfare-state organisations in Holland or neighbourhoods in Swiss cities.

How do informal political collectivities come to define their aims, how far does their action respond to that of other political bodies, what communication processes take place within them, how do these processes affect the results of what they do? The articles in this collection approach such questions specifically by emphasising *context* and its impact on action within it. This approach is necessary, first of all, because of the permeable boundaries characterising informal or unofficial politics. Participants in collective action may be dissatisfied with normal channels—like the anti-poll-tax campaigners examined by Rootes—or no established means may exist for making their views felt—as in the case of the miners' wives' groups studied by Beckwith. Here space must be created for political action where previously none existed, and there are no regulations to constrain interaction between the new collective actors and the political terrain surrounding them. Nor are there conventions to determine where the action itself begins and ends; this can only be established empirically, not a priori. Affected parts of civil society or the media, for example, may form part of the surroundings or part of the movement itself; other political groups may become part of the action or they may not. Collective action as it fluctuates over time, therefore, must be sought in a broad field without pre-set bounds.

The contributors here treat collective political behaviour as the conjoint public action of pluralities of people, action which combines to yield results which could not be accomplished by single individuals alone, and which both makes demands on and affects political processes. Collective political action is both commoner and more significant than is often assumed; research developments in ageing policy, or the ways in which civil servants execute government policies, are shown here to have collective aspects not immediately apparent. Interrogating this type of action makes it possible to approach areas of political life which at first appear inchoate, but which in fact form the stuff of everyday politics: what for ordinary participants is the nature of their political world.

The contributors here show that progress in understanding collective political action

can be made by using an approach characterisable in terms of the politics of knowledge and argumentation. They trace, for example, how elements of social movements come to be perceived as legitimate or otherwise, how collective problem-solving is approached in different urban neighbourhoods, or how technological research develops differently in national settings with different political priorities. The authors do not set out with a preconceived theory of the relations between knowledge and power; instead they trace avenues of effective power by answering knowledge-related questions about the development of perceptions, aims or tactics. The decidedly empirical approach taken in most of the contributions confirms that the politics of knowledge can be grounded on non-speculative foundations, promising to replace more intuitive aspects of culturalist explanations.

In methodological terms, attention to context widens the frame of reference used in the empirical study of collective political action, emphasising aspects of political action which may be systematically ignored—partly because there is no everyday language in which to describe them. In the cases of neighbourhood politics or the interaction between employment and social service agencies, for instance, effective contexts cannot be inferred from formal regulations but must be sought and defined, and their impacts on participants determined; but participants in collective action themselves often give unclear accounts of its boundaries and appear unconscious of its precise relations to its surroundings. Hyvärinen's study of the Finnish student movement, in particular, shows that the knowledge bound up in collective action may be so much part of its setting that action and context are intrinsically interrelated. These aspects of collective behaviour cannot be elicited by straightforward questioning alone but require intensive empirical investigation.

From a normative point of view, it is significant that collective action often arises from discontent with conventional politics; it may involve impacts on public life undertaken by groups of people without officially representative roles, or whose roles have effects different from those formally intended. This must have an impact on the working of democratic politics. Either actors are aiming to alter the course of public affairs by bypassing established modes of decision-making and resource-allocation, or this is an unintended side-effect of their behaviour. Chapters in this volume describe attempts to broaden public participation in environmental policy-making, citizens' groups supporting the rights of people living on polluted ground, or organisations of the unemployed. The collective actors in these cases are aiming to enhance the democratisation of contemporary societies; and it is precisely because of its normative standing as a potential source for redemocratising society, as well as because of the range of its public impact, that unconventional collective action is attracting increasing interest from political scientists. But, as Foweraker notes, collective political participation should not be seen as a unitary phenomenon, inevitably praiseworthy. We need to know more about the generation and results of collective behaviour if we are to understand under what conditions it contributes to the intensification of democracy and when it might do the reverse.

Since collective political action is intimately related to its settings, diffuse rather than tidily organised and packaged, it has much to indicate about the workings of politics which are democratic in the non-normative sense of being associated with 'grassroots'

activity. But democratisation may also be understood to include developing the opportunities open to informal political collectivities; here the normative status of any particular case of collective action cannot be assessed until we know more about how to trace concealed or unnoticed patterns of power which develop within collective groups, and until we can render visible those influential patterns of opinion which at present remain implicit and taken for granted by the actors concerned. The campaigners for miners or for the unemployed described here, for instance, develop different solutions to problems as their interaction with changing contexts progresses; we need a better understanding of the factors affecting these pragmatics of public life.

The chapters in this collection, all focusing on political behaviour which mediates between official political arenas and the politics of everyday, begin with Beckwith's account of a women's organisation in support of the British miners' strikes culminating in the early 1990s. Her analysis shows that movement action is not directed by discrete, identifiable decisions about what should be done, but evolves and changes as its setting does. Concerned with the development and effects of social movement 'standing' as groups achieve recognition as political actors, Beckwith shows that political, social and historical contexts shape the legitimacy accorded to aspirants to action. Protagonists' own expectations and strategies (how do they conceptualise themselves as political actors? what are they aiming for?) are shaped by the terrain they enter, then shape that terrain in return—although within limits, as Beckwith demonstrates. The 'knowledge' involved in the evolution of a movement, this implies, is not an isolated cognitive phenomenon, indepenent of the world to which it is applied. It is shaped by structures of power—by what it is practically possible to perceive and to believe within the changing, fluid contexts in which action takes place.

Hyvärinen's work on the Finnish students' movement extends this approach. He deals with strategies, expectations and beliefs, items relatively familiar to political science, and augments them by considering the public roles of hope, optimism, fear and disillusionment. These should not be dismissed as private, psychological phenomena; they are on occasion intrinsic to political action, and their effects can be traced without subjectivism. Moreover, these elements may derive in part from the context of political action: informal political action and its context may be inextricably blended. 'Knowledge', in this sense, does not inhabit an exclusively cognitive sphere, but it is itself a constitutive part of human political interaction.

Gorges investigates action which might initially appear fundamentally individual and anything but political: the development of technological research knowledge. Even in this least likely case, action is shown to be both collective and subject to political processes exercised within the contexts where it develops. This implies that other types of knowledge will also be more collective in nature and less purely cognitive than might have been assumed, and gives further grounds for objecting to models of action which conceptualise strategy and choice in clear-cut, decisionist terms.

Next, Foweraker shows why not only political action but also the *analysis* of political action must be examined in context; the knowledge of political scientists itself is heavily shaped by the political contexts in which they live and work. Theorists based in Western Europe and America are led by what Hyvärinen would call their own 'expectational horizons' to press social movement behaviour in other settings into theories formed on

the assumption that defects in Western political contexts are decisive for movement activity. This omits to recall that taken-for-granted aspects of this background are both desperately aspired to in places such as South America and possibly more threatened in the West than is commonly acknowledged; and it distorts theorists' ability even to perceive collective action which occurs in patterns they do not expect. Ironically, Foweraker also points to South American cases where some of the prerequisites of resource mobilisation theory (Olson 1965) are satisfied in ordinary political life rather than purely in the abstract. In repressive political contexts, the assumption that political actors will routinely possess intelligible motives for public action is transformed from an artificial assumption to an everyday probability; its over-rationalised conceptualisation of human action is expunged in settings where the mass of people do have good grounds for resentment, and their decisions whether and how to take action really are primarily instrumental.

In different ways, then, all these four chapters identify real connections between knowledge and argument, political action and context; moreover, there is nothing about the connections traced here which suggests that they are rigidly limited to the world of unconventional politics. These findings have implications for political action overall, suggesting that effective patterns of knowledge and power may be located in contexts broader than those which formal channels indicate. In methodological terms, the accounts provided here of relations between political behaviour and its contexts both rule out rational-choice analyses (cf. Ward 1995) and, by tracing intelligible regularities without attributing 'rules' to actors, bypass neo-institutionalist ones (cf. e.g. March and Olsen 1989).

It is consistent with this line of reasoning that the contributions in Part II should cast doubt on forms of political analysis which treat 'context' in terms of discrete, dichotomous variables. Hyvärinen suggests that parts of this approach are simply unnecessary; Rootes and Aarts both show that much is also mistaken, since sweeping characterisations of entire political arenas obliterate crucial variations in resources and political power, as well as distinctions between what is genuinely structural and what is not. As Rootes points out, even in situations where, within a given timespan, aspects of setting such as institutional rules may be regarded as relatively stable, informal practices associated with them often are not, and these may be decisive in influencing action. To understand politics we need to know what happens in real cases; to the extent that collective political action is not precast in terms of standard analytical expectations, it forces attention on the empirical world and enables us to notice where dichotomies fail to hold.

Rootes makes explicit what the preceding chapters imply: much systematisation about collective action has been premature. 'Political opportunity structures', he argues (in opposition to Kitschelt 1986), frequently are not really structures at all; the metaphor is misleading. Much that shapes political possibilities is 'essentially contingent and in practice relatively unstable'; dimensions such as 'openness' and 'closure' do not apply consistently across political systems, and cannot be used to predict when collective action will occur. Instead, the responsiveness of established political élites to collective action varies, and collective actors' knowledge, their perceptions and evaluations, have significant effects. The impact of political contexts on collective actors is mediated by

their evaluations both of themselves and of others; their beliefs and values may constrain them from seizing opportunities or stimulate them to create new ones. The forms taken by collective action, therefore, cannot be deduced from impacts of structures on the one hand or contingencies on the other. They are shaped, in ways which change over times, by actors' beliefs and values as well as by the availability to them of particular political repertoires.

Everyday life in late modernity recurrently involves the common defence of their interests by citizens with no regular involvement in 'conventional' politics, and Aarts draws attention here to the salience of 'valence issues', where knowledge has a special status. In such cases, the situation to be attained commands wide agreement—purity of the environment, for instance—but knowledge of the means to attain it is violently debated, and collective access to the knowledge in question may also be disputed. Aarts is dealing with action taken by people affected by a common catastrophe—polluted ground in housing areas—making demands on the political sphere in order to deal with it. He tests expectations about the formation and subsequent action of protest groups, derived from such sources as collective action theory in the Olsonian tradition and the theory of 'political opportunity structures'. These approaches, Aarts demonstrates, generate expectations about collective political action which this selection of cases disconfirms. He shows that groups' interaction with context may on occasion be crucially important—but not in ways which theories put forward by Olson and others would suggest. Size and resources lacked their promised predictive value for his cases, and 'left-wing' parties were no more anxious than others to assist environmental protesters. Theoretical work on the impact of context on collective action, moreover, tends to focus on features of the overall political structure: whether, for example, it is inclusive or exclusive. Aarts exhibits a contrary case, where the tactics of the *group* seems to have determined those adopted in the *setting,* rather than the other way round.

Rootes argues that abandoning preoccupation with (often non-existent) structures does not imply that we cannot begin to understand informal political action, and the work of van Leeuwen *et al.,* Royall and Joye concurs. Their chapters show that different forms of the activation of knowledge—argumentation, in effect—can be traced as key elements connecting a context and the collective action within it. At a time when hitherto dominant political frameworks, such as those provided by welfare states, are in crisis or decline, collective forms of behaviour respond to public problems in different ways: adapting to adjustments in the social services in Holland, attempting to defend the interests of the unemployed in France and Ireland, crystallising local forms of problem-solving in Switzerland.

Van Leeuwen *et al.,* contrasting practices in employment and social services in three Dutch cities, show that even institutions are influenced by self-concepts derived in part from their contexts. The authors trace government organisations' reactions to policy directives; interaction between these collectivities can produce outcomes different from what the directives would predict, according to local contingencies encouraging different perceptions and conventions to prevail. The authors track developments in these selfconcepts empirically, charting differences in their effects. Their work underlines the need in political analysis to recognise the significance of collectively produced new meanings, responsive to their political settings, with fluid boundaries and uncertain

futures.

Investigating movements of the unemployed which seem similar until their contexts are taken into account, Royall shows that the problem of organising the unemployed has different pragmatics in different settings. Collective action of the unemployed in France has remained fragmented and uncoordinated in comparison with that in Ireland, where it has attained wider range and more stability. Royall sees differences in political context between the two cases as pivotal for their different developmental trajectories. Similarly, Joye's analyses of settings within cities—neighbourhoods—expose regularities of mixed political, social and cultural form, which make it likely that certain types of problem will be solved efficiently in one setting and others elsewhere. As both these chapters show, knowledge as expressed in collective problem-solving is crucially context-related.

Like van Leeuwen *et al.* in relation to institutions, Joye emphasises that contexts cannot be straightforwardly identified; to determine the bounds and impact of an effective context it is necessary to investigate empirically what activities occur over given regions, and how they are related to their settings. Contexts may be indicated partly by participants' cognitive maps, and partly by the activation of various sources of power; but these are not necessarily conceptualised distinctly by those concerned. Further to this, Joye's own discriminations between regional contexts bring to light their capacities to facilitate or inhibit solving types of neighbourhood problem. He argues that they facilitate or inhibit in a probabilistic, not a deterministic manner: they make room for some approaches and make others more difficult, illuminating or obscuring different types of issue.

This highlights investigation of connections between knowledge, public policy and democracy. Running throughout these chapters is the aim of discovering how knowledge and context affect collectivities' capacities for participating in ordering aspects of their own societies. The recurrence of this theme in this volume implies assent to the Habermasian claim that knowledge is not simply neutral but necessarily based on some interest—here, an intendedly emancipatory one. This does not entail accepting the division of knowledge into domains in which separate interests prevail; many of the contributions in this book indicate scepticism about rigid conceptual divisions among public spheres. But for the authors here, investigating the interaction between political action and context repeatedly returns to a key aspect: the way knowledge functions as argument in the political world.

Fischer, again in relation to environmental questions, brings the relation between knowledge and the collective activity of political argument directly to bear on the question of democracy. Are the principles of collective, democratic participation in public decisions becoming outmoded in the 'knowledge society', making way for a politics of expertise? Resoundingly rejecting this option, Fisher explores attempts, derived from environmental movements in particular, to build on the collective nature of knowledge itself in collaborative processes of 'popular epidemiology'. These processes are practical forms of researching contexts in such a way as to locate individuals' problems within the logic of their everyday lives. 'Experts', rather than assembling discrete pieces of evidence and diagnosing problems with technical solutions, support participants in conceptualising and exploring their own arguments. This is a method which contextualises the resulting assessments of risk themselves. Through such

approaches to knowledge, Fischer argues, both collective democratic decisions and scientific method can be revitalised together.

Schmalz-Bruns extends this concern with the normative character of the demands made by sensitivity to context. If policy analysis is intrinsically connected with the search for genuinely democratic forms of living, then responding to the effects of contextuality demands a thorough reconstruction of contemporary political institutions, centring on questions about the nature of the public and how to ensure unrestricted access to public dialogue. Such a reconstruction might meet stipulations about democracy which have been made from the beginning of this century onwards, for example by the Pragmatist school; but Schmalz-Bruns shows that these stipulations are so difficult to satisfy that the pursuit of democracy in contemporary societies poses a challenge of intimidating proportions.

The *Gestalt-switch* in this collection distances analysis from decisionist tendencies in conceptualising political action; rather than isolating the action, it highlights the grounding around that action, utilising some approaches more familiar in sociology. This is an approach necessary to the study of informal politics, whose connections with context are particularly strong, but it also draws attention to the impact of context on political action in general. There is an urgent need for systematic empirical accounts of the contextual dynamics of fluid, developing political journeys. It is not enough to recognise the role of context by conceptualising it in terms of interacting variables, where individuals and groups are conceived of on a billiard-ball model: the interactions concerned are more like compounds than like mixtures. Nor, on the other hand, will it suffice to treat 'culture' or 'tradition' as 'black boxes' whose influence on action is appreciated rather than analysed: hence the empirical approach in the cases investigated here.

Exploring the possibilities to which this text draws attention requires an approach which can remain systematic while dealing with data which refuse to be so. Edmondson and Nullmeier, beginning from the question of the role of knowledge in political life, suggest a methodology for political analysis as well as a model of political action systematically related to questions of argumentation and power. In line with the evidence put forward in other chapters, the model specifies that political actors need to be understood as interdependent with their contexts, and it provides an approach to analysing political communicative action in these terms. It is also consistent with the evidence in this volume that Edmondson and Nullmeier emphasise that political phenomena are heavily influenced by the actors' own knowledge-related contributions. The political and sociological examination of knowledge, therefore, should not concentrate simply on unmasking manipulation, but should explore how the sociopolitical shaping of knowledge underlies processes of political communication—and how political processes in turn affect what is taken to be knowledge. In order to analyse the deployment of modes of knowledge-organisation within particular terrains, a model of action is needed which both takes systematic account of the ways in which power and politics permeate communication and permits open-mindedness towards the empirical exploration of this field.

Edmondson and Nullmeier therefore employ an Aristotelian rhetorical model whose conception of action presents knowledge as inextricably linked to place, time, culture and

setting—but which does not legislate in advance about the discursive forms these links must take. The cases in this collection show that knowledge and power can take effect without being easily traceable via discourses identified by clear linguistic markers; their analytical categories often need to accommodate the 'fuzziness' of empirical data on collective action. A rhetorical approach is designed to respond to these features analytically, as well as to facilitate the search for procedures enhancing constructive forms of collective political action.

In terms of theory construction, while the contributions in this book are closer to neo-institutionalism than to rational choice theory, they eschew the neo-institutionalist emphasis on rules as analytical devices. Behavioural regularities in the political world are often casually ascribed to rules; but the strictures raised by Rootes apply here too. Like 'structures', 'rules' demand sceptical empirical examination. The usefulness of a notion is degraded when it is too widely applied, and the analyses offered in this collection are able to make sense of the unofficial political world without emphasising 'rules' at all. On the contrary, problems which appear similar if we concentrate on their initial descriptions—how to begin an environmental movement or how to enhance participatory democracy in an urban setting—do not seem so similar when their contexts are taken into account, casting doubt on the transferability of 'rules' in real-life political contexts. Instead, argumentational analysis offers a more flexible and context-sensitive approach to reconstructing patterns of public behaviour in practice.

To place them in a broader theoretical setting, the approaches taken in this volume are compatible with the Aristotelian suggestion that political knowledge should be seen as intrinsic to interaction rather than separate from it, and with much that is characteristic of Pragmatist writers. Their emphasis on the contextuality of knowledge and their opposition to readymade, misleadingly clear-cut solutions relinquish abstraction and control as defining features of knowledge. Like Aristotelian rhetoric, Pragmatism declines to search for certainty; both are differentiated from post-modernism in refusing to deny that some beliefs can be considerably better or worse founded than others, even though the criteria used in reaching such judgements go beyond those of nomotheitic philosophies of science. This volume's emphasis on contexts for collective action concurs in dispensing with deep dichotomies between knowledge and value, logic and experience, and in exploring the development of grounded knowledge as a co-operative enterprise.

An instance may be taken in Gorges' study of how 'the state of knowledge' at any given time not only varies between sociopolitical and economic contexts, but varies as a result of collective interactions on intellectual, sociopolitical and economic levels. Technical knowledge itself, like aspiring social movements, can acquire or be denied 'standing' in a setting made up of changing markets and local and national political systems and economies, so that what is accepted as known in a given place, at a given time, is crucially influenced by its context. Even in technological terms, the world looks different from the vantage-points of different settings, and this can be tracked in empirical detail.

The approaches taken here have implications for the conceptualisation of knowledge itself: not framing it in over-rational terms, nor discussing it over-speculatively. One dominant view of knowledge in the West tends to concentrate on its manifestations in the public world, evading reference to subjective aspects of intentions and expectations. The

most positive elements in this tendency owe much to the influence of philosophers such as Austin (1955), whose interest was in practices and performances rather than rules, and Ryle (1949), who stressed that many 'internal' states are noticed by their bearers by means of the same behavioural observations outsiders use. Ryle's approach is in turn essential to ethnographers such as Geertz (1973), whose study of cultural knowledge locates it firmly in the public sphere, in effect downgrading the analytical relevance of subjective experiences. Hyvärinen's meso-level approach provides a corrective to *exclusive* concentration on what happens in public; like Mannheim (1936), he emphasises that subjective cognitive elements can also form part of public politics. Horizons of expectations or attitudes of mind are subjectively experienced and derive their power from the force of their subjective impressions—but they originate in public constellations and influence them in return.

An emphasis on meso-level interaction clears the way for future empirical analyses of how cultures and traditions affect collective action: not in ways which are irrational and in the end inscrutable, as Weber would have had it, nor in modes which are as immovable and external as Durkheim made it appear. Hence, much that is important in the politics of effective knowledge can be learned from what is done by, and what happens to, collectivities taking part in informal politics. Contexts' effects on action can be understood by tracing ways in which the action is disputed and discussed; argumentation between collective actors highlights what, within a particular collective context, it works to say, what is accepted as reasonable and practical politics in one setting as opposed to the next. Thus patterned elements in different contexts may be analysed and their significance assessed. Collective action is shaped within shared settings which have evolved subject to changing constellations of power, themselves operating on local, national and supranational levels moving out from the action itself, and fluctuating at different rates in time.

Such characterisations of context tell us *where to look* for explanations of collective action; but they do not invite us to generalise too hastily about how collective action arises. There is much still to be discovered about how political action takes place in informal areas of public life: empirical research still has much to explore in terms of how collective opinion takes shape and takes effect. Fields of public life such as those investigated here exhibit a wide range of attempts at involvement in politics by unofficial groups or in unofficial ways, but we do not know enough about how these attempts take place and develop over time, nor about how their normative aspects arise. This argues for a return to analysing the connections between argumentation, power and politics as concerned with the good life for collectivities of human beings; it displays a strong affinity with the classical origins of discourse on politics as well as attempting to respond to pressing contemporary needs. The blurred but fruitful arena of collective political action will be a productive field for discovery.

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# Part I
# Relations between context and action: knowledge and ontology

# 1
# Movement in context: women and miners' campaigns in Britain

*Karen Beckwith*

## INTRODUCTION

Although the early literature on political opportunity frameworks focused on political institutions and their practices as major structuring devices which condition the possibilities for success and failure of collective action, more recent theorising has emphasised the extent to which non-institutional structures and political and cultural arrangements affect possibilities for collective action. The cultural challenge to political opportunity structure research includes a developing focus on social movement 'context', that is, 'interactions between overall structures of power and argumentative strategies' and the specific 'setting' in which collective action occurs (Edmondson 1994, p. 1). Context, in these terms, includes

> perception of the relevant 'community', the nested formal and informal cultural norms directing the behaviour and expectations of actors; the level and nature of the language used to detect the problems at hand;… and…the special rhetorics of arguments designed to have the potential of convincing and persuading participants, those concerned with specific problems and courses of action.
>
> (Edmondson 1994, p. 2)

Edmondson's understanding of context focuses primarily upon argumentative structure and content, and hence is closer to a 'cultural' than an 'institutional' conception of factors shaping opportunities for collective action; yet she grounds her understanding in the recognition that 'notions of politically acceptable argument…[in] a given setting [define] the limits of its politically practicable world' (1994, p. 2).

Matti Hyvärinen's work on the Finnish student movement illustrates the importance of context in shaping possibilities for collective action. Hyvärinen argues that 'the expectational structure', or movement activists' perceptions of what is possible for them, constitutes a 'key "liminal context" between macro-level contexts and the collective action' (Hyvärinen 1994, p. 2). For Hyvärinen, a crucial element for social movement action is its 'accepted existence' (Hyvärinen 1994, p. 4). Noting that different social movements have been recognised and accepted at various levels across different points in time, Hyvärinen argues that a movement's expectational context shapes its 'power, authority, and prospects in launching further collective action' (Hyvärinen 1994, p. 4). Gamson and Meyer, in their work on framing political opportunity, implicitly recognise the importance of expectations about *potential* actors, noting that policy, issue or

institutional changes can 'involve new definitions about who is or should be involved' (1996, p. 282).

Judith Adler Hellman's earlier work on the Italian feminist movement underscores the importance of context in determining who is identified as a legitimate actor by demonstrating how dominant political discourses shape political opportunities for new social movements. Examining the development of the Italian feminist movement in five Italian cities, Hellman elaborates relations between the dominant political discourse of each and the opportunities (or lack thereof) for feminist organising and influence. Hellman argues that the context in which feminist movements emerged in Italy conditioned the form and content of those movements, and that 'feminist organizations [were] shaped in their ideology and practice by the traditions and the political environment of the Left peculiar to the city in which they [emerged]' (Hellman 1987, p. 5). Depending on variations in these factors, the feminist movement mobilised women differently, found greater or lesser political opportunity for organising, and had greater or lesser policy impact.

Dieter Rucht, Ann Swidler and Gary Fine all emphasise the importance of context in understanding social movement behaviour and success. Rucht proposes the concept of 'arena', which he defines as 'a structurally bound setting in which conflictual interaction takes place' (Rucht 1988, p. 217). Within an arena, conflicting parties interact with reference to an audience. By focusing on ways in which contending actors appeal to an audience, action within a specific context can help reveal cultural constraints at a variety of levels. These include, among others, media and movement network 'diffusion' of international movement information (1988, p. 211), 'socio-cultural factors', and a gradual movement of public opinion on the issue at stake (1988, p. 212). Rucht also includes within an arena approach to collective action the 'strategic choices of the movement' (pp. 212–13). Swidler similarly recommends a close focus on 'the public contexts' in which cultural understandings are developed from or confirmed in collective interaction among activists (Swidler 1995, pp. 36, 39). 'Specific political contexts' constitute the sites, or arenas, where action, ideology and new articulations of demands emerge and are developed (p. 36). Gary Fine (1995) likewise emphasises the importance of 'interactional arenas' as locations for articulating and creating movements' cultural traditions and narratives (p. 128).

These authors suggest that movement activists are not perfectly free to assert their presence as legitimate political actors, because movements enter any potential conflict with an extant social location which, as I argue in this chapter, affects their capacity as well as their need to establish their standing in the struggle. The facts that potential actors have prior social identities and that they are identified by others as having a latent but particular location in regard to political action mean that social movements must construct their standing upon a pre-existing foundation. A struggle over political standing both reflects the existing context for the social movement and indicates how a social movement might shape the context in which it engages in collective action (Beckwith 1996). Gamson and Meyer recognise this and make passing reference to movement standing, arguing for the importance of the media in establishing 'to other media organizations and to elites and issue publics who the serious players are on a given issue' (p. 16). The media, they argue, 'confer standing on actors' (p. 16). This focus on

contextual variables connected with knowledge—'political space', the 'universe of political discourse', 'political standing' and 'expectational context'—provides us with new means by which to contribute to political opportunity theory.

Women's movement activism is particularly useful for examining issues of context and opportunity, because it may reveal the extent to which context is gendered, serving as a limitation to women's activism but not men's. It may reveal the extent to which women in a political movement may undertake particularly women's ways of activism in recognition of the gendered limitations of their movement context, as well as ways in which female movement activists succeed in transforming that context. The extent to which political opportunities and context are constants for movements in general can be evaluated in specific cases where women are involved as primary activists in a movement which is not a women's movement *per se;* that is, one in which women's issues are not primary (or even articulated), and where women are not anticipated to be direct beneficiaries if the movement succeeds. By focusing on how gender may be one element defining a collective action context, we may more clearly understand how context may both shape and be shaped by movement activists in general.

This chapter employs the case of Women Against Pit Closures (WAPC) to examine ways in which activists are both constrained by and shape opportunities for political action. Women Against Pit Closures, nationally, is a group of women who organised in support of miners and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) during the 1984–5 British Coal strike. WAPC is defined primarily by its support for miners and mining communities. Nationally and in regional branches, it supported campaigns, initiatives and industrial action organised by the NUM, and undertook autonomous actions as well. WAPC support for miners and mining communities was reinforced by a defining membership characteristic: being related to a miner, past or present, by blood or marriage, was constitutionally underwritten as well as enshrined in WAPC culture and practices. My specific focus in this chapter is on the 'Lancashire Women Against Pit Closures', a regional group that organised during the 1984–5 British Coal strike, and continued in its activism, with an occasional hiatus, through several miners' campaigns—the most important of which was the 1992–4 anti-pit-closure campaign.

Lancashire Women Against Pit Closures is an illuminating case for examining the gendered context of movement activism. Although British law prohibits the employment of women as miners, women have been active in supporting various campaigns initiated by the NUM and are widely identified as having been crucial in sustaining the NUM's 1984–5 strike against British Coal. During the 1992–4 anti-pit-closure campaign, Lancashire WAPC was the most visible, active and militant group leading the campaign against closing Parkside Colliery, the last deep coal mine in Lancashire. Because of the primacy of their activism and, as I shall argue, because they were women struggling in a men's movement, Lancashire WAPC constitutes an excellent case for evaluating the gendered context of their struggle and how activists may have served to transform that context to improve their chances for success.

The case of Lancashire Women Against Pit Closures also permits an assessment of the cultural contributions to political opportunity structure models by examining two major contextual elements in women's collective action. The first is women's *location* in various political movements; that is, women's movement location identifies the context

in which women can assess their opportunities for collective action and develop strategies, as well as the context in which movement success, in terms of satisfaction of movement demands, (re)shapes the opportunities for women's future collective action.

The second major contextual factor is the extent to which political movement actors can shape the context within which they act to increase their opportunities for success, with particular reference to *articulating political standing* as a collective action resource. In examining women's movement location and women's articulation of their political standing, the context in which women engage in collective action is seen as fluid rather than as fixed, and movement participants can be envisaged as potentially effective agents in influencing political outcome, rather than as confined by forces they neither recognise nor control. This further suggests that political opportunities can be created or increased by the agency of collective actors.

## CONTEXT IN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT ACTIVISM: MOVEMENT LOCATION AND POLITICAL STANDING

I define 'women's movement location' as the extent to which women's lived, gendered experiences are explicated in the movement's issues, demands and goals. Women's movement location can be characterised as *gender-direct, non-gender-direct,* or *indirect*. Women are located *directly,* in gendered terms, in feminist and women's movements, where activist women refer to their experiences as women and to the collective condition of women, and articulate demands referring primarily to women or to women's issues. Women also constitute the major movement leadership, membership and potential constituency. I recognise that the content of women's gender identity may vary according to the particular conditions of discrete movements, but emphasise that the distinguishing elements of these movements are, again, the articulated primacy of gender identity and issues, regardless of the specific content, and the development of the movement and its demands based upon these priorities. Women's suffrage movements, contemporary feminist movements and elements in reproductive rights and anti-abortion movements exemplify movements where women are directly located by virtue of gender.

It is also the case, of course, that women are activists in movements where their identity and issue commitments are primarily independent of gender, for example, movements in which race or class identities or issues serve as the location for mobilising participants. Women active in the US black civil rights movement, for example, were located in *non-gender-direct* ways, since race served as the defining characteristic locating movement participants. Likewise, women workers are directly located, as workers, in labour movements. Women and men are located similarly, in non-gender-direct movements, by sharing and emphasising similar (race or national or class) identities, and issue commitments based upon them.

Women are also frequently participants in movements where they have no direct identity involvement, in gender terms or otherwise, and where their location in the movement is primarily through others. The direct location of activists in these movements derives from an identity and a concrete relation to the movement that women do not share. In these cases, women have only *indirect* movement location, as committed

participants mobilise in support of others. Examples of women's indirect movement location include the US anti-draft movement during the Vietnam War, the US black civil rights movement (for non-black women), and components of labour movements where union membership is restricted to men.

Although these classifications rely upon gender as their defining characteristic, other major identities could serve to locate activists in a variety of movements. Employing gender as the major criterion, however, permits several possibilities for developing our understanding of women's movements specifically and political movements in general. By conceiving of women's activism in movements as located by virtue of gender, whether directly, directly on grounds other than (or more primary than) gender, or indirectly, we can begin to understand how location in a movement affects opportunities for women's mobilisation, strategic decision-making, collective action and success in achieving their goals. We can also employ differences in women's movement locations to evaluate movement strategies in similar political contexts; to anticipate the response of movement targets, opponents and the State; and to understand women's relationship to other movement actors and to other movements.

We can also understand how women may actively transform their movement location, especially when their initial relationship to a movement's core identity and issues is indirect. Women may be able to transform their movement location, and hence the context in which they act, by articulating their position in the movement as central. By asserting their movement standing, women may be able to transform the context in which movement action occurs, developing a more favourable political context in which to engage in collective action.

By political movement standing, I mean a status of legitimacy in making claims and demands within a political movement and an articulation of commitment to the movement grounded in that legitimacy. By legitimacy, I mean the development of acceptance and acknowledgement by others of the actors' incorporation into the movement as primary participants. Political movement standing is therefore a socially and politically constructed resource for political actors, constructed in the ensuing unfolding of movement events. It can serve as a political resource for recruiting participants and achieving movement goals; hence the content of standing and its articulation can constrain movement participants as well as offer them opportunities for success in action. Potential (or aspiring) movement actors articulate their standing in a movement and employ that standing as a base from which to assert demands and to influence collective action choices. In movements where female activists are indirectly located, women may be able to transform their position of influence within the movement by asserting a primary movement standing. Women Against Pit Closures is an excellent case for assessing the relationship between women's location and women's standing in a social movement.

## WOMEN AGAINST PIT CLOSURES

Women Against Pit Closures (WAPC) is an organisation of working-class women, established during the 1984–5 British Coal strike, for the purpose of providing strike

support to the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). Organised as a national confederation, WAPC regional groups have considerable autonomy, and activities and strategies are planned on a regional, even a pit-by-pit, basis. Only women are members of Women Against Pit Closures and, among members, distinctions are made between women who are related to miners and those who are not. Primacy is accorded to 'miner-related' women who, by constitutional provision, must account for at least 75 per cent of each branch or local group's membership, as authorised by the national organisation. Beyond the membership distinctions, however, additional requirements prohibit non-miner-related members from holding elected office; hence, 100 per cent of WAPC leadership are related to miners. These constitutional provisions, rarely enforced in practice, none the less underscore WAPC's primary organisational characteristics of a female membership and a leadership that is miner-related.

During the 1984–5 strike, WAPC groups had been involved in a wide range of strike support activities, including soup-kitchen work, fund-raising efforts, public speaking campaigns and picket duty. Between 1987 and 1992, various individual WAPC groups disbanded, as their respective pits were closed by the government in the aftermath of the strike, while other groups, in whose communities pits still produced coal, deactivated. These dormant groups, and the national WAPC leadership, remobilised in the autumn of 1992, in response to the Conservative government's initiation of a comprehensive campaign to close most of the nation's deep coal mines, with an estimated 100,000 job losses. Characterised as 'the most savage redundancy programme to be inflicted on British industry' (Harper and Beavis 1992), its announcement evoked remarkable resistance, including demonstrations involving hundreds of thousands of protesters (Powell 1993, p. 230). The National Union of Mineworkers filed suit against the government in the High Court, on the grounds that the government had not complied with the consultative review procedure necessary for any pit closure. The Conservative government, taken aback by the unanticipated resistance, 'climbed down' from its original position by announcing a profitability review of twenty-one of the thirty-one pits scheduled for closure (White and Beavis 1992). By the end of the year, the High Court found in favour of the union, requiring the government to undergo the necessary review process. The mass protests, in combination with the High Court procedure and some additional parliamentary opposition, created a space within which community-based resistance to the pit-closure programme could be developed. Women Against Pit Closures responded with a national campaign in defence of all the pits threatened with closure, and on a local basis, individual WAPC groups engaged in specific defence of the pit(s) in their community.

In the anti-pit-closure campaign, the signature action of WAPC groups was the establishment of 'pit camps'. A series of camps were established, on British Coal property, at six of the ten pits listed for immediate closure. The pit camps centred on a portakabin or a caravan that served as an office, a site for receiving visitors, and accommodation for pit camp activists around the clock. Pit camps usually included a brazier for burning coal: a symbolic flame of support and a practical means of keeping warm. These camps were explicitly modelled on the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, and activists from Greenham provided assistance during the early days of the Barnsley Miners' Wives' Support Group pit camp at Grimethorpe Colliery in Yorkshire.[1]

Lancashire Women Against Pit Closures was one of the remobilising groups, active during the 1984–5 British Coal strike but dormant since 1987. During the 1984–5 strike, Lancashire women had been involved in strike support, soup-kitchen work, fund-raising efforts and picket duty at eight deep coal mines in Lancashire, the county of which Manchester is the major city. In the years following the British Coal strike, between 1985 and 1992, the government had already closed seven of the eight Lancashire pits, leaving only Parkside Colliery in the village of Newton-le-Willows, halfway between Manchester and Liverpool. In 1992, the government listed Parkside Colliery as one of ten mines slated for immediate closure. Lancashire WAPC remobilised in October 1992 to protest against the threatened closure of their local pit, which had already stopped cutting coal; by January 1993, Lancashire WAPC, with help from local miners, had established Parkside Pit Camp. The camp, consisting of a brazier, two caravans, a portakabin and portable toilets, was located at the entrance to Parkside Colliery, on British Coal property, where the pit lane joins the A47. Lancashire WAPC activists organised to staff the camp, to recruit supporters and to provide speakers to interested groups across the country.

## THE CONSTRUCTION OF STANDING

Lancashire WAPC members were active in a struggle where issues of gender were heightened. The nature of the miners' campaign, whose goal was to persuade the government to abandon its plan to close thirty-one deep coal mines, meant that the primary actors, the primary beneficiaries and the primary campaign leadership were male. The context of the campaign, however, involved government prohibitions against direct miner activism, foreclosing opportunities for men who were miners to resist the government's plans by undertaking industrial action or other forms of protest. Because only men are miners in Britain and because miners were precluded from active, organised resistance, the gendered context of their struggle provided an opportunity for some, but not all, women to position themselves at the leading edge of the anti-pit-closure campaign. State employment practice and law, combined with government restrictions on men employed in mining, structured a gendered context in which women emerged as activists with primary political standing.

Women positioned themselves as activists in the anti-pit-closure campaign by articulating a political standing that legitimised their involvement and recognised their indirect location in the movement. Two claims underlay WAPC's political standing: (1) that WAPC members were related to and struggling on behalf of miners, and (2) that WAPC members were women with distinct contributions to make in the struggle. First, where miners were precluded from active resistance as part of a movement in which they were directly located, activist women in WAPC asserted their movement standing with specific reference to the miners. Not miners themselves, WAPC members were none the less miners' wives, sisters, daughters and/or mothers, and hence could assert a direct legal and/or biological connection to miners. Such a claim was unique, in that other potential activist groups could not make similar or stronger claims of connection to miners. Secondly, women asserted their movement standing as women in Lancashire and in the communities surrounding Parkside Colliery. Recognising that women often bear the

burden of community reconstruction in the face of industry shutdowns, Lancashire WAPC articulated movement standing as grounded in their concern for their community as autonomous women.

Both of these components of women's standing were reiterated in Women Against Pit Closures songs and symbols and in interviews. Claims about women acting as autonomous women and on behalf of others were simultaneously asserted, and are evidenced in interviews with Lancashire WAPC members. One prominent activist in both the British Coal strike and the anti-pit-closure campaign, herself a former NUM member, emphasised women's standing in the movement as women with their own interests, connected to the mining community:

> I just think that women have got a big role to play in mining because we're, I reckon, the biggest majority anyway in the country. We're 51 per cent of the population. And I think women directly suffer from anything that happens like that, because women are mothers and women aren't, you know, they feel all the deprivations that their families feel. I think initially a woman must come down to feeling the strongest feelings. If anything, they are, especially, family feelings, and I think that this is the role that women have got to play. They've got to stand up now and defend their rights and the rights of their children and their families. We've got a big role to play. I think we're strong and I think we can play it quite well.

Concurrent claims about supporting the miners and references to specific miners (fathers, husbands, brothers) also located WAPC activists in the antipit-closure campaign. Women's assertions of autonomy and connection, of interests beyond those of the NUM but also connected to them, of independence and support, emerge from Lancashire WAPC documents, personal interviews, media interviews, songs and slogans. Claims of miner-relatedness position women as supportive of others; claims of women's interests as working-class women in communities position women autonomously. In articulating their political standing from two potentially contradictory claims, WAPC had to negotiate conflicts arising from the tension between miner-relatedness and women's autonomy.

This tension was most marked in the rare cases of women who were themselves members of the NUM, not as miners but as workers at the collieries, primarily as 'canteen ladies'. In these few cases, women had direct standing as NUM members and as workers at British Coal mines, although not as miners; some of these women were also married to miners.

The complexities of women's standing in the anti-pit-closure campaign, relying upon claims of both relationship and autonomy, are exemplified in an interview with a Lancashire WAPC activist. She recounted the difficulties of two friends, who were married to miners who worked (scabbed) throughout the 1984–5 British Coal strike:

> Before the ending of 1986, I became very close to [my friend] Joyce, who was the [Lancashire] delegate [to National WAPC] at the time. And it became impossible for her to continue as delegate because she was classed as a scab's wife. Because Joyce's husband went back to work. [Even though she] continued with the women [picketing during the strike] and actually picketed her husband.

And while a lot of us understood this situation, there were other people in other parts of the country that just wouldn't have that situation. What they were saying was that she was still living on her husband's wages and that's how they classed her. And I fought tooth and nail for Joyce because at my own pit where I was out on strike, my best friend was out on strike. We actually worked in the canteen, so we were out on strike in our own right [as NUM members]. But my friend's husband worked all the way through the strike. And Allison was also classed as a scab's wife and went through all the things that scabs' wives went through which was all the violence directed at her husband and at her family. She actually caught the brunt of [it], but yet she was actually a striking NUM member. So I always put this story over at National that in certain circumstances you couldn't call one person a scab's wife. But I never made much of a success of it.

In interviews, WAPC activists employed language that shows the extent to which women indirectly located in a movement must justify and articulate their legitimate presence as activists in it. Reflecting on this dilemma, one activist concluded,

You know, I just think it's a shame because it seems to me that throughout history and throughout society women—you're labelled by not what you are but often who you are, or *whose* you are.

Which is much more disastrous, you know, the whole, sort of, thing of that they're women. I mean, this disempowers women, which is a tragedy because you don't, you don't grow in experience if people are constantly saying, 'But you're not really a part of, of this whole struggle.' I'd far rather we saw what people *did*.

Women's direct involvement in the anti-pit-closure campaign was affected not only by the tensions of women's political standing claims, but by women's indirect location in a movement in which other actors—miners and the NUM—were directly located. WAPC activists worked autonomously but closely with the NUM from the onset of the anti-pit-closure campaign in 1992. As they had in the 1984–5 British Coal strike, women active in the anti-pit-closure campaign constructed their political standing claims in the context of the NUM's position as directly located in and as the primary protagonist of that campaign. Although the NUM, as a national union, was supportive of Women Against Pit Closures, the structure and history of the union would have made detailed control of organised women difficult. The NUM was not fully empowered to conduct the anti-pit-closure campaign, and both external and internal structural factors precluded the NUM from embracing the strategies employed by WAPC activists and from controlling the national campaign.

As suggested earlier, external structural factors of law and government practice constrained NUM strategic and organisational opportunities. British Coal made public its decision to dismiss, without compensation, any miner actively resisting the government's programme of pit closures; hence, miners were effectively removed from the public (and indeed most of the private) activism in the campaign against pit closures. Industrial (or strike) action was severely constrained by provisions in the British labour law reforms of

the 1980s, necessitating the expense of balloting the national membership for union strike authorisation, public notice and a limited time frame (thirty days) in which a strike could be undertaken before another national ballot would be required. British labour law and British Coal practice constrained the range of strategies available to the NUM, with particularly negative impacts upon the union's capacity to act quickly and collectively. The constraints upon the NUM, however, were inapplicable to WAPC, and hence the external structural factors impeding the NUM's collective action opportunities created a space within which WAPC could act on behalf of the NUM.

Internally, the confederated and decentralised structure of the NUM made centralised control of WAPC difficult, especially as WAPC reflected the organisational structure of the union itself. WAPC local groups, affiliated in their pit camp activism with specific collieries, operated independently of each other, and communication between local groups depended upon personal contacts rather than any coordinated network of consultation. National WAPC monthly meetings served as sites for information-sharing and discussion, but not for coordinated strategic planning. The national organisation, consisting of delegates and vice-delegates from every local group, had a modest leadership, elected by the delegates, confirming the primacy of local collieries and formally dispersing decision-making powers and strategy-making to the confederated local branches, decentralising power and authority as in the NUM itself. Fund-raising likewise followed the decentralised pattern of the NUM and National WAPC structure: local WAPC groups, working with pit-specific Miners' Support Groups, raised money in their local communities, by selling miner—and mining-related goods at market stalls, by providing the focus of the pit camp as a location for collecting donations, and by speaking to local and regional groups. Monies raised locally were controlled and spent locally, independently of National WAPC and with complete financial autonomy from the NUM.

The structural decentralisation of the NUM, and the organisational and financial autonomy of WAPC from the NUM, provided a context of autonomy within which WAPC could construct their political standing in a campaign in which they were initially indirectly located. The content and form of their political standing construction enabled them to undertake actions during the course of the anti-pit-closure campaign that no other actors were positioned to undertake or capable of executing. The internal structure of the NUM constrained the union's capacity to undertake collective action on short notice, as well as its ability to discipline and coordinate its own confederated regional groups. It was similarly incapacitated in its ability to discipline, to direct, or to coordinate WAPC activities. These internal structural factors defined the parameters within which WAPC could act autonomously on behalf of the NUM. Because the NUM could not coordinate the national anti-pit-closure campaign and its associated actions, requirements of political standing construction were heightened for WAPC while possibilities of WAPC independent actions were increased. Although the NUM might have impeded WAPC's efforts in the anti-pit-closure campaign or could have contested WAPC's construction of its standing, the NUM was not fully equipped with the structural, organisational and financial tools to impose the discipline and direction necessary to capture and to control Women Against Pit Closures.

The National Union of Mineworkers did not contest women's standing claims during

the anti-pit-closure campaign, however, but rather accepted and reinforced women's claims as participants. Women were invited speakers at NUM rallies across the country during the campaign. The NUM's publication *The Miner* printed photographs of women in action in every issue during the campaign. National union leaders made frequent reference to Women Against Pit Closures, in positive, sometimes glowing terms. The content of public references to WAPC activists, although sometimes fondly paternalistic, was never oppositional. The NUM offered no public criticism of WAPC, presented no oppositional or negative construction of WAPC activists, and conveyed, through publications and speeches, an understanding of WAPC activists as 'valiant' and progressive in their support of miners and mining communities.

WAPC was successful in constructing a primary, relational standing in the anti-pit closure struggle, indirect and supportive though their movement location was. This had two implications. First, WAPC was able to use its standing to engage in political actions that were precluded for the NUM by the conditions of the government's programme, and enabled women to succeed in undertaking actions that were not easily predictable and therefore difficult for British Coal to prevent. Secondly, women's standing provided them with a modest base for continuing participation in working-class women's struggles after the campaign closed.

I have discussed in detail elsewhere the various illegal colliery occupations undertaken by Lancashire WAPC, and refer readers to that work (Beckwith 1996). Let me briefly list the numerous occupations undertaken by WAPC groups across Britain in 1993. First, the pit camps established at the six collieries entailed illegal trespass on British Coal property, and various struggles ensued over whether or not caravans, portakabins and braziers would be tolerated on these sites. Some colliery managers were more cooperative than others; the manager at Parkside Colliery, for example, permitted Parkside Pit Camp activists to draw water at the colliery, and supplied them with free coal for the brazier. The manager at Houghton Main Colliery, in contrast, forcibly removed a caravan from the pit camp site, with two activists still inside. None the less, all six camps persisted, serving as a source of support and solidarity for miners who were still compelled to 'sign on' every shift, and providing a focus for publicising the continuing opposition to the government's programme. In contrast, had pit camps been established and staffed by miners, directly located in relation to the struggle, the result would have been immediate dismissal and loss of benefits for any participant. WAPC's ability to articulate their standing as women, related to miners, served to authorise them as pit camp organisers, and made it difficult for British Coal to remove them.

Secondly, the pit camps served as staging grounds from which WAPC activists launched additional illegal occupations of British Coal property. Three occupations were successfully undertaken at Parkside Colliery in Lancashire, each involving different women: a three-day underground sit-in by four WAPC members, a five-day winding-tower occupation by four WAPC members, and an eleven-day occupation, by three women, of a liner train cabin on the colliery grounds. In Yorkshire, WAPC members occupied the manager's office for three days at Markham Main Colliery; another WAPC group successfully undertook a one-day sit-in at the British Coal offices at Mansfield near Nottingham; others established a pit camp outside the Department of Trade and Industry in London. Members of Trentham Pit Camp stormed Trentham Colliery outside

Stoke-on-Trent, and chained themselves to the shaft of a winding tower, where they were entrenched for several days. The combined standing claims of miner-relatedness and of women acting as women authorised women's participation in the anti-pit closure struggle and underscored women's success in the various occupations, at the same time that British Coal did not expect women to be undertaking actions of this type, and hence did not prevent them.

Claims identifying the 1984–5 British Coal strike as a major turning-point for working-class women's involvement in a more widespread politics have generally been disconfirmed. WAPC's standing claims both in the 1984–5 British Coal strike and in the 1992–4 anti-pit-closure campaign positioned the group in terms of supporting others, which suggests that WAPC may find it difficult to advance causes where they as women had direct standing. There was no *quid pro quo* attached to WAPC support for miners, no body of *shared* standing or identity with the miners upon which the women could have drawn for reciprocal support. The movement standing developed by women active in the 1984–5 British Coal strike did not protect them from being excluded from the decision to end the strike and return to work, a decision made by the NUM. In 1993, as British Coal closed Parkside and Vane Tempest and Markham Main and Houghton Main and Trentham and other collieries, agonising decisions about whether to acquiesce in redundancy offers and 'sell one's job' were made by individual miners in their local union and local pit contexts.

As the anti-pit-closure campaign drew to a close across individual pits, WAPC activists chose different post-struggle alternatives. Trentham Pit Camp activists wrote a play about their winding-shaft occupation, and devoted their efforts to producing it, in Stoke and elsewhere. Sheffield WAPC, which had been the support group staffing Houghton Main Pit Camp, disbanded and reconstituted itself as Women in Struggle, an antiracist, working-class, women's group. Lancashire WAPC shifted its focus to the campaign against open-cast (strip) mining, in part due to the particularities of Parkside Colliery, and undertook a collective project of preparing a book about their struggle.

In the anti-pit-closure campaign, WAPC activists succeeded in shifting their original indirect movement location by articulating, clarifying and reinforcing their political standing claims as primary actors. Although they were not miners, Women Against Pit Closures members and supporters undertook major collective actions and constituted the leading edge of the anti-pit-closure campaign. But the content of standing developed by WAPC in the anti-pit-closure campaign is unlikely to serve as a resource for future organising or coalition-building, beyond that which locates them indirectly. Many, although not all, WAPC members explicitly rejected feminist activism and emphasised their understanding of their involvement in the campaign as based on female working-class identity; several argued that any future political action on their part would continue to be grounded in and limited to working-class struggles.

## CONCLUSION

As the case of Women Against Pit Closures in the 1992–4 anti-pit-closure campaign suggests, where women's movement location is indirect, women will need to articulate a

political standing that helps reposition them as primary actors in the movement. Beyond women's specific indirect movement location, it may be the case that organised women will always be required to justify their legitimate presence in any collective action, and that the context of any women's political activism is always gendered. That is, to the extent that women are not expected to be politically active, to the extent that the general 'expectational context' excludes women from political life, the context in which women are active in social movements—directly on gender grounds, directly on other grounds, or indirectly—is a gendered context that, at some level, will always require women's assertion of their legitimate presence. Regardless of movement location, women's collective action is confounded by a pre-established construction that identifies women as external to politics; women find themselves in a gendered context in collective action that identifies them as secondary or subordinate political participants.

This suggests, first, that women experience a particular type of gendered context that is constant across political movements and independent of women's movement location. Secondly, it also suggests that women are always required to construct, or reconstruct or reconstitute, their political standing, even in gender-direct movements, because fundamentally women are seen as illegitimate political actors. Before women can engage in persuasive political action, they must justify themselves as political actors. Morgen and Bookman remind us that in Western political theory, 'the "political" sphere has been regarded as a male domain that has excluded women' (1988, p. 20). West and Blumberg, concurring, argue that

> women's contributions [to political struggle] have been ignored, misrepresented, or erased from history in a patriarchal world…. By making political women 'invisible,' men reinforce the dualistic world-view of themselves as political and women as apolitical.
>
> (1990, p. 8)

Martha Ackelsberg makes a similar point; in this view of politics,

> women have no proper place in the public sphere; their participation is neither encouraged nor welcomed. When women have acted outside their homes (which, despite this ideology, women have been doing for centuries, whether as workers or as activists), their activities have often been ignored or ridiculed, defined as lying outside the domain of politics properly construed.
>
> (1988, p. 300)

A vast array of feminist scholarship examines the generalised non-political location of women. Yet even the most recent scholarship on women and collective action shares the assumption of women's externality to politics and attempts to understand it primarily in gender-direct terms, rather than recognising the continuity of women's collective action, and it attempts to recuperate non-feminist political activism as 'feminist' in some regard (Kaplan 1982; also Kingsolver 1989; Maggard 1990). The presentation of women, especially working-class women, as newly mobilised or empowered by the example of contemporary feminism, while correct in recognising existing influences, organisational ties and networks, errs in assuming that women's involvement in political movements is

unusual. As Morgen and Bookman remind us,

> Working-class women (especially women of color) have never been simply consigned to the private or domestic realm, and their history of political action has been shaped not by their role(s) in any one sphere but by their multiple responsibilities between and across spheres.
>
> (1988, p. 14)

The literature which conflates women's activism with feminist activism attempts to construct, for women, a political standing that is related to feminism (usually undefined), rather than recognising actual movement locations and women's standing claims in those movements. This literature also underscores an ongoing context for women involved in collective action: a context which claims that women's political activism is unusual and, often, unacceptable.

What does the experience of Women Against Pit Closures contribute to the evaluation of the culturalist critique of political opportunity structure models? By illuminating two major contextual elements in women's collective action, women's double location in a generalised, apolitical expectational context and in a specific indirect movement location, the articulation of political standing by Women Against Pit Closures evidences the means by which actions related to knowledge and power can interact within a context to make an impact upon that context itself. Language, the use of symbols, and 'play' within the parameters of an apolitical expectational context can shape and even temporarily shift that context to one more receptive to women's activism and more conducive to women's demands. Working within the political space (negatively) constructed by the dictates of British Coal and a generalised context where women were not expected to act, Women Against Pit Closures provides an example of how, by embracing dominant cultural constructions, by claiming and repositioning the stereo-typical understanding of 'miners' wives', women can emerge in a movement, even where they are indirectly located, as the 'leading edge' of the struggle. As one WAPC activist explained,

> To me, this is why I joined Women Against Pit Closures, 'cause they were an active group that were actually doing something, in a way more and separate, too, to the miners' support group. And actually, in everything that's happening at the moment, politically, since October, this is at the sharpest point. It's really on the edge of everything, you see. So, that's why I'm here. [T]hat has to be considered in terms of where you put your energies into, and it's not just about sitting down with women, even though that's been wonderful, really.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## NOTE

1 The data presented in this chapter were collected during my tenure as a Simon Research Fellow in the Department of Government at the University of Manchester. Between October 1992 and November 1993, I interviewed and observed Lancashire Women Against Pit Closure activists at Parkside Pit Camp, and I participated in their meetings from 15 January 1993 to 22 June 1993. Additional interviews were conducted with female activists in other WAPC branches and in National WAPC, local and national NUM officials, rank-and-file miners, colliery managers, and British labour historians and sociologists. Additional evidence derives from speeches, videotapes, the media archive on Parkside Pit Camp and Lancashire WAPC, WAPC pamphlets and other documents, and all articles on the anti-pit-closure campaign from the *Financial Times* and the *Guardian,* 3 September 1992 to 3 June 1993.

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# 2
# The merging of context into collective action

*Matti Hyvärinen*

## INTRODUCTION

How do different contexts actually impose their impacts on collective action? Do we always know exactly what features belong to the context and what features constitute the collective action itself? These questions are intended to challenge the rhetorical purity implied by the dichotomy between a totally separate 'context' and the 'action' imagined to be situated within it. In this article, I shall argue that the limits between 'context' and 'action' are in fact *negotiated,* both *rhetorically* and *conceptually*. To carry out this task, I shall first discuss the concept of social movement, and then present social movements themselves as an extremely important type of context for collective action.

The other major mediating context to be discussed here is *'the expectational structure'*. Both activists and potential activists share some expectations of political opportunities. I shall argue that these expectations, rather than 'the political opportunity structure' (see Tarrow 1991, pp. 32–6), are one of the key 'liminal contexts' between macro-level contexts and the collective action. My point is that in the end these 'liminal contexts' merge into the collective action itself. The movement I shall discuss below is the Finnish pro-Soviet student movement of the 1970s.

## SOCIAL MOVEMENT AS CONTEXT

For analytic purposes, I differentiate three key concepts here: 'the project' (or the organisation), 'the collective action' and 'the social movement'. The difference between projects and collective action depends on the fact that participants can discuss and decide on things in the project. Projects, therefore, *generate* and *direct* action. They are, in a strong sense of the term, systems of interaction. In this article, the key project studied will be the Socialist Student Union (SOL) in Finland in the 1970s. In contrast, 'collective action' is something which actually 'happens': strikes, riots, demonstrations and so on. Usually, collective action is organised and led by projects; in Alberto Melucci's words, 'Collective action is rather the *product* of purposeful orientations developed within a field of opportunities and constraints' (Melucci 1989, p. 25; italics mine).

A social movement, on the other hand, is neither action as such nor an organisation as such, nor is it a system of interaction as such. In his rhetorically elegant analysis, Melucci rejects traditional images of social movement. A social movement is not a 'thing', a unitary fact, he claims. Then he poses the decisive question:

> But how does one know that a movement exists behind protest activity? If one adopts this [traditional] perspective, a movement resembles a metaphysical entity which triggers protest organizations and protest events.
>
> <div align="right">(Melucci 1989, p. 24)</div>

Melucci opens his answer by demanding that

> sociological analysis must abandon the traditional view of movements as characters moving on a historical stage. In the tradition of both progressive and conservative social thought, conflict is often represented through the image of theatre. Social movements are cast as figures in an epic tragedy…
>
> <div align="right">(1989, pp. 24–25)</div>

So for Melucci a 'social movement' is neither a unitary subject nor a shadowy entity standing behind events on the street and elsewhere; he describes it anew as 'a composite action system' (1989, p. 28).

It is fairly well known how Melucci eventually defines his concept of social movement: as collective action which involves solidarity, engages in conflict and 'breaks the limits of compatibility of a system' (Melucci 1989, p. 29). I myself should prefer another path of reasoning, even though the criteria Melucci presents seem to be heuristically sound and empirically valid. I propose that they may be, in the final analysis, quite unnecessary. A better solution might be to radicalise Melucci's conceptual analysis some-what. He is deeply dissatisfied with two rhetorical images of social movements, the movement as 'a thing' and as 'a person' in a drama. He does not accept this subjectivisation of social movements, and instead suggests a move from the idea of a person to that of a 'system'. But to what kind of system? I suggest that the analytic levels of 'the project' and 'collective action' together cover 'the systems of action' that Melucci wishes to discuss.

My argument is that a social movement exists as long as it is *said, confirmed* and *believed* to exist. The criteria Melucci presents may now be interpreted as contemporary everyday criteria for accepting the posited existence of a movement. A social movement, as a composite phenomenon, *legitimates* and unites actions of different projects and organisations. In this perspective, it neither acts like a person, nor is it a unitary thing. As a matter of fact, it does not *act* at all; instead, different project activists speak and act on behalf of it. In this regard, a social movement closely resembles the concept of 'society' (which, at least in the Nordic countries, is often portrayed as a dramatic person who 'demands' the most various things). In the perspective of separate collective events, a social movement offers a unifying and strengthening political horizon. And by introducing the concept of expectation here, I can conclude that a social movement offers an *expectational structure* for collective action. Conscious that there always exist both significant and insignificant aspects of expectational structures, I proceed by arguing that the existence of a social movement is a highly relevant context for collective action. This negotiated context moulds, activates and unifies further action.

The very existence of a social movement, for this reason, is always a matter of political struggle and negotiation. This rather nominalistic approach frees political scientists from the precarious role of normative umpires in ongoing political struggles. The researcher's question is no longer 'Does this action system match the criteria of a social movement?'

but 'Do the supporters, adversaries and "third parties"—including the media—actually accept the phenomenon under study as a social movement?' 'Which are the current rules of acceptance?' I take it that there are radical differences in the ways in which, for example, the existence of 'the women's movement', 'the workers' movement' or 'the student movement' has been accepted at different times and among different audiences. But we do not need to argue about the comparative *validity* of these modes of coming to accept that each of the different movements existed. The political scientist can adopt the role of a happy agnostic: social movements do exist for those who believe in their existence and our task is to examine these very effective beliefs.

This manner of reasoning is not a surrender to slack arbitrariness. A political party, for instance, can hardly demand the status of a social movement successfully, because the competent use of political language itself is far from arbitrary, and is instead an affair of the utmost conventionality. A political-party-as-a-social-movement would risk losing face and appearing ridiculous and deceptive. We are not, here, discussing something arbitrary but something quite real in its implications. The birth of a social movement changes the expectational context of collective action. Projects with and within some recognised social movement possess augmented power, authority and prospects for launching further collective action.

## THE POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE AND EXPECTATIONS

The much discussed, much-celebrated concept of 'political opportunity structure' (see Karen Beckwith's, Kees Aarts' and Chris Rootes' articles in this volume) comprises much that is sound, despite the concept's odd appearance of being an oxymoron. The crucial point is clear and easy to accept:

> If collective action is a form of politics, then as in conventional politics, there must be a set of constraints and opportunities that encourage or discourage this kind of behavior and lead it towards certain forms rather than others.
>
> (Tarrow 1991, p. 32)

It is undoubtedly appropriate and reasonable to examine both 'constraints' and 'opportunities' that actors face.

But conceptual problems begin with the attempt to attach 'political opportunity' to 'structure'. Somehow this link seems, at least in its strong and contingency-free form, considerably to devalue the crucial openness and fuzziness of political action itself. Hannah Arendt has aptly expressed this problem in her famous account of the 'frustration of action':

> Exasperation with the threefold frustration of action—the unpredictability of its outcome, the irreversibility of the process, and the anonymity of its authors—is almost as old as recorded history.
>
> (1958, p. 220)

In a political world like Arendt's, political opportunities cannot be conceptually or empirically reduced to any pre-fixed structures, ready to be detected by social scientists or deployed by political actors. As regards collective action, the problem is at least twofold, both 'ontological' and 'epistemological'.

On the ontological level, the meaning of 'political opportunity' is tied up with *changing* context and contingency. Therefore I suggest using a much more modest concept, that of the 'political opportunity *set*'. Part of this 'set' may reasonably be understood to be comprised of truly structural constraints, those which change slowly, while the other pole is comprised of more rapidly changing and contingent elements of opportunity.

However, if we give up the purely structural and reductionist conception of political opportunity, we have to face new and somewhat disquieting problems on the epistemological agenda. If 'opportunity' has as much to do with contingency as with structure, political science can no longer tidily compare the context of political opportunity and the collective action within it—simply because the 'political opportunity set' has turned out to be an inexhaustible category. In the final analysis, only action can test the full scope of opportunities, and action, by definition, itself consists in choice and partiality.

Movement activists face the same problem of recognising and computing their opportunities, but on this level it is no longer necessary to evaluate the correctness of their evaluations. The political opportunity set, as translated and cognised in the form of *expectations* of activists in the project and in the movement, is beginning to be part of the reality of the movement. At this point, alarmingly, we seem to be talking no longer about contexts but about political *action*. My suggestion is in fact that collectively shared, negotiated and shaped expectations can in this way comprise a type of liminal context for social action proper.

Turning to our example, what actually is the connection between the independence wars of former colonies and the Finnish student movement? Finland has never been a directly colonial power and it would be complicated to argue that its political opportunity structure changed at the relevant period. Instead, it is reasonable to suggest that the long period of successful independence movements in former colonies strongly affected the political expectations of one generation, at least in regard to the opportunities for collective movements and the changeability of the world in general.

Of course, one of the primary contexts of Finnish student activism was the 'student movement' of 1968 in France, Germany, the United States and elsewhere. Yet it is more than obscure how all this activism might actually have been able to change the political opportunity structure of the Finnish student activists. (It would be allowing the concept to generate self-fulfilling hypotheses merely to go on searching within the Finnish political culture until we could find something, anything, which might be presented as a structural change.) It is true that students were expected at the time to be active, influential or even dangerous, within or outside the political system; this undeniably sensitised the political system to react, on its own part, with a responsive set of expectations to growing student activism. These expectations were not necessarily negative: students offered a remarkable opportunity to the political parties, if encouraged and tamed carefully. What all this amounts to is that these movements did create a radically new *expectational horizon*

among Finnish students. A student movement was something to be expected. Getting involved in a social movement was something that students did, from San Francisco to Poland. Activism seemed to be an integral part of the emerging youth culture.

## THE CONTEXTS OF THE FINNISH STUDENT MOVEMENT

A huge amount of literature has discussed the student movements of the 1960s. No wonder that an honourable list of 'contextual factors' for these movements also exists. In the Finnish periphery, the echoes of these movements actualised some years later than in Central Europe. For analytic purposes when examining the ways in which these echoes were transmitted, I distinguish between the 'televisual' transmission of movement icons and a thicker, cultural, theoretical and organisational form of transmission. For a long period, the transmission of ideas associated with rebellion took place much more quickly on the televisual or iconological level. Rudi Dutschke and Daniel Cohn-Bendit were extremely effective as rebellious images, even when their ideas were poorly transmitted or understood. Might this have been a case in which the idea of a social movement travels much quicker than the movement itself ?

During 1968–9, as the movement in West Germany experienced its 'authoritarian' or 'proletarian' turn and began its decline, the movement was only beginning in Finland. This sequence produced only a delayed movement, but a movement born in a radically different international context, one populated by flourishing revolutionary groups. The result was a movement dominated by a popular pro-Soviet Marxist-Leninist student organisation, SOL. The German SDS (Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund) was disbanded in 1970, and the 'project of the SOL' began in the very same year.

It is far from satisfactory to describe the student movement only as a collective mental aberration, as it is nowadays repeatedly presented. The more promising approach suggested here is to interrogate, first, the peculiar *constraints* and *opportunities* in the case, and then the particular *expectations* which were aroused by these constraints and opportunities.

The Finnish context, of course, was a context imposed by the presence of the Soviet Union. Never actually occupied by the Soviets, Finland remained independent after the Second World War in a very precarious way, constantly in part dependent on a good relationship with the Soviet leadership. This was the landscape which provided the context for a calculating and half-hearted *Realpolitik*. It meant a permanent double message: firstly, official 'friendship' with the Soviet Union, emphasised to be such by the Presidents of the Republic and all of the other leading politicians; and, secondly, an unofficial grudge, manifested for instance in all of the school teaching of history.

In this context, President Urho Kekkonen (1956–81) was extremely skilful in soothing the Soviet leadership and in advancing Finnish economic interests (by buying oil and selling industrial products). However, President Kekkonen, then a national hero, effectively fought for his own position by silencing any criticism of the Soviet Union, and by declaring that his competitors did not inspire sufficient confidence in the Soviet Union to be regarded as viable challenges to his own position.

Especially after the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Soviet leaders exerted

strong pressure on President Kekkonen and the Finnish government. The core message of this pressure was to prevent all 'unfriendly', that is critical, public discourse about the Soviet Union. The atmosphere for a genuinely pro-Soviet Marxist-Leninist movement was excellent at this time, just because of this lack of public criticism and opposition. As regards 'constraints' and 'opportunities', it was not insignificant that Soviet leadership dared to exert (as it did in 1958) or to threaten to exert open economic pressure on Finland, if the governmental coalitions did not please their Eastern friends.

A fascinating context, indeed, but how did it achieve its full impact on the collective action of students? My first answer is that there are very few successful social movements or spurts of collective action which are oppositional in all respects. For example, the Maoist groups in Central Europe shared their critical attitude towards the Soviet Union with the daily press. In Finland, the Maoists had no such support. In contrast, the tone of their criticism was comparable only to the texts of the most extreme Right. For all of its revolutionary élan, pro-Soviet Marxism-Leninism had the President himself as its ally. Both of them pursued genuine 'friendship' with the Soviet Union. Both of them fought against critical speeches. The Marxist-Leninist movement was eager, in a way, to implement the *Realpolitik* of the Finnish foreign policy *honestly,* and on the level of civil society. President Kekkonen ingeniously encouraged young radicals, and leftist flirtation with the presidential power was an inseparable part of the collective action which was emerging. Because of this link on the level of foreign policy, the Socialist Student Union's project enjoyed a certain protection against over-harsh criticism. No credible political force was in a position to criticise the SOL of being too servile in regard to the Soviet Union.

The presidential context had other aspects too. During the 1960s, President Kekkonen had seemed to believe for his own part that the near future would be that of socialism, in one form or another. He did not seem to *prefer* socialism—sometimes he talked about Finland as the last capitalist country in the world—but nevertheless he seemed to recognise this shift as an inescapable future. In this way the President was, at least partly, involved in the context of belief in socialism.

One of the Finnish paradoxes of the 1960s was the combination of an inherited closure on the part of the society together with an exceptionally rapid pace of structural change. Because of its geography, history and foreign-policy orientation, real cultural ties and common experiences with Europe were extremely limited at the end of the 1950s. If it was *necessity* that governed the life and experience of the generation engaged in post-war reconstruction, the 'baby boom' generation everywhere met only rapid *change:* people migrating from the countryside to the newly developed suburbs; industrial structure changing from agriculture to manufacturing industry quicker than in any other country in Europe; the higher secondary-school system suddenly opening up to include children from lower-class families; and the welfare system taking decisive new steps. If we add the impact of newly acquired television, it is easy to capture the socially, politically and culturally changing context that the new generation confronted in practically every institution with which it had to deal. No institution was in fact prepared to tackle the problems that this number of young people from new social groups brought with them.

I call this situation a 'context of permanent reform'. Culturally, it meant an incessant struggle between conservatives and modernists. Until the 1960s, the state apparatuses

assumed a guardian role as regards the content of published literature, which engendered fierce political struggles—and one trial for blasphemy. President Kekkonen, who was alert to opportunities for undermining the positions of the nationalist conservatives, searched for and found support from the modernist side. He had therefore, by the 1960s, taken the position of an ally of the radicals.

From the perspective of the new political actors walking into the universities, the structure of opportunities was more than unclear. Nevertheless, according to a well-known argument presented once by the Marxist activists themselves, it was the process of narrowing social and political opportunities which radicalised, or even revolutionised, the young students. As Heikki Ylikangas (1986, p. 223) puts it, 'the academic elite looked for the way to power from the only direction where it was still dimly visible, that is, from the direction of a bigger or smaller revolt'. However, I perceive at least two major flaws in this direction of argument. First, because of the construction of the welfare state at that time, the state apparatus welcomed a rapidly growing number of specialists. Secondly, from the perspective of pure opportunity, the next generation had a much longer path to power but, of course, it did not make any attempt to seize power. Narrowing or opening opportunities, as such, do not explain much if the delicate level of 'expectational structure' is omitted.

Instead of *lack* of opportunity, I would argue for the relevance to this situation of *ambiguity* of opportunity. According to William E.Connolly (1991, p. 21), people in late modernity face enormous risks of discrimination and attributed 'otherness' if they fail to consider their lives as planned and organised projects:

> One can either treat one's life as a project, negotiating a path through a finely grained network of institutionally imposed disciplines and requirements, or one can struggle against those disciplines by refusing to treat one's life as a project.
>
> (1991, p. 21)

The good life, Connolly argues, seems in the contemporary world to necessitate such a project-approach and its consequent indebtedness to various institutions from education to housing, marriage and office life. I have great sympathy for Connolly's criticism of this imposed requirement of project-orientation and self-control, but here I want to discuss the risks of the opposite context. During the late 1960s, radical ambiguity as regards individuals' own opportunities was conducive to a revolutionary attitude precisely because it effectively destroyed, or relativised, the cultural frames within which one could have recognised one's own life as an organised project. No wonder, therefore, that the project which was discovered was typically collective.

This context of incessant change can also help to make sense of one of the most curious debates among young Finnish intellectuals during the late 1960s, the debate about optimism, pessimism and disappointment. The culturally shared point of departure was growing optimism. The ongoing period of the great structural change had created an unshakeable belief in the state, in reforms and in the 'practicability' *(Machbarkeit)* of the whole social and political world.

In this spirit of general reformist optimism, the leftist parties attained a majority in the parliamentary elections of 1966. After this victory, a 'Popular Front Government' was

formed. In accordance with thoughts of President Kekkonen, the Communist Party joined the government, which, among other things, meant that Social Democrats agreed to co-operate with the Communist Party for the first time since the onset of the Cold War. Magnificent expectations were attached to the start of cooperation between leftist parties and the new government. Leftist intellectuals theorised the 'parliamentary' and 'Finnish way' to socialism. Not the students but Communist Party activists launched this discussion of the various forms of the change-over to socialism. This quite naive belief in socialism—and in the government—was strongest among those Communist cadres who had waited and struggled for leftist cooperation and for the 'opening up' of the Communist Party.

No wonder then that the subsequent governments were not able to fulfil these great expectations. During the late 1960s, the theme 'disappointment' and 'pessimism' arose as a general problem among young radicals. Nevertheless, this was not absolute pessimism; it was not pessimism regarding the real goal, socialism, and its attainability. It was disappointment with the Popular Front Governments which radicalised the next generation. In spite of all avowed 'pessimism' and 'disappointment', *belief in socialism* itself was transmitted to the next generation of radicals. This belief in socialism must be treated as a relevant *contextual* factor because the radical students neither invented it nor shared it alone. Their disappointment (in accordance with a growing tide of New Left criticism circulated among the young radicals) 'translated' this belief into a belief in revolution.

Once again it is apparent how moving from the context (opportunity) through the 'liminal context' (the prevailing expectations) very soon leads to the centre of the action itself.

My next step is to introduce a new aspect of the movement's overall context, the Finnish Communist Party. Just like most of the other Communist Parties in Western Europe, it was deeply split between 'Stalinists' and 'Revisionists' (see Waller and Fennema 1988). After its Fifteenth Congress in 1969, the Party actually became a party with two centres. From the perspective of the student radicals, it was, in the first place, politically and culturally an extremely old-fashioned and dogmatic party. How, then, could it ever come about that the Socialist Student Union's project was both such a success and such a supporter of the Stalinist wing of the Communist Party? The answer is that an undivided party could not have succeeded so splendidly in this support function. An undivided party would have been a very concrete and bureaucratic party. As it was, however, the student radicals, who began to read and adopt Marxism-Leninism after 1968, did not in the event become well acquainted with party practices. In short, what they adopted was a sort of *ideal Leninism*. During my research project (Hyvärinen 1994), I interviewed twenty-seven former Stalinist student activists biographically. One of the key results of this work was to show that their attachment to Leninism was most of the time ideal. In *practice,* most of the student activists came to find Leninist party practice very alien to them after a while.

Within this horizon of ideal Leninism, the struggle between the Stalinist and Revisionist currents (both of which, in retrospect, appear relatively strongly Stalinist in general direction) was elevated to a struggle *for* the revolutionary party. During the formative years of 1969–71, the minority within the party was amorphous enough to

absorb the political imagination of the young Marxist-Leninist converts. In other words, the Communist Party did not appear to its young members as a real, concrete, bureaucratic party machinery, but as a *great opportunity*. Ironically, it was only the party majority which appeared in the form of normal party bureaucracy, while the Stalinist minority seemed to offer a genuine chance for a potent and ideal movement full of social criticism. It was precisely the Stalinist party minority which criticised the Popular Front Governments, which theorised about imperialism and Marxism-Leninism. The Stalinist minority seemed to be both a political *movement* and a great potential force in reviving a strong Communist Party. This seemed the very chance which was needed to overcome the limitations of everyday politics and everyday experience. It really appeared that political opportunities were being opened up.

   To this extent, a leftist political party with a major split and with concomitant mobilisation for support might be understood as providing a 'structural opportunity' for radical mobilisation. However, the process which actually took place was full of irony, coincidence and contingency. When the moderate party revisionists and left-wing socialists launched their discussion of the 'peaceful' and 'parliamentary' way to socialism, they could hardly have imagined the revolutionary outcomes of these debates.

### THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT OF '1968'

I have already emphasised the peripheral and 'delayed' nature of Finnish student activism; it is, therefore, pertinent to look more thoroughly at the changing international context to which this activism was peripheral. The 'authoritarian' or 'proletarian' turn of student activism during the late 1960s seems to crystallise a radical turn from *power* to *force,* to use Hannah Arendt's terms (1958). The glorified year of 1968 offers an exceptional list of successful uses of force and violence: the Tet offensive in Vietnam; the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy; the shooting of Rudi Dutschke; the pacification of the May events in France; and finally the occupation of Czechoslovakia enhanced the significance of force over power. These dramatic events, which indisputably constituted one of the key contexts of further student action, generated new interpretations of politics and action. Political orientations were reshaped by two metaphors, or 'representative anecdotes' in politics (Burke 1945, pp. 59–61). These were 'Politics is War' and 'Revolution'.

   What can this change in key metaphors account for? Richard Rorty has suggested that major scientific revolutions can well be interpreted as 'metaphorical redescriptions' (Rorty 1989, p. 16). Following Donald Davidson he also asserts that (new) metaphors actually 'mean nothing'; that they are better understood as extra-linguistic provocations. But, most importantly here, this metaphorical use of noises and marks 'is the sort *which makes us get busy developing a new theory*' (1989, p. 17; italics mine). My suggestion is that this account of scientific revolutions should be extended to include political changes as well.

   In a way, the metaphors above offer one translation of '1968' as it was actually experienced. The metaphors of 'Revolution' and 'Politics is War' more than anything else 'made us get busy developing a new theory'. New slogans of 'revolution' at the

universities, throughout the educational system and elsewhere, did not originally mean anything strictly Marxist, Maoist or Marxist-Leninist. They did not express much more than a strong emotional desire to turn everything which was old upside-down. But as metaphors of politics, these slogans posed engendering questions: What kind of a revolution? Do we actually know anything about revolutions? It was the vague and amorphous notion of 'revolution' which was able to preoccupy and animate political imagination and theoretical search for certainty among radical students. It is always this vague and metaphorical language about 'revolution' that precedes the orthodoxies of different Marxism-Leninisms.

The consequences of the metaphor 'Politics is War' are notorious. In Italy, Germany and the United States it received a new form: 'Politics is Guerrilla War.' In Finland, the interpretation was more conventional and pacific. The basic understanding of politics which was involved came very close to the idea of frontal attack, and the fronts involved came to be those of the Cold War. This indisputable fascination with wars, all kinds of wars all around the world, was by no means a Finnish peculiarity. However, in Finland the former generation had fought two wars against the Soviet Union, and the stories told about these wars were the key material of the unofficial anti-Soviet grudge. Genuine friends of the Soviet Union had to interpret these wars anew as they joined the winning side.

The new understanding of politics as a form of using force, as a world-wide war between forces of progress and forces of imperialism, engendered a search for allies and organisation. Therefore, the Soviet Union and the Finnish Communist Party were considered progressive and forceful *allies*. This interpretation was strongly emphasised by my interviewees. The adoption of Marxism-Leninism was essentially a question of force, a question of having allies all around the world. The metaphor 'Politics is War' mediated, therefore, the context of '1968' and the final adoption of Marxism-Leninism.

## THE BIRTH OF THE FINNISH STUDENT MOVEMENT

Towards the end on the 1960s, different expectations and opportunities had already become fixed among Finnish student radicals. Clearly, the birth of the 'student movement' was expected to take place, even in Finland. Belief in socialism as a future prospect was stronger than ever. 'Disappointment' with the Popular Front Government did not mean disillusionment with one's own capacity for action.

The Minister of Education Johannes Virolainen (of the Centre Party) then presented a bill to parliament which generously offered the 'one man one vote' principle for application in the administration of the universities. Unsurprisingly, the bill met fierce resistance among rightist members, but it caused concern among some Social Democratic representatives too. In February 1970, the Student Union of the University of Tampere launched a strike intended to expedite the reading of the bill. The strike was a success in most of the universities, and in Tampere it continued for a week. The MPs changed their tactics and the left and centre declared that they would support the demands of the students. Student activists with the most varying backgrounds came together and shared fabulously heady feelings of success. The students were accorded considerable publicity

in the mass media as well as support from tens of trade union branches and various other leftist organisations. In the event, the bill was left in abeyance until the following elections and was then rejected, but the episode itself produced an atmosphere which was really influential, and with it a context of *'actionist optimism'*.

During and immediately after the February strike, the concept of 'the student movement' was coined, circulated and broadly accepted. The events of the strike themselves can be seen as forming this very decisive context for all further action: the context of 'actionist optimism'. It had been possible, even rather easy, to pressure the parliament with a spontaneous strike. How great, then, might the vistas of organised and effective action be? Here it is important to note again the decisive difference between structural and purely contingent opportunity. As regards the parliament, political parties, the media, and even the students themselves, the first, basically spontaneous outburst both created and employed radically contingent political opportunities. Student activists, however, combined perceptions of their own expanding feelings with a number of Marxist-Leninist dogmas, and in consequence came to consider these opportunities basically structural.

It followed from this structural understanding of opportunities that the most far-reaching dilemma after the strike was the issue concerning organisation. What kind of an organisation would be able to lead, generate and coordinate further action? The posing of this question meant that the strike activists had widely accepted the 'context of the social movement' and the need for continued action. Prior to the organisational solution, several 'expectational contexts' had existed: the context of the social movement, the rather generalised belief in socialism and even in revolution, and the belief in force and actionism. Against the background of these contexts, a core group of the activists of the strike decided to join the Socialist Student Union.

## REVOLUTION IN ONE'S OWN ORGANISATION

The organisational form of the reformed SOL was a delicate combination between idealised Leninism and a use of the pattern according to which universities are structured. The radicals were fired by the great ideal of 'scientific' politics. The basic cell of the new organisation, then, was the branch, comparable with the level of a university department. This departmental form of organisation was considered both to be most effective in mobilising 'the masses' and to be highly scientific: because of its roots in Leninist principles on the one hand and in the departments of the university on the other.

During the following years, an astonishing amount of time and energy was consumed in the construction and expansion of this form of organisation, together with the various other organisations of 'the democratic student movement'. Most of the activists I interviewed related that they had spent two or three years 'in action' without making any remarkable progress in their studies. The founding and 'strengthening' of the organisation itself was one of the key sources both of pleasure and of feelings of power. Particularly during the academic year 1972–3, the organisation was remarkably successful in organising recurrent national student strikes and demonstrations in order to support the 'one person, one vote' principle. In the parliament, subsequent success was much more

modest than in 1970.

Most of the activists tell the same sort of story: 'Delight began to decline in the years 1974–75.' This climatic change in atmosphere can be described as a process in which the original, and decisive, expectational contexts of actionism gradually disappeared. Three separate developments can be discerned here.

First, the basic 'expectational context' and the main reason for the organisational project—the belief in revolution and in a Great Change—gradually diminished, despite every effort on the part of the new, effective organisation. On the level of strategy, visions of revolution were suspended, and theories of the 'democratic turn' evolved. This vision presupposed, however, a prolonged struggle, even the development of special 'democratic professional practices'. These piecemeal changes ruined the original rationale for hectic activism and organisational fervour. The organisation was designed for revolutionary struggle, not for peaceful and moderate times.

Secondly, and correspondingly, 'belief in actionism' evaporated as well. There were several reasons for this process. One is that, in contrast to the late 1960s, fascinating international examples to be followed were unavailable, or were badly unorthodox. Students no longer wanted to 'get involved' in a process which was perceived as historically momentous. Moreover, there is a huge difference between one's *first* experiences of participation in disruptive collective action, and routinised and recurrent participation in a well-organised 'struggle'. The pleasure of collective action dissolved with the systematic employment of a 'mass movement'. It is also the case that, even if the SOL was extraordinarily effective in organising demonstrations and actions, it was also very effective in showing how fundamentally useless this action actually was. None of the major objectives was ever attained. One-sided faith in mass action, and therefore in *force,* at the expense of genuine politicking and political action, eventually became a source of frustration.

Thirdly, even if the strength of the SOL seemed to grow continuously, the project itself endangered its most important contextual feature, that of the 'student movement'. The legitimising aura of the 'student movement' became threatened in the course of continuous quarrels between different political groups and representative student unions. The moral capital of the vanguard was soon spent in the search for force. In particular, the media, which had provided critical publicity, forgot the 'student movement' before long, and began to discuss 'party quarrels' and 'Stalinist mass mobilisation'. Of course, the Socialist Student Union was the organisation which continued the debate and revived the student movement most heroically. But, as we know, a social movement is something that organisations do not automatically own and cannot automatically dominate. In all these ways, the original expectational context of the project disappeared, and so did that particular version of collective action.

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# 3

# Technology and context: the impact of collective action on the development of knowledge

*Irmela Gorges*

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter[1] presents a case study on the impact of society on investigations into computer-aided design (CAD) systems in mechanical engineering design at universities in the USA, France and West Germany between 1955 and 1985. In each country, basic research on the assistance of computers in the design process is comparable; there are three main research approaches: computer graphics, design-oriented and production-oriented CAD systems. However, the relative strength and dissemination of these respective research lines differs. The differences can be explained by the impact of social groups, for example the military, the industry or the scientific community, on the development of the new technologies by means of, for instance, funding research, or supporting the distribution and use of the new technologies. On the other hand, depending on the changing market for a specific research product and in correlation with other factors such as the university education system, or the 'culture' of information exchange between science and industry, the social power of these groups may vary within a very short period of time. Corresponding to the particular constellation of the political and economic power of relevant social groups involved in the development of CAD systems as this constellation is made up at a particular juncture, specific research approaches and preferences for specific research lines will prevail. Thus it is the case that research and development on new technologies emerge from a variety of collective actions, and research results reflect the impacts which the specific economic, cultural and political structure of a particular society has exerted on these collective actions.

This chapter therefore shows that even knowledge which might be thought of as technical, neutral and developed by individuals can be shown to be both collective in its own constitution, and influenced by collective action in social, political and economic fields. What follows tries meticulously to trace the interaction between individuals which led to developing CAD knowledge, and at the same time to chart the influence of different contexts which gave this developing knowledge a different form in each of three settings. These combined interactions are sufficiently significant to produce different knowledge types in different cases; knowledge cannot be thought of as a discrete, unchanging 'given', but as the variable product of collective political action.

**THE IMPACT OF THE MILITARY ON CAD RESEARCH IN THE USA,
1940 TO 1970**

University research into a technology now known as CAD systems started at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge, USA. Since the end of the Second World War, MIT had been engaging in research which developed into CAD research around the mid-1950s. Up to the mid-1960s, both the preparatory work and the actual CAD research was largely financed by the American Defence Ministry, respectively by the Navy and the Air Force. The account of this work which will be given here shows how it developed as the result of constant interaction between individuals and between these individuals and their political, economic and military contexts.

Preparatory work in computer hard- and software had been developed at MIT since the early 1940s. At the beginning of the Second World War, the Servomechanisms Laboratory was established at MIT's Electrical Engineering Department for the purpose of examining control processes. One of the research projects, starting in 1944, examined the possible development of flight simulators. Jay W.Forrester, head of the project, and his close colleague Robert R.Everett, after they had brought themselves up to date with ongoing research on analogue and digital computers at the time, decided to build a computer to process the necessary mathematical operations for the flight simulator. However, after the war the Air Defense Systems Engineering Committee (ASEC) and the Office of Naval Research (ONR), after several inspections by outside experts, recommended reducing funds for the project. But at the beginning of the 1950s, following the first nuclear tests by the USSR in 1949, the Korean War in June 1950 and the start of the Cold War, the project received more attention, and by 1954 research resulted in a reliable computer for general purposes. 'Whirlwind', the name given to the computer due to its high processing speed (Redmond and Smith 1980), worked with vacuum tubes and was equipped with a 30 cm-diameter radar screen, which was originally intended for the graphic representation of the calculated flight path of missiles.

Members of the research group which had built the Whirlwind decisively influenced the development of high-speed computers in the USA. For instance, Kenneth Olsen, who took part in Project Whirlwind as a graduate student, became the founder of the Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC) in 1956. DEC soon built faster computers which replaced Whirlwind. The TX-0, then the TX-2, was given to MIT's Lincoln Laboratory, which had been established several miles away from the MIT campus in order to conduct military research exclusively. But Whirlwind was still used by students and research staff from other disciplines on the MIT campus, such as, for instance, groups conducting research on CAD systems.

Research on utilising computers for the design process took place to complement hardware developments at MIT, again for military purposes. In the 1950s, using Whirlwind as a general computer, the Servomechanisms Laboratory investigated developing computer programs for the numerical control of machine tools.[2] As early as 1950, Alfred Süsskind, using research funds provided by the Parsons machine tool factory in Michigan, had used Whirlwind to calculate the motion paths of lathes; following the start of the Cold War, the Air Force showed an interest in these studies.

When J. Francis Reintjes (Reintjes 1991) became head of the 'Servo Lab' in 1952, he continued the studies on improving the controlling of machine tools. In 1955, under the guidance of Reintjes, John H.Runyon wrote part instructions for machine tools, and, in the same year, Arnold Siegel presented the first programming of numerically controlled machine tools on Whirlwind; this, however, was limited to the motion paths of two-dimensional surfaces and could not be transferred to three-dimensional tasks. In 1956, Reintjes decided to use the remaining funds from the 'Digital Flight Test Instrumentation Project (DFTI)', a project that was also financed by the Air Force, for further developments of Siegel's studies. Douglas T.Ross, a mathematician who had been working successfully on the DFTI project under the leadership of John Ward since 1952, was appointed head of the newly created 'Computer Applications Group', consisting of two scientists and two students.

The intention of this group was to work out a program enabling engineers to program three-dimensional motion paths for machine tools in easy-to-learn commands. By December 1956, the Computer Applications Group had introduced a concept for three program parts. The hierarchical construction of each individual part made it possible, by means of just a few input commands, to evoke a series of further operations required for controlling the motion paths of machine tools. Because of this 'automatic' execution of input commands the program was called Automatically Programmed Tools' (APT) (Ross 1989). In 1957, on Ross's request, programmers from the 'Subcommittee on Numerical Control' (SNC) of the Aircraft Industries Association (AIA)[3] and the machine tool industry met at MIT for a few days in order to complete APT. They succeeded in writing the program, except for one problem which Ross solved during the weekend following the meeting with the aid of a textbook published in 1947 (Olmsted 1947). This had been recommended to him by Dwight M.B.Baumann, a doctoral candidate and instructor at the Design Division of MIT's Mechanical Engineering Department. Further research on APT took another two years, and it was not until 1959 that APT was presented to the public at a press conference. The program, which was installed on Whirlwind, showed the motion path of a machine tool in the production of an ashtray. Further development and updating of APT, which still had to be adjusted to different types of machines and tools before it could be applied in industry, were transferred to the Illinois Institute of Technology Research Institute (IITRI), the former Armour Research Foundation (Reintjes 1991, p. 89).

Even before the modest funds allocated to the APT project ran out, the head of the former Servo Lab (the name was changed to Electronic Systems Laboratory) and the APT group had considered the possibility of extending research on path control, i.e. graphical programming, to other stages of the production process.[4] Early in 1959, the group met representatives of the Design Division of MIT's Mechanical Engineering Department, among them Robert W.Mann, Steven A.Coons and Dwight M.B.Baumann. They decided on a series of tutorials to discuss studies on the application of graphical programming for the mechanical engineering design process; it is claimed that the notion 'computer-aided-design' and the acronym CAD was coined in the course of these discussions.

Even though naming the new project seemed incidental, a hidden but smouldering dispute on basic goals of the project was begun. The machine-tool programmers were

interested in automating the mechanical engineering design process in order to get standardised graphic information which production scheduling could easily transform into commands for the manufacturing process. From the point of view of design engineers, however, a program was needed not only to replace the routine work of graphic representation performed by draughtsmen and draughtswomen but also flexibly to assist the design engineer's work in different stages of the design process. Hence, naming the new project 'computer-aided design' signalled that the Design Division's position had been adopted in the course of the discussions. This difference of opinion will be mentioned again below; it took on a different significance in various research contexts, according in part to assessments of economic and social needs in specific national settings.

In June 1959, a joint project proposal from the group from the Electrical Engineering and from the Design Division of the Mechanical Engineering Department was sent to the Air Force (Manufacturing Methods Branch of the Air Material Command). The first of several Air Force contracts was dated 1 December 1959. However, each group followed its own research approach. The former APT developers extended APT by a compiler (language translator) and additional program parts. Again, Ross invited about thirty programmers from more than twenty companies to MIT in order to achieve this. In the mid-1960s, Ross introduced the AED (Automated Engineering Design or Algol Extended for Design) program, which he considered the beginning of the philosophy of complex programming (Ross 1989).

In the other group, the members of MIT's Design Division of the Mechanical Engineering Department under Robert W.Mann directed their attention to a pragmatic analysis of the design process. They considered their most important research aims to be developing input commands for processing graphic data, processing these data for fabrication needs, and the outputting of the same data on vector screens or on drafting machines (Mann 1992). Under the guidance of Coons, Mann and Baumann, several masters' theses were written on these topics; a doctoral dissertation in electronic engineering written by Ivan E.Sutherland[5] was considered the most important point of departure for later research on CAD systems. At the Lincoln Laboratories, Sutherland developed a program named SKETCHPAD. The program, which was implemented on Olsen's TX-2 and completed in 1963, enabled a construction and modification of graphics on a vector screen with the aid of a light pen, and modifications and rotations of the constructed geometrical figures, as well as 'stress analysis', the bending of shapes to which pressure is applied, for example in bridges (Sutherland 1963). Shortly after this, Timothy E.Johnson, in his master's thesis, extended the program from two-dimensional to three-dimensional graphic representations (Johnson 1963). Although Sutherland was not a member of the Design Division, Mann and Coons gave unqualified support to his study and considered the SKETCHPAD program a result of their own research approach within the CAD project.

The CAD project was finished in 1964. The Electronic Systems Laboratory took over subsequent studies at MIT until 1969 under the leadership of Reintjes (Reintjes 1991, p. 109).

## EARLY COMMERCIALISATION OF CAD IN THE USA, 1970 TO 1975

In keeping with MIT's view of technological research, it is normal practice to publish results without any restrictions and release them to further development for practical purposes. Researchers involved in the CAD project, at the end of the 1960s, left MIT in order to translate the research results into commercial success. Douglas T. Ross founded the SofTech software company in 1969 in order to develop further and sell the AED program to both civilian and military concerns. Ivan Sutherland first went into military research,[6] but returned to university research in 1966, first at Harvard. He was later offered a position at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, where, together with David Evans, he founded the software company Evans and Sutherland, which still exists. Today, Sutherland works with the Sun Corporation. Steven A.Coons left MIT and first moved to Harvard University, then became adviser to the Ford Motor Company, where he developed the concept of the 'Coons patches' which were used for freely shaped surfaces. He was then invited by Bertram Herzog to become adviser at the University of Colorado, where he died in 1979. Students who had become acquainted with the CAD project at MIT also founded software companies, such as Computer Vision, established by Philippe Villers, or Calma or Applicon. Others who had taken part in tutorials held by Coons at MIT in the early 1960s became teachers of 'CAD' at universities and in industry. Examples include Bertram Herzog, who, at that time, was a manager of the Engineering Methods Department of the Ford Motor Company, or S.H. 'Chace' Chasen, head of the research laboratory at Lockheed Company, Atlanta, or Carl Machover, who had presided over several hardware and software firms before he started his own consulting firm in computer graphics, the Machover Associates Corporation, in 1976.

During the 1970s, all the companies enjoyed enormous commercial success due to simplifying the MIT research products with which the scientific product was adapted to the needs of the American military and private market. Computer Vision, for instance, isolated the SKETCHPAD system's ability to produce drawings, thereby concentrating research and development on 'computer graphics', aiming at obtaining perfect on-screen representations of objects in numerous colours and tints, and with shadow areas. In a second step, in order to facilitate handling the CAD systems, necessary operations were reduced to 'turning the key'. These 'turn-key-systems' could be used by industry, advertising agencies, or by private owners of personal computers. Sutherland himself has remained faithful to the field of computer graphics until today. However, in the early 1970s, the terms 'CAD' and 'computer graphics' were still synonymous.

## A NEW SCIENCE-FUNDED RESEARCH IMPETUS AT AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES, 1975 TO 1985

It was only in the mid-1970s that a new research line split investigations into CAD systems from computer graphics. At Stanford, Bruce Baumgart introduced, in his doctoral thesis, the principal ideas of computer-internal representation of three-dimensional bodies (solid models) (Baumgart 1972). These had been developed by Ian

Braid in Cambridge, England; Braid had published the first solid modelling system under the name BUILD in 1973. In the USA, Baumgart's dissertation initiated a second wave of CAD research at universities—on three-dimensional 'solid modelling'.

As opposed to MIT research on CAD in the sixties, solid modelling research was sponsored by the Department of Defense, by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and to a great extent by industry. Soon, several research lines of solid modelling evolved at different universities and the new research field started to split 'computer graphics' from 'computer-aided design'. Richard Riesenfeld, Elane Cohen and Tom Lyche at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City continued to follow the computer graphics line. Herbert B.Voelcker and Aristides A.G.Requicha at the University of Rochester[7] were engaged in geometric modelling research following the research of Douglas T. Ross and aiming at manufacturing parts automatically (Requicha and Voelcker 1982). At other universities, researchers turned their attention to special problems regarding 3-D systems, tackling the problem from the design aspect; for example David C.Gossard at MIT and also Dave C.Anderson at the Purdue University. In this context Charles Eastman, an architect, must also be mentioned; he belongs to the informal core group of early solid modelling researchers in mechanical engineering, although he envisaged the application of solid modelling systems to designing buildings (Eastman and Baer 1975).

At the same time, research on solid modelling started to reintegrate the design engineering with the manufacturing process from both the manufacturing and the mechanical engineering design ends. Symptomatic for the beginning of integration between design—and production-oriented research approaches with solid modelling was Michael Wozny's 'Center for Interactive Computer Graphics' at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI), Troy, New York.[8] This was founded in 1977, and renamed 'Rensselaer Design Research Center' in the early 1980s. At the same time, research was shifted from 'computer graphics' to the standardisation and integration of computer-aided design and Computer-Aided Manufacturing (CAD/CAM) (RPI 1991). However, collective action was needed to develop CAD/CAM further: in the 1980s, the projects of the Troy Center as well as integrated research on CAD/CAM systems conducted at other centres were far in advance of their realisation in the practical field (RPI 1991).


## PRODUCTION-ORIENTED, SCIENCE-FUNDED RESEARCH ON CAD IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY, 1965 TO 1985

CAD research in the Federal Republic of Germany started at the time as the CAD project at MIT ended, in 1964/65. In the 1950s and 1960s, when the immediate post-war phase of reconstructing the democratic political and economic system had ended, German engineers had already learned about the research carried out at MIT; but it was not until the mid-1960s that representatives of the scientific and the industrial community as well as the German government made mutual efforts to adopt CAD research results, as well as findings on other new technologies from the USA, and to adapt these for use in German industry.

As far as research on CAD was concerned, there were first and foremost four institutes in West German universities which produced exceptional results in developing CAD

systems. These were the Werkzeugmaschinen-laboratorium (WZL: Laboratory for Machine Tools) at the Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule (RWTH) in Aix-La-Chapelle; the Institut für Werkzeugmaschinen und Fertigungslehre (IWF) (Laboratory for Machine Tools and Manufacturing Science) at the Technische Universität (TU) in Berlin; the Lehrstuhl für Maschinenelemente und Konstruktionslehre (LMK: Chair of Machine Elements and Mechanical Engineering Design) at the Ruhr University in Bochum; and the Institut für Rechneranwendung in Planung und Konstruktion (RPK: Laboratory for the Application of Computers in Planning Processes and Design Engineering) at the University of Karlsruhe. In Germany, the production-oriented CAD research field, which had long been under-represented in the USA, clearly dominated over 'computer graphics' research such as that fostered by José Encarnacao at the University of Darmstadt. Encarnacao's research has still not gained the same recognition in Germany as in the USA.

In the Federal Republic of Germany, the first phase of CAD research was initiated by the directors of the two oldest production-technology and machine tool laboratories at universities: Herwart Opitz, head of the WZL at the RWTH, Aix-La-Chapelle, the laboratory founded in 1906 by Adolf Wallichs,[9] and Günter Spur, since 1965 director of the IWF at the TU Berlin, the laboratory founded in 1904 by Gerhard Schlesinger. Opitz and Spur, together with Walter Simon, professor at the TU Berlin, and Gerhard Stute, from the University of Stuttgart, had already started research on a program for a numerically controlled machine tool before 1965. This project was funded by the German Research Association (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, the DFG). Research efforts were multiplied when, in the framework of a biennial colloquium held at the WZL in Aix-La-Chapelle starting in 1965, possible ways of reducing costs in the production of small series were discussed. Representatives of industry and science agreed to take over and adapt the APT system for the automated programming of machine tools, developed by Douglas T.Ross at MIT. However, the program was to be extended in order to ensure its introduction and distribution in West Germany in a standardised form. From 1965 to 1967, with the aid of a newly founded association and affiliated bodies, researchers who mainly worked at the WZL developed the EXAPT program (EXtended subset of APT); this was subsequently further developed and distributed not only within the Federal Republic of Germany, but, with appropriate adaptations, in other European countries also.

Parallel to the development of EXAPT, studies on the application of computers to the mechanical design engineering process started at the two production-technology research laboratories, the WZL at the RWTH, Aix, and the IWF at the TU Berlin. At the WZL, the main objectives were to supplement the rationalisation of production processes by introducing rationalisation measures into designing. Under the guidance of Opitz, Rolf Simon produced a doctoral thesis and Dr Walter Eversheim a *Habilitation* thesis on 'computer-aided design' (Simon 1968). Eversheim proved that rationalisation of the design effort could be achieved by reducing the variety of parts (Eversheim, 1969). The basic geometric shapes of these could be translated into a program, and basic shaped parts could be assembled in a variety of designs. This point of view contrasted with the common conception that machinery manufacturers would mainly produce first-of-a-kind designs rather than variations on designs. Under the leadership of Opitz's four successors,

who were appointed in 1972, further doctoral research at the WZL followed the approach of rationalising production processes; here it was Walter Eversheim and Manfred Weck especially who pursued the fields of computer-aided design and production planning. Since the 1970s, medium-scale and small companies, especially in the Aix region, have been able to benefit from this research.

At the IWF at the TU Berlin, doctoral candidates under the guidance of Günter Spur developed a CAD system concept which was discussed at international conferences. They attempted to reduce the variety of parts in a manner which would not result in a reduction of the variety of functions, and at the same time facilitate work planning by introducing procedures capable of standardisation. At the IWF, early graphics were successfully implemented on a computer in 1972. Among other programs the COMPAC (Computer Part Coding) system developed by Jürgen Kurth (Kurth 1971) became one of the well-known results of research conducted at the IWF (Krause 1976).

As opposed to investigations at the WZL and IWF, doctoral candidates supervised by Hans Seifert at the LMK (established in 1969 at the newly founded University of Bochum) concentrated on developing a design logic theory and on computer assistance for the design process. Here, Herold (Herold 1974) developed the modular PROREN system for supporting first-of-a-kind designs, which was first demonstrated in 1974 (Bargele 1978).

As early as 1975, all three laboratories, the WZL, IWF and the LMK, had caught up with the research standard of American CAD research. Around 1975, at the same time as their American colleagues, they started investigations into solid modelling and from then on they continued to keep up with the international standard in CAD research. In accordance with the state of research and development in the second half of the 1970s, the doctoral candidates supervised by Hans Grabowski at the fourth laboratory, the RPK at the University of Karlsruhe (founded only in 1976), worked on improving the applicability of existing systems. These concerned, for instance, adapting American turn-key systems for use in German industrial companies,[10] or integrating programs from diverse research fields into all stages of the factory production process (Eigner 1980).

Doctoral research, as well as research projects at all four laboratories at leading universities in the Federal Republic of Germany, either was financed by the DFG or was considered part of the work of assisting a laboratory's director. Universities in Germany are all financed by the state, and unless special arrangements are agreed upon, they are not allowed to conduct either profit—or non-profit-oriented research which is funded by outside interest groups, such as the industry or the military. Therefore in all German universities, research on CAD issues must exclusively be funded by the scientific community, i.e. by independent foundations.

## THE HIDDEN IMPACT OF SOCIETY ON CAD RESEARCH ISSUES IN WEST GERMANY

From the point of view of engineering development, the WZL, the IWF, the LMK and the RPK all made up-to-date contributions to CAD research; each was outstanding in its own specific research approach. However, analysis of the 'non-technical' conditions under

which the three institutes worked between 1965 and 1985 has shown an almost unrestricted dominance of the production-oriented research carried out at the WZL and the IWF. Both of these laboratories were enabled not only to quadruple their research personnel while that of the LMK and RPK remained constant, but their directors also occupied all principal posts in the self-governing bodies of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG). The expert commissions of the DFG assigned funds for CAD research projects more frequently to the WZL and the IWF than to the LMK and the RPK.[11] In fact, the LMK was unable to carry out even a single project in the DFG 'computer-aided design' focal promotion programme, which corresponded to its own thematic approach, while the WZL and the IWF received assistance for several projects in the same programme. The politics and economics of the German research context, which was dominated by WZL and IWF experts, ensured that research emanating from the dominant WZL-IWF axis was regarded as by far the most reliable knowledge.

This clear under-representation of the LMK projects began in the second half of the 1970s with the development of 'solid models'. At that time the scientists at the production-technology-oriented IWF were defining 'CAD' as a system which served only to prepare and plan production processes—i.e. following their own approach (Spur and Krause 1976). In the second half of the 1970s, both laboratories, first the IWF, then the WZL, were extended by a Fraunhofer Institute for promoting the application of research results to industrial practice. Furthermore, the Federal Government also decided to start a support programme for developing CAD/CAM systems serving the demands of production-oriented research.

This dominance of production-oriented CAD research corresponded to the strong position of the machine tool industry as the top economic factor in the Federal Republic of Germany. Research on production-oriented CAD systems, which would help to rationalise the machine-tool industry as the strongest part of the Germany economy, was fostered even more intensely after the first oil crisis in 1974 and the first signs of a worsening employment situation in the second half of the 1970s. The coalition government of Social Democrats and Liberals, in power from 1969 to 1982, as well as the Christian Democratic government, in power before the 'grand coalition' of all three parties between 1966 and 1969, sought to keep the machine-tool industry in a world-leading position in order to protect the German economy from incipient recession. But this strong contextual influence did not provide a favourable result with regard to the introduction of CAD systems in industry. With the exception of the LMK's design-oriented PROREN system, sold by a company which the institute director and his assistants had founded in order to bypass the hidden boycott of the DFG commissions, in West Germany no powerful CAD system was developed for successful commercialisation by software companies. Moreover, until the late 1980s, not a single integrated CAD/CAM system was developed to the point of application maturity, nor was industry prepared to accept such systems. As compared to the USA, West Germany lacked software companies prepared to develop CAD systems designed in university laboratories.[12] The Fraunhofer Institutes could not bridge the strict separation between non-profit research at universities and industry. In addition to this, the failure to produce applicable, commercialisable German CAD systems was due to the fact that research directors at the two biggest manufacturing-oriented laboratories pushed aside

investigators of design-oriented solid modelling research. As a consequence, the market for design-oriented CAD systems, which were both less complex and easier to sell, was left open to foreign products.

## CAD RESEARCH NETWORKS IN FRANCE, 1955 TO 1985

In contrast to the German example, the possible economic success of multiple, 'democratic' research approaches to new technology is demonstrated by CAD research conducted in France after the late 1950s. CAD research in France emerged from companies, and found its way into the research of the Ecoles Nationales and universities from there.[13] Academic CAD research in France is still more closely linked with industry than in the USA or Germany. In 1958, two years after the APT project was started at MIT, Paul du Faget de Casteljau, a mathematician at Citroën, was given the task of developing a numerical definition for a casting mould, which could then be transformed into program instructions for a machine tool. Within two years he succeeded in producing a magnetic tape for a milling machine, using a purely mathematical definition of surfaces. Even though Casteljau's method was taught to draftsmen at Citroën from 1963 onwards, he was forced to keep it in secrecy until 1984. Proceeding from Casteljau's method, the SADUSCA/SPAC-CAR System was built at Citroën and was used in designing the 'GS' in 1968. However, Citroën, as a company, decided not to engage in commercialising computer software and hardware (Poitou 1988b, 1989).

Around 1960, without any knowledge of Casteljau's work, an engineer at Renault Machine Outile, Pierre Bezier, started research on what later on became the UNISURF system (Poitou 1988a, p. 245). Bezier, too, defined surfaces, for example car bodies, by mathematical operations (Bezier 1988). When Renault and Peugeot signed an agreement for co-operation in research and development in 1966, engineers from Peugeot further developed the prototype UNISURF, which was used to design the Peugeot model 204 in 1968. In 1974 Peugeot broke the agreement with Renault and bought two other companies, Citroën and Talbot, merging into Peugeot S.A. The new company adopted the Citroën policy towards the development of CAD/CAM systems. Instead of developing their own CAD systems further, the management decided to buy Computer Vision's turnkey system and,

> in order to improve CV's [Computer Vision's] limited capacities in surface design and solid modelling, parts of Casteljau's and Bezier's results were incorporated into what was to be named the 'CV+' system.
>
> (Poitou 1988a p. 245)[14]

Thus the different approaches taken by Peugeot S.A. and Renault to computer aids to the production process were combined. At Peugeot S.A. a method was used resembling the production-oriented approach to CAD (Poitou 1988b, p. 246), while Bezier's UNISURF was designed in order to integrate styling, modelling, drafting and manufacturing with the aid of a computer right from the start. In contrast to the situation in Germany, different approaches to CAD developments did not result in battles about prevalence in research funding, and did not hinder further merging of systems.

Academic research into CAD did not start in France until the late 1960s. The first design-oriented CAD system originally emerged from studies on computer-assisted representations of the dynamics of fluids. In 1970, at the Laboratoire d'Informatique pour la Méchanique et les Sciences de l'Ingénieur (LIMSI), a research laboratory of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) in Orsay near Paris, Jean Marc Brun and Michel Théron developed the EUCLID system for modelling and visualising the effect of flow on objects, for example on ships. EUCLID is considered to be the first design-oriented 'solid modelling' system in France. Brun and Théron continued the development of EUCLID at the CNRS up to its industrial maturity, supported by an automobile components manufacturer with American majority shareholders. Then in 1979, Brun and Théron founded their own software company, Datavision. Only one year later, they sold 51 per cent of their shares to the military division of the MATRA-Group and, in 1985, Renault consented to the merging of Matra-Datavision's EUCLID with an updated version of UNISURF. Renault connected EUCLID with Bezier's UNISURF, which, in turn, had been combined with the French version of APT to become SURFAPT (Poitou 1989, pp. 92ff.). It is quite apparent that, contrary to the characteristics of CAD research in Germany, in France this powerful CAD system was developed as a result of the continuous adaptation, integration and commercialisation of systems which had been developed within different contexts and for different fields of application.

Again, other CAD systems were designed by the aircraft industry, the state-owned Aérospatiale and the partly privately owned Avions Marcel Dassault-Breget Aviation (AMD-BA) in the early 1970s. Besides adopting systems built by other firms, AMD-BA also developed its own famous integrated CAD/CAM system, CATI (Conception Assistée Tridimensionelle Interactive), designed by F.Bernard. Towards the end of the 1970s, CATI was further developed (Neuve Eglise 1981) and, at the beginning of the 1980s, it was implemented in the production process before being extended to the CATIA system and then marketed. CATIA is now one of the most widely used CAD systems in the world (Poitou 1988a, 1989).

In French CAD research, the military played a less important role than in the USA, but military research and university projects were combined in a special manner in this setting. One of the first research projects on the tool path control of NC programs was initiated under the guidance of Jean Pierre Crestin at the military college Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Techniques Avancées (ENSTA), Paris (Crestin and Paillard 1973); a small production-oriented CAD system, VULCAN, was designed but not further developed. In 1973, ENSTA fostered the establishment of the Groupe de Recherche en Informatique Interactive (GII) set up by former students of ENSTA, which conducted research on interactive programs and graphical output. In 1978, GII merged with an informatics group named CPAO (Conception et Production Assistée par l'Ordinateur), providing the army with systems automating the design process from 1981 onwards. Several smaller systems had been designed when, in 1990, CPAO was transformed into the Institut de Recherche en Productique et Logistique (IRPL). The new name stood for a new arrangement for co-operation in research between the military and industry, which resulted from negotiations between the Ministry of Defence and ARMINES (Association pour la Recherche et le Développement des Méthodes et Processus Industriels), the research association of the industry. IRPL scientists teach courses at the army, in industry

and at universities, discussing the application and integration of programs for different purposes in the entire production process (Pistenon).

Again, in contrast to the USA and Germany, in France informatics played a major role as a starting point for research and development on CAD. Computer-graphics-oriented CAD research emerged from computer science studies which were at first conducted at the Institut de Recherche en Informatique et Automatique (IRIA) in Grenoble. There Michel Lucas attempted to visualise curve paths, which led him into computer graphics research; he teaches now at the Ecole Central de Nantes. Up to the present day, former members of the group around Lucas, for example Denis Vandorpe, Laboratoire d'Informatique Graphique et d'Intelligence Artificielle, or Claude Bernard, Université Lyon I, continue to carry out graphics-oriented research. However, their main emphasis is in design-oriented CAD research, which they consider the indispensable starting-point for data-transfer from CAD to CAM systems.[15]

Presumably, the strong emphasis on computer-science-oriented research on local area networks for the comprehensive production process results from the Grenoble school, too. Thus, in the early 1970s, Jean Marc Mermet's studies served as a starting point for research which has basically been continued right up to the present day by his pupils, Yvon Gardan, now head of the Laboratoire de Recherche Informatique (LRIM) at the University of Metz, and Bertrand T.David, Ecole Centrale de Lyon, Ecully (Gardan 1991).

This short summary of research approaches developed in France illustrates that all the research lines developed in the USA have also emerged in France, supplemented by a strong influence from computer science. However, compared with CAD research in the USA and Germany, it is difficult clearly to define the relative strength of the three main fields: computer graphics, design-oriented and production-oriented CAD research. However, the foundation of two organisations for the purpose of supporting a general exchange of information about research results between science and industry may indicate a certain prevalence of the design-oriented and the production-oriented research lines *vis-à-vis* computer graphics and an information science approach to CAD. In 1968, with the financial aid of the government, Christian Sauvaire, representative of the academic production-oriented CAD-NC military research sector, founded the Agence pour le Développement de la Production Automatisée (ADEPA) in order to provide the mechanical engineering industry with information on results from private or military CAD as well as CAD/CAM research. However, it seemed, as in the cases of Germany and the USA in the early 1970s, that French industry was not yet prepared to apply CAD systems designed for integrating the production process 'backwards', i.e. from the point of view of the production—(or manufacturing-) oriented research approach.

In 1974, another organisation was established which often competed with ADEPA's activities. Mermet, at that time research assistant to Kuntz-Mann in Grenoble, the founder of the informatics-oriented Institut de mathématiques appliquées de Grenoble (IMAG), had contacted scientists and representatives of industry at the forefront of CAD/CAM research and application, in order to establish the Mission a la Conception Assistée et au Dessin par Ordinateur (MICADO) (Poitou 1989, p. 122). Soon MICADO, sponsored by different private and public sources, acted as a successful counterpart to ADEPA, with 400 members in 1982, including 100 industrial associations. In contrast to ADEPA,

MICADO emphasised the conception phase of a product as the starting-point for developing integrated CAD/CAM. With this approach, the association successfully promoted the application of CAD systems such as, for instance, EUCLID, the program developed by Brun et Théron at the CNRS (Poitou 1989, p. 125). Thus they did not limit promotion to a specific industry but sold the system to furniture, textile or elevator companies alike.

In addition to the various activities of the two associations, the Ministries for National Education and Industry, and the respective *Region,* in a joint effort, founded six experimental centres, Ateliers Inter-Etablissements de Productique (AIP), in order to train students in various technical and non-technical issues in the comprehensive production process, including the application of CAD/CAM.

## CONCLUSION

An international comparison between the historical development of computer-aided design (CAD) research in the USA, the Federal Republic of Germany and France reveals characteristic patterns with regard to CAD research in each of the three countries. Despite the fact that the same research lines (computer graphics, the production-oriented and the design-oriented CAD) were the subjects of development, contextual conditions in each country had a multitude of impacts: they affected the speed of development, the funding of specific research approaches, the effort to reintegrate research lines and finally the implementation of respective CAD systems into industry.

Many of the differences observed within research on CAD in the USA, France, and Germany may be regarded as 'cultural' characteristics specific to their own settings. However, the analysis presented here has emphasised the role of sociopolitical groups and their impact on the development of new technologies. From this it may be concluded that the more social groups are given the opportunity to take part in the collective action in which new technologies are developed, the more flexibly the shaping of new technologies can respond to demands from all parts of a society; and the more accepted, widespread and economically successful the new technology will be in the context within which it is developed.

## NOTES

1 The author conducted the research project relevant to this article at the Institut für Philosophie, Wissenschaftstheorie, Wissenschafts—und Technikgeschichte, at the Technical University, Berlin, Germany. A related account of this work was published by the European Commission Directorate-General, Science, Research and Development (Brussels/Luxembourg) in Perrin and Vinck (1996).
2 David Noble (1985) has pointed out that introducing numerically controlled machine tools in industry eventually led to a social revolution in production: by taking over the programming of machine tools, management could assume control of the production process.

3 In 1959 the Aircraft Industries Association changed its name to Aerospace Industries Association.

4 It is claimed that the representative of the Air Force responsible for MIT, Bill Webster, referred Ross to a *Fortune* article on the development of a 'drawing machine' in 1956 (Ross 1989, p. 7).

5 The dissertation, leading to a D.Phil.degree, was written under the guidance of Claude E.Shannon, and was supported by Marvin Minski, Steven A.Coons and Douglas T.Ross together (Sutherland 1963, pp. 1ff.).

6 For a while he was with ARPA, the 'Advanced Research Projects Agency' of the Department of Defense (DOD).

7 According to Voelcker and Requicha, early research on three-dimensional programs had already begun in the 1960s, when L.G.Roberts reported on his investigations into 'Machine Perception of Three Dimensional Solids' at MIT's Lincoln Laboratories in 1963.

8 One of several research centres promoted by the National Science Foundation and working in close cooperation with industry.

9 Adolf Wallichs was the first person to translate into German F.W.Taylor's book *On the Art of Cutting Metal.*

10 For instance Martin Eigner made a substantial contribution to the organisation of databases, also needed for the creation of 3D volumetric models (Eigner 1980).

11 The directors of the WZL, Aix-la-Chapelle, carried out a total of 256 of the projects sponsored by the DFG between 1966 and 1985 (sum of the projects listed in the annual reports of the DFG). Of these, Walter Eversheim headed 55 projects. Within the same period, Günter Spur, IWF, Berlin, headed 44, Hans Seifert LMK, Bochum, 23 and Hans Grabowski, RPK, Karlsruhe, 13 of the projects.

12 It is only since the early 1990s that software firms, for instance those working for the car company VW, have been set up close to the IWF at the TU Berlin.

13 Jean-Pierre Poitou has dealt with the history of CAD systems in France in great detail (Poitou 1989).

14 The founder of Computer Vision, Philippe Villers, a Frenchman, reports that he had found an efficient sales representative in France, and that therefore Computer Vision systems could be sold, above all, in France (interview with the author in 1992).

15 As opposed to the Germans, the CAD researchers in France defined French acronyms at an early stage: CAO (Construction Assisté par Ordinateur), FAO (Fabrication Assistée par Ordinateur), and CFAO (Construction et Fabrication Assistée par Ordinateur).

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# 4
# Social movement theory and the political context of collective action

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## CONTEXT, COLLECTIVE ACTION AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY

The foregoing chapters have begun to explore the mutual influences between collective action and its political contexts. The perceptions of the social actors involved in collective action are clearly important to these influences, and often act to 'mediate' them. On the one hand, Matti Hyvärinen reveals that these perceptions can create their own 'expectational context', and, consequently, the rhetoric of collective action comes to constitute its contextual reality in some degree. On the other hand, Irmela Gorges demonstrates that cultural and institutional contexts can condition the perceptions which shape the collective generation of knowledge. This chapter seeks to develop these insights by taking a step back from collective action and the perceptions of the actors themselves, in order to examine theories of collective action (in the form of social movement theory) and the perceptions of the theorists. It will be argued that these theoretical perceptions are themselves strongly influenced by the theorists' own political and cultural contexts, and, furthermore, that these perceptions are capable of creating their own 'expectational context'—an ideal-typical world which serves the theoretical purpose of 'explaining' collective action. The problem is that this 'expectational context' of social movements may correspond little or not at all to the real political contexts where most social mobilisation now occurs. The ways that collective action in the form of social movements is 'imagined' may therefore fail to take account of the real features of the majority of these movements.

Social movement theory is necessarily drawn from the experience of particular social movements in particular places. Yet a reading of the theory reveals its universal aspirations. Its broad explanatory claims seek to transcend the geography and history of its own genesis. There is an attempt to construct general theory that can travel across the boundaries of time and space. But does the theory travel well? In particular, can it address the properties of social movements in distinct political and cultural contexts? The question is sharply posed by the increasing differentiation of the sites of theoretical production and collective action. Over the past twenty years, social movement theory in Western Europe and North America has expanded in the same rhythm as the social movements themselves have declined. In the meantime there has been an exponential increase in social movement activity in Eastern Europe, South Africa, China and Latin America.

This is not to suggest that all social movement theory is the same. On the contrary, the theory itself is shaped by its social and historical context. In Europe this has included a social democratic consensus, the growth of the welfare state, strong corporatist traditions and a highly institutionalised labour movement (Scott 1991). In this context *new social movements* really did look new, and social movement theory sought to explain the novelty by major shifts in society and culture. The United States, on the other hand, had no such social democratic or corporatist traditions, and the labour movement was less important to national politics. Here social movements were explained not by big changes but by the continuing ability of outsider groups to *mobilise resources* and gain representation within the system. But both orders of theory invoke general principles of explanation. What are these principles? And do they apply outside of Western Europe and North America?

## SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY DESCRIBED

In Europe the theory has mainly sought to explain *why* social movements arise in the first place. It sees the movements arising in response to large historical and societal changes that have created a discrete category of *new social movements* which express, in turn, the construction of new social and political identities. Indeed, it is the question of *identity* that defines this theoretical approach (Cohen 1985). The changes are variously described as a shift from liberal to late capitalism (Habermas 1973, 1987), from industrial to postindustrial society (Touraine 1985, 1988), or from material to postmaterial values (Inglehart 1977); and together they have created a new cognitive basis for collective action (Melucci 1989). Once again, this theory is not homogeneous, but it does represent a recognisable corpus of social scientific inquiry.

Seminal to this theory was Habermas' notion that the *lifeworld* of civil society is being progressively colonised by the subsystems of money (the market) and power (the state) (Habermas 1989). For Habermas it clearly followed that all social movements must be particular and defensive (with the single exception of feminism since it still makes universal moral and legal claims). Touraine balked at this defensiveness and sought to make social movements something quite different. Through his ideas of *reflexivity* and *historicity* he explores the potential of *the* social movement to transform contemporary society. But Touraine, Habermas *et al.* agree that the roots of social movement activity lie deep within civil society: 'Private life is more than ever a public thing, the stake of a social movement' (Touraine 1988, p, 14). As a result the movements are diverse and spring from disparate kinds of conflict. Hence the burden of explanation itself shifts from structure to actor, with an emphasis on the construction of new identities. The theory seeks to explain both contemporary collective action and the specific stakes of this action.

Many of the critiques of the European theory turn on the question of 'newness'. By way of illustration, the theory claims that the *new social movements* are not class-based like the old movements (Inglehart 1977; Offe 1985), but have to do with global concerns, the defence of community and personal realisation, But the critics reply that *new social movements* may, in fact, be quite class-specific and drawn from the educated but frustrated middle classes (especially the 'third generation' that has been excluded from

political decision-making) (Scott 1991). As a corollary the theory claims that the process of identity-formation is more complex than in the past (because it is not class-based), and that the new movements are quite unlike the 'historical personalities' of the past century (Melucci 1989). But the critics respond that the problems of identity construction remain the same for all movements, and, moreover, that class identity itself has to be constructed (cf. E.P.Thompson 1974). If *new social movements* are not really new, then the grand theories of the historical shifts that explain the 'newness' are redundant. By extension the critics allege that the theory in general is overblown. What really explains the recent rise of social movements is the institutional and legal context of post-war Europe and especially the inadequacies and failures of the main institutions of interest intermediation, trade unions and political parties (Scott 1991; Dalton and Keuchler 1990, p. 16).

North American theory, in contrast, makes no reference to the historical or social context of collective action, and the institutional context remains indeterminate. The broader context is no longer crucial because this theory seeks to explain *how* rather than *why* social actors mobilise. Why they do so seems self-evident. Nobody is happy with their lot. How they do so becomes a double question of how detached individuals make up a social actor, and how some such actors manage to mobilise while others do not. The core assumption of the theory is that individual rational actors apply instrumental reasoning to their decision to participate (or not) in social mobilisation. Even though we may all be equally miserable rational actors, the 'free rider' problem makes participation unlikely in the absence of selective incentives and sanctions (Olson 1965). The theory then develops through an inquiry into *resource mobilisation* and organisation, leadership and strategic decision-making. The approach is finally defined by its rejection of functionalist explanation and its focus on *strategy*.

Critiques of what has become known as *resource mobilisation theory* tend to turn on the question of methodological individualism. Critics object that an instrumental rationality that bridges a rigid means/end distinction is an incomplete account of the motivations for social mobilisation. Weber's account was richer and more rounded, and specified different types of motivation. And an approach that is self-consciously 'without history' (Hirschman 1982) or context cannot explain the formation of the preferences of social actors or the goals of social action. In other words, without a vision of identity, there is no knowledge of goals, and the means/ends calculation must remain opaque—so vitiating the notion of rational choice (Melucci 1988). This sets the theory a tautological trap, since interests then tend to be defined in such a way that, whatever the choice, it always furthers those interests. Moreover, the 'free rider' problem and the uncertainty of future good inevitably imparts a conservative bias to the theory. In fact, social mobilisation occurs much more frequently than this theory can easily explain.

The main problem, say the critics, is that the 'individual motivation to participate cannot be considered an exclusively individual variable' (Melucci 1988, p. 339). In other words, it is impossible to explain how individuals come together in the first place without exploring their social networks and community contexts, their ethnicity and their gender. It is shared experience and especially shared grievances, a common sense of 'moral outrage' (Moore Jr 1973), that feed the 'production of meaning' (McAdam *et al.* 1988) and create the cultural consistency and cognitive basis of collective action. In more recent years *resource mobilisation theory* has addressed these concerns through the idea of the

micromobilisation context (or recruitment network, or social movement sector) that links the micro and macro levels of social mobilisation. What it has generally failed to note is that this context is often institutional rather than social.

## STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

Theory sometimes makes strange bedfellows. Laclau and Mouffe have argued that political practice constructs the interests it represents; that identity is a contingent outcome of the process of mobilisation; and that the choice of values that identity articulates is itself completely contingent (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). This approach comes close to that of *resource mobilisation* insofar as they both take the original cultural materials of identity as unimportant and both (initially) ignore the institutional context of social mobilisation. Furthermore, the analytical radicalism of Laclau and Mouffe reveals, by implication, that both *resource mobilisation theory,* or 'RMT', and *new social movement theory,* or 'NSM', see identity as coming first, as providing the premise for the subsequent analysis. The difference between the two schools is that NSM sees identity as specific and problematic, while RMT sees identity as general and unproblematic (we are all rational actors). But it is clear that the processes of organisation, mobilisation and strategic choice all contribute to construct identity; and since contingencies are present in these processes, and especially within strategic choice (there is no singular rationality in social movements), the formation of identity cannot be predicted or controlled (Foweraker 1993, ch. 12). The European theory privileges reflexivity and the interrogation of identity, and insists on knowing *who we are;* but there is no sense that the answer may come as a complete surprise.

In recent years there have been some concerted attempts to reconcile NSM and RMT. In general this has been done by posing the key questions in terms of 'both/and' rather than 'either/or'. Just as identity is a question both of original cultural materials and of organisation and strategy, so collective action by social movements is seen as both expressive (of identity) and instrumental, as both generating and mobilising resources, as having the kind of 'dual logic' (Cohen and Arato 1992, p. 508) that both constructs personal and collective identity and promotes instrumental and strategic activity. In illustration, the civil rights movement in the United States sought rights *and* the removal of the traditional norms of social control; while most forms of feminism seek economic and political power *and* changes in patriarchal institutions and practices. In other words, civil society becomes both the target and the terrain of social movements (Cohen and Arato 1992, p. 509), and social movements themselves are both defensive and offensive at the same moment in time.

## SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY AND LATIN AMERICA

The purpose of this (all too brief) characterisation of the theory is to support a subsequent inquiry into its applicability outside of Western Europe and North America. The theory's principles will be tested here in contemporary Latin America, where social movements

have arisen and multiplied in a very different historical and political context. The presumption is that analogous arguments could be made for other geographical areas at other times; and the main preoccupation is whether contextual differences inevitably invalidate the theory.

Both NSM and RMT tend to assume the presence of liberal democratic regimes, and see social movements as a response to, critique of, or attack on the inadequacies and partialities of these regimes. But most social movements in Latin America have arisen under military-authoritarian regimes, and often struggle to achieve the liberal democracy that is allegedly failing elsewhere. In a deeper sense both NSM and RMT assume the presence of a dense, articulate and communicative civil society, and the dissemination of liberal values within this society. But the regimes of Latin America have suppressed the autonomous activity of civil society (banning freedom of assembly, speech, information and even *habeas corpus*), and often unleashed violent assaults upon a society that was anyway tainted by authoritarian traits (O'Donnell 1984; Valenzuela 1990). In Habermasian terms, the theory assumes an active public sphere and extensive welfarism, but in Latin America welfarism has been patchy or absent, labour controlled and the public sphere constricted (Weffort 1989). By extension, both NSM and RMT insist on the diversity of social movements that seek to vindicate or protect particular, delimited and specific sets of rights (universal rights being guaranteed by the liberal polity), whereas (equally diverse) social movements in Latin America are still pressing for universal rights, since common civil liberties remain a central concern. There is a radical difference between contexts where citizenship is enshrined and others where its elements are still inchoate.

In recent years there has been something of a vogue for NSM among Latin American intellectuals and Latin Americanists (for example Escobar and Alvarez 1992). But NSM explains social movements by the major shift from industrial to post-industrial society, and from material to post-material values; whereas the main *lifeworld* shift in Latin America has been from rural to urban and industrial life, and consequently its social movements are still primarily concerned with material needs and demands. Far from a struggle for symbolic goods by new middle classes with post-material values, social movements in Latin America are engaged in a 'prematerial' struggle for physical survival in their recurrent demands for basic services and public utilities. In short, they mobilise around local, immediate and concrete demands for the most part, and mobilise the popular sectors of the deprived and dispossessed, as well as the working class. The most numerous movements are therefore the urban ones, and they have become the main topic of social movement research on the continent.

When the NSM insistence on the diversity and specificity of social movements is imported into the Latin American context, then social phenomena that never qualified twenty years ago (such as the action of basket-weavers in the upper Cochabamba valley) are suddenly certified by the NSM label. Moreover in Latin America it is the 'older' movements (like the unionism of the ABC triangle in São Paulo, or the electricians' or teachers' movements in Mexico) that still spearhead the main political struggles, with class concerns remaining central in many cases (Davis 1989, p. 233). Furthermore, while NSM may see social movements as a response to the pressures of commodification, bureaucratisation and massification (Mouffe's restatement of Habermas' lifeworld issues:

Mouffe 1988), in Latin America it is still the massive and overwhelming presence of the state that matters to most movements, and especially the centralisation of power and decision-making in the executive and public administration (Boschi 1987). Social movements are therefore mainly engaged in responding to or promoting the multiple forms of state intervention and regulation, and the state is the main focus of their demand-making. In short, if there is any 'newness' here it must be in the quality and character of the relationship between social movements and the state. By extension, while NSM argues that identities are formed in civil society, it is often observed in Latin America that identities are 'constituted at the political level' (Moisés 1981), that is through interaction with the state. Civil society in Latin America, on the contrary, has had to be reconstituted or recovered as a 'space of freedom' (Scherer-Warren and Krischke 1987). 'Where it did not exist it had to be invented' (Weffort 1989, p. 115).

Unlike NSM, RMT has found little resonance in Latin America, possibly because the methodological critiques have proved too damning, possibly because its 'imperial' provenance has made it unwelcome. The feminist analysis of RMT, in particular, has criticised its reliance on a 'pseudo-universal' rational actor who, in fact, is a first-world, white, middle-class male, wearing a suit (Marx Ferree 1992, p. 41). Such a perception represents a real impediment to applying RMT to Latin American social movements that mainly mobilise the poor and deprived, the *mestizos* and ethnic minorities, and, above all, the women. At the same time, RMT is seen as projecting middle-class reform goals through non-violent conflict and the practice of 'normal politics' (Piven and Cloward 1992), thus coming close to the idea of a generic social movement that always demands the same (acceptable) degree of political change (Muller 1992). In other words, RMT can be characterised as specific to the United States' context of PACs and pork-barrels, where the mutual permeation of Social Movement Organisations (SMOs) and government agencies make social movements barely distinguishable from interest groups. In Latin America, in contrast, the stakes of social conflict are much higher; there is much more violence; and authoritarian regimes have tended to make 'normal politics' impossible. The military regimes were not called 'regimes of exception' for nothing.

## APPLYING SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY

The political context of Latin America is clearly very different from that of the liberal societies of Western Europe and North America. Since this political context certainly shapes the organisation, strategy and trajectory of Latin America's social movements, it might appear inappropriate to apply NSM or RMT to these movements. Social movements in the two different contexts would then appear as incommensurable, and the great body of social movement theory as parochial rather than universal in scope. But let us pause before throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

At its highest level of abstraction, NSM theory can apply to social movement activity under the harshest authoritarian governments of Latin America. The Habermasian thesis of the colonisation of the lifeworld is mirrored grotesquely in the 'privatisation of the political' (Oszlak 1987) and subsequent politicisation of the private by the military regimes of the continent. The state has invaded the private sphere, especially the family

sphere, through systematic policies of disappearance, torture and terror. The most courageous response, certainly in the early years, came from the women's movement, and Habermas' assertion that feminism is unique among *new social movements* in 'going on the offensive' reverberates in the Argentine and Chilean contexts. However, although the framework of analysis can be suggestive, the movements themselves can be very different. In Latin America it was their traditional roles as mothers and wives that impelled women to mobilise, so that private nurturing promoted collective (and public) action (Sternbach *et al.* 1992; Safa 1990). The women moved to occupy the public space of their community to achieve family survival in the difficult economic circumstances created by neo-liberal policies, austerity measures and national debt; and they responded to the invasion of the sanctity of the family. All this gave 'the personal is political' a very special meaning in Latin America (Jaquette 1989, p. 205), and linked the women's movements to human rights groups and the struggle against authoritarianism. It also made the women's movements of Latin America distinct from those of North America and Western Europe.

The European theory links the rise of social movements to the failures of the institutions of interest mediation, and the crisis of the populist state in Latin America (and the suppression of representative institutions by military regimes) can play a similar explanatory role (Slater 1991). This interpretation is corroborated by the decline of social movements during and after the eventual transitions to democracy in Latin America, and the re-emergence of party and trade union politics (Mainwaring 1987; Share and Mainwaring 1986). In short, just as the European theorists see centralised management apparatuses and exclusionary corporatist controls as partly responsible for social movement activity in Europe, so Latin American movements responded to the 'techno-bureaucracy' of the military regimes. Similarly, NSM's insistence on the diversity of the movements and the multiplication of their sites of struggle can apply to Latin America, where movements emerge out of labour institutions, urban communities and the popular church.

None the less, it is evident that the best that can be expected from the application of NSM to Latin America is a series of more or less suggestive analogies made at the highest level of analytical abstraction or empirical generalisation. This may not be a bad result, but it does mean that the analytical purchase of NSM on Latin America remains insecure, and is certainly not secure enough to support a detailed programme of research. This has not prevented tens and possibly hundreds of brave attempts to apply the theory.

The prospects for the (potential) application of RMT in the Latin American context are more promising. Tilly has argued that social movements are basically nineteenth-century phenomena that reflect the historical shift from the defensive actions of traditional groups and communities to the offensive pursuit of new rights and advantages on a national scale (with the coming of the national state): the basic 'action repertoire' of the nineteenth century remains the same today (Tilly 1984, 1990). A similar, if more recent, shift can be described in Latin America, where 'economic corporate' (Gramsci 1973) and community demands have spawned more overtly political demands for *rights;* and where the constrictions of the 'national security' doctrines of the authoritarian regimes have catalysed this shift. But beyond these analogous changes in the scope and goals of social movements, RMT's insistence on the strategic content and institutional context of the

movements is essential for any inquiry into social mobilisation in Latin America, where the preponderance of the state has determined the predominance of legalist and institutionalist strategies among recent movements (Foweraker 1989, ch. 14; 1993, ch. 10; 1995, ch. 4). Indeed, nearly every social movement in Latin America will seek negotiation with state agencies and apparatuses in order to secure the kind of *capacidad de gestión* that may ensure its own survival. The FMLN (El Salvador), FSLN (Nicaragua) and Sendero Luminoso (Peru) are the exceptions to prove the rule. In short, RMT appears appropriate to the majority political practices of social movements in Latin America, which are a form of mass politics in close and strategic interaction with the state.

In similar fashion the extension of RMT into 'micromobilisation contexts' that link the micro and macro levels of social mobilisation through an analysis of 'the cell structure of collective action' (McAdam *et al.* 1988, 711) could be very helpful to any inquiry into the 'preconditions' or facilitating contexts of social movements in Latin America, including urban neighbourhood associations, Catholic base communities, popular economic organisations and the institutional contexts created by the state itself, especially through different forms of corporatist labour organisation (which have been the setting for many of the most important movements). A different development of the theory in the direction of 'political process theory' and 'cycles of protest' (Tarrow 1989; 1994, ch. 9) could be equally useful in analysing popular resistance to, and mobilisation against authoritarian regimes in Chile, Brazil and Mexico. Finally, RMT's notion of the Political Opportunity Structure (composed of national political traditions and institutions, political parties, alliances, the coherence of dominant coalitions and so forth) is relevant to the projection of social movements into political society during the recent transitions to democracy in the continent (which is the strategic question *par excellence*). In this connection the relatively benign RMT view of the institutionalisation of social movements (suggesting that the 'iron law of oligarchy' does not necessarily impose negative results) may contribute to a more balanced account of the contribution of social movements to democracy in Latin America, where political integration and political success cannot be seen as mutually exclusive (Jaquette 1989, p. 194).

In sum, despite the methodological critiques, it appears that RMT has a great deal to offer the analysis of social movements in Latin America. Yet there have been very few attempts to apply the theory in Latin America, and the Latin American literature has suffered as a result. At the very least, analysts of Latin America should take note of the convergence of RMT and NSM to describe a 'dual logic' (Cohen and Arato 1992, p. 508) that is entirely relevant to the Latin American context, where the conditions of authoritarian rule have consistently muddied the dividing line between expressive and instrumental action (Garretón 1989), and where all social mobilisation has an expressive, even heroic content (Cardoso 1983, p. 235).

## SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY REVISITED

None the less, there are clear and enduring difficulties that will beset the application of NSM and RMT to social movements in the Latin American context. Some NSM theorists who are well acquainted with the realities of Latin America have noted these difficulties,

and removed them by definitional fiat. For Touraine, real social movements are only found in central, post-industrial societies, where they are reflexive and struggle over historicity (Touraine 1988). In Latin America, in contrast, the struggles of social movements aim to achieve participation in the political system, and therefore they are not social movements proper, but *popular* movements (Touraine 1987). Laclau and Mouffe, on the other hand, argue that the diversity of social movements, and the multiplication and variety of their sites of struggle, demonstrate the post-modern form of decentred democratic struggle (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). In Latin America, in contrast, the struggles of social movements have a clear centre in the repressive and authoritarian state (the axis of domination and imperialism), and therefore they are not social movements proper, but *popular* movements. This is a worrying response. Since NSM is unsuccessful in explaining social movements in Latin America, they are denied the status of social movements. 'Do not adjust your head, it is the reality that is out of focus.' It may be preferable to adjust the theory, or at least admit that parochial theory should forego its universal pretensions.

If social movements in Latin America are denied the same status as those of Europe or North America, then all the potential advantage of comparative analysis is lost. In the Latin American context it is alleged that its clientelistic and populist pattern of political domination (and the particular forms of political integration of important sectors like labour) have had negative consequences for democratic advance (for instance Fox 1994). Labour, in particular, was offered special privileges and social rights (or entitlements in a Parsonian kind of social citizenship), so that the demands for labour or trade union rights could not act as proxy for citizenship rights proper (Malloy 1987). In short, political rights were traded for social rights. As a consequence, organised labour could not be the democratic actor it was elsewhere (Reuschmeyer *et al.* 1992, ch. 7)), but, on the contrary, acted to support authoritarian solutions over long periods in countries such as Mexico and Argentina. However, over the past twenty years or so, social movements across the continent have come to struggle for universal political rights, so challenging the patterns of clientelism and patrimonialism, and laying claim to modern forms of political citizenship (Foweraker 1993 chs 10, 11; 1994; 1995 ch. 5). One of the reasons alleged for the decline of social movements in Latin America during the recent transitions to democracy is that they lost their special role as defenders and promoters of universal rights as the struggle for citizenship moved to the constitutional sphere (Touraine 1988, p. 75; Jaquette 1989).

In Europe it is argued that social movements no longer struggle for universal rights but for specific protections, particular privileges or special prerogatives such as regional autonomy (Mouffe 1988; Coakley 1992). If this is true, how do these movements affect the longer-term legitimacy and effectiveness of liberal democratic regimes that still depend on universal and equalising forms of political mediation? In other words, are the movements necessarily beneficial to continuing democratic advance? These questions are increasingly acute now that the social movements are looking not so much 'new' as frighteningly old, with the resurgence of right-wing movements in France, and equally right-wing xenophobic and irredentist movements in Germany and Italy (cf. for example Ignazi 1992). The present crisis of confidence in democratic institutions (both severally at national level and within the European Union), and the continuing weakness of the labour

movement, make it worth asking whether social movements (new or old) will act to open the democratic process or, on the contrary, precipitate increasingly exclusionary forms of democratic government.

In the early 'mass society' versions of social movement theory (Kornhauser 1959; Smelser 1962), social movements were understood to express the rage and disorientation of anomic social actors whose traditional social contexts had been destroyed by processes of modernisation. Social movements were dangerous to the institutional order of liberal society, and were therefore a 'bad thing'. Later theories, such as those represented by the NSM and RMT schools described here, saw social movements as raising new issues and extending the political agenda. They mobilised constituencies which would otherwise go unrepresented, creating an important source of political 'renewal' in liberal society, and were therefore a 'good thing'. Currently, one view of social movements sees them as destabilising incipient democracies in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, or as threatening the institutional supports and political freedoms of established democracies in the West. Another and contrary view sees them as crucial protagonists in struggles for democratic rights in South Africa, China, South-East Asia and Latin America. Social movements are therefore both a 'good thing' and a 'bad thing'. But what is quite apparent today is that the quality of the judgement depends not simply on the (increasingly ambiguous) perceptions of the theorists, but on the political contexts where social movement activity takes place—in implicit recognition that the universal pretensions of social movement theory have been effectively undermined by regional and national patterns of political power and political argument.

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# Part II
# Collective action in political context

# 5
# Shaping collective action: structure, contingency and knowledge

*Chris Rootes*

Political contexts confront actors with patterns of opportunities and constraints not of their own making. These contexts of action are increasingly referred to as 'political opportunity structures' but, if 'political context' were indeed all that were involved, there would be no good reason for this terminological innovation. There is value, most evidently in comparative analyses, in giving more weight to *structural* dimensions of political contexts of collective action than most analysts have been accustomed to do, but the utility of the concept of 'political opportunity structure' will be enhanced if we confine its application to those elements of political contexts of collective action which are in fact genuinely structural.

## 'POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES': THE EMERGENCE OF A CONCEPT

Given the centrality of the state in modern societies, and its corresponding importance to strategies and outcomes of collective action, it is curious that social movements' relations with the state should only recently have become systematically studied. One reason is that, until the late 1980s, social movements tended to be studied chiefly by sociologists whose focus was on the motivations for, and social bases and organisation of, social movements as collective behaviour. Their character as political action directed towards states and established political actors was comparatively neglected.

Political scientists have come relatively late to the study of social movements, principally because there is in political science an understandable bias towards the state and its institutions, and towards the most mainstream and institutionalised forms of political mobilisation. Social movements, especially in the early stages of development, may appear marginal, ephemerally organised or, sometimes, little differentiated from semi-institutionalised pressure and interest group politics. Political scientists' scepticism about social movements is increased because previous social movements have invariably disappointed the utopian hopes of their supporters. Where they have persisted, they have eventually developed into institutionalised interest groups or conventional political parties. Political scientists, aware of the eternal verities of the routinisation of political innovation, have accordingly been sceptical to the point of outright dismissal of the more colourful claims made for social movements.

In recent years, however, there has been some convergence between the perspectives

and concerns of sociologists and political scientists. One consequence is the popularity of the term 'political opportunity structure'. Perhaps the most widely cited work to employ the concept is Kitschelt's (1986) article on anti-nuclear movements.

Kitschelt argues (1986, p. 59) that political opportunity structures function 'as "filters" between the mobilization of the movement and its choice of strategies and its capacity to change the social environment'. The crucial dimensions of political opportunity structures are the openness or closed-ness of states to inputs from non-established actors, and the strength or weakness of their capacities to deliver effective implementation of policies once made. Kitschelt's schematic representation of state structures produces a two-by-two matrix into which his four cases are neatly fitted: Sweden is open and strong, the USA open and weak, France closed and strong, West Germany closed and weak.

Kitschelt hypothesises that, depending on their openness or closedness on the input side, and their strength or weakness on the output side, states encourage movements to adopt strategies which are either assimilative or confrontational. States which are open and weak invite movements to work through multiple points of access provided by established institutions, but where systems are closed and strong, 'movements are likely to adopt confrontational, disruptive strategies orchestrated outside established policy channels' (Kitschelt 1986 p. 66).

However, when Rucht (1990) re-examined the development of antinuclear movements in France, West Germany and the USA, he concluded that the effects of structures on actors' strategies were less determinate than Kitschelt suggests. In all three countries, a mixture of assimilative and confrontational strategies was employed; strategies changed over time and in response to specific events; the number of people arrested in acts of civil disobedience was highest in the supposedly 'open' USA, and more people participated in 'confrontational' demonstrations in West Germany than in more 'closed' France. To categorise the dominant mode of actors' strategies in each country as neatly as Kitschelt did is, Rucht suggests, to obscure the complexities of collective action as it developed in interaction between protesters and the authorities (cf. Flam 1994).

The suggestion that Kitschelt has trimmed his cases to fit his categories raises the question whether those categories are analytically independent of the empirical cases—or are they *post hoc* attempts to put structural boxes around (suitably simplified) characteristics of the four empirical cases considered? Is it possible to fit any fifth case into this matrix? These are questions of more general significance and ones to which we shall return.

Suggestive though Kitschelt's article is, its chief value is its unintentional exposure of a major weakness in most attempts to employ the concept of political opportunity structure. It conflates genuinely structural features of political systems with aspects which, because they change relatively quickly and are themselves shaped by other institutional arrangements, are more properly recognised as *contingent* features of those systems.

It was this failure to distinguish between the structural and the contingent which led Kitschelt to categorise the West German political system as 'closed', a surprising classification in view of Nelkin and Pollak's (1982) contrast between what they saw as the relatively *'open'* West German system and the quite 'closed' French one, and the consequences for anti-nuclear movements in each country. Certainly, the West German

system was at various times relatively closed to one set of protesters or another (relatively, that is, by comparison with the United States or Sweden if not France); but those instances of closure were essentially *contingent* upon the political strategies and tactics of other political actors, rather than direct effects of structures. If the most general condition of political systems that stimulated the development of radical student movements was the absence of effective opposition (Rootes 1990), a strikingly unambiguous instance of this was the Grand Coalition of the CDU and SPD which governed West Germany from 1966 to 1969 and to which the emergence of the APO (Extra-Parliamentary Opposition) could be directly traced. Clearly such closures of political access have the effect of changing the balance of opportunities for political action of various kinds, but these changes are not usually institutionalised or in any meaningful sense 'structural'. They are essentially contingent or conjunctural and, by comparison with the typical lifespans of political institutions, they are relatively short-lived. Assimilating them to 'structures' serves to confuse rather than to enlighten.

One reason this confusion has tended to pervade discussion of political opportunity structures is that there has been slippage between the way the term 'structure' has generally been used in political science and the way it has been used by sociologists. Whereas traditional political science has tended to equate 'structure' with formal political and especially governmental institutions, sociologists in general deal with 'institutions' which are less formally structured, are professionally disposed to scepticism about the world of appearances as constituted by formal institutions of whatever sort, and seek to demonstrate that the informal, uninstitutionalised practices of social life are themselves not random and chaotic but patterned or 'structured'. Thus sociologists, attempting to achieve critical penetration of the veil of appearances, speak of 'structured social inequality' and, indeed, of the 'structure of opportunity'.

Slippage between the traditional political scientific and the sociological uses of 'structure' is understandable because the concepts and vocabulary of sociology have frequently been used by political scientists endeavouring to render critical a discipline which has often been so preoccupied with the formal structures of government as to assume that political institutions actually perform as they are formally supposed to perform. It is unsurprising that political scientists interested in forms of collective action which fall outside the confines of traditional, conventional, formally institutionalised politics should look beyond the conventional armoury of political science.

The work of Kriesi (1995) and Kriesi *et al.* (1992, 1995) has gone far towards clarifying the discussion of 'political opportunity structures' by distinguishing clearly between the formal institutional structure of the state, the informal procedures and prevailing strategies used to deal with challengers, and the configuration of power and alliances in the party system. But, although this is clearer than Kitschelt's conceptualisation, it is nevertheless the case that the further away one moves from the formal institutional structure, the further behind one leaves the genuinely structural and the further one moves into the realm of arrangements which are essentially contingent and relatively unstable over time. It is simply confusing to describe such contingent or conjunctural constellations as 'structures'.[1] In his discussion of the 'configuration of power in the party system', the third broad dimension of political opportunity structure in his analysis, Kriesi identifies the electoral system as the source of the main impact of the

formal institutional structure. However, most of what follows from the impact of the electoral system is better described as the *contingent product* of this aspect of the political system than as anything structural in its own right.

In their most recent work, Kriesi *et al.* (1995) include party systems as formal institutional structures, and regard the 'prevailing strategies' of established members of the political system as the informal accompaniment of those structures (ch. 2). The latter seems especially unfortunate because, whilst 'the predominant patterns' of such strategies may indeed be 'deeply embedded', their employment is more contingent or conjunctural than Kriesi *et al.* suggest. It needs to be recognised that states and different state institutions treat different social movements and movement organisations in different policy areas differently, both generally and at different points in time (cf. Tarrow 1994, pp. 90–2). We need to pay more attention to the complexity of state structures, to the contingent and conjunctural aspects of state responses to collective action, and to the difficulties such complexity poses for attempts to advance global characterisations of even relatively formal institutional structures.

Just as Kitschelt's analysis proceeded on the basis of just four countries, so too does that of Kriesi *et al*. The suspicion again arises that what are presented as theoretical and analytical propositions, to be tested against empirical evidence, are in fact empirical generalisations developed from knowledge of the cases concerned. What happens when we consider a fifth case?

## POLITICAL CONTEXTS AND COLLECTIVE ACTION IN BRITAIN

It is intriguing that only one of the comparative studies of political opportunity structures—and that the most sceptical of the concept's value (Flam 1994)—should have considered Britain. How should we characterise the British political system? At first glance it is structurally 'closed', more closed even than that of France. If this sounds strange in view of the fact that Britain was once esteemed (not least in France) for its consensual, responsive and 'integrative' mode of government, consider that:

• The formal structure of British government is unitary and increasingly centralised (there are no regional assemblies above the level of county councils and there has been a long-term erosion of the powers and responsibilities of local government);
• The judiciary is not entirely independent of government;
• There is no written constitution and no possibility of appeal to a constitutional court;
• Referenda are rare, so far held only to relieve governments of the burden of taking decisions unpopular with their own MPs;
• The electoral system is an unmitigated majoritarian one based on simple 'first past the post' voting in large single-member constituencies. This presents more obstacles to new parties and fewer opportunities for minorities to use elections as national platforms than does the French system.

Structurally, the British state is at least as institutionally 'strong' (Kriesi *et al.* 1995, p. 33) as the French. Indeed, in terms of its ability to deal with challenges, the British system is arguably stronger. The absence in Britain of the continental European concept

of the state means that there are few rules imposing coherence and rigidity on governmental action; this, combined with extensive powers largely unfettered by constitutional checks and balances, gives British governments almost unlimited flexibility to pursue and withdraw initiatives as political advantage dictates (Rüdig 1994 p. 96).

To balance this, in Britain there are formal possibilities of judicial review and appeal to tribunals in various areas of government competence and, particularly in matters affecting the environment, there are elaborate requirements for consultation, representation and public inquiries. Informal access to decision-makers and the character of the major political parties as 'broad church' coalitions of diverse interests further mitigate the system's closure. However, though these may be seen as consequences of structural arrangements, in practice access by these means is clearly contingent upon the prevailing balance of political forces—it is not structurally given. The formal political opportunity structure in Britain clearly has consequences for collective action. Let us first consider the case of the environmental movement.

## The environmental movement and the Green Party

It has been claimed that 'Britain has the oldest, strongest, best-organised and most widely supported environmental lobby in the world' (McCormick 1991 p. 34). Yet despite being the oldest such party in Europe and as unambiguous a champion of radical ecology as any, the British Green Party is, by Western European standards, weak.[2]

This weakness is exacerbated by and reinforces the tendency of a well-institutionalised environmental movement to seek alternative means of access to decision-makers, and to cultivate relationships with bureaucrats rather than politicians. If the British electoral process is almost uniquely closed to an ecological party, it is balanced by an administrative structure which is, both formally and informally, relatively open to the representations of environmental lobby groups. The environment is probably better served than any other area of public policy by formal arrangements for consultation and public representation. As a result, institutional arrangements have generally favoured the 'bureaucratic accommodation' of environmental interests (Jordan and Richardson 1987); environmentalist organisations have tended to adopt postures of negotiation and consultation with officialdom rather than protest and confrontation (Rüdig 1995). The consequence is that various environmentalist organisations, including even Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, now enjoy the status of expert witnesses, consulted by government departments and agencies on matters of mutual concern (McCormick 1991; Doherty and Rawcliffe 1995).

Many channels of access for environmental interest groups were opened or enhanced when the Wilson Labour government (1964–70) established a variety of quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations with responsibilities for environmental regulation. The abolition of many such agencies in the early years of the Thatcher government (1979–88), and the consequent truncation of access for lobbyists, propelled environmentalist organisations into a more activist stance (Flynn and Lowe 1992), but the more normal pattern has been and remains one of discreet lobbying rather than popular mobilisation. Lest it be thought that this moderation is a product of the peculiar civility of British political culture, survey evidence suggests that, in aggregate, the British differ

little from West Germans in their dispositions towards protest or political participation (Rootes 1992). What differs is the way political institutions shape the translation of such dispositions into action.

One respect in which Britain differs from Germany is in the extent to which radical leftist groups have remained within the orbit of the traditional, mainstream party of the left. Unlike the West German Social Democratic Party (SPD), which formally rejected Marxism in 1959 and subsequently expelled its student organisation for excessive radicalism, the Labour Party has remained a 'broad church' encompassing Marxists and social democrats alike. The reasons for this are, in part, ultimately structural. An electoral system which is so closed to minority parties encourages radical leftist groups to work within the Labour Party rather than put up candidates in their own names. Contingent factors, during the 1980s, further concentrated the attentions of leftist radicals upon the Labour Party. When Labour lost government in 1979, and especially after it was abandoned by a number of prominent social democrats in 1981, the battle for power within the party became a major preoccupation of leftists and Trotskyists who might in other circumstances have sought different outlets for their energies. Because the struggle for control of the 'mass party of the British working class' did not seem unwinnable, radical leftists were not, as they were in West Germany, compelled to rethink their political strategy. As a result, in Britain but not in Germany, leftists generally continued to scorn an environmental movement they regarded as 'middle class' and diversionary (Porritt and Winner 1988 p. 64).

The Labour Party, because it is such an inclusive party, and because it was in opposition throughout the revival of the peace and environmental movements, was well placed to act as vehicle for a variety of radical discontents. That it did so in the case of the peace movement is unsurprising: the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) was, since its inception in 1958, oriented mainly toward the Labour Party (Taylor 1988); since the 1960s, support for unilateral nuclear disarmament had been a rallying point for the left within the party; in 1985 two-thirds of CND members supported Labour (Byrne 1988 p. 61). However, with the exception of a few Labour-controlled local authorities and token manifesto commitments inserted at the insistence of members of the generally uninfluential Socialist Environment and Resources Association (SERA), Labour failed to take up the environmental challenge until forced to do so by electoral competition from the Conservative and Liberal Democratic parties.

In Britain the permeability of the Labour Party to the radical left and the near institutionalisation of the peace movement by CND and the Labour Party precluded the kind of alliance of leftists, pacifists and environmentalists which produced the Green movement and Die Grünen in West Germany. As a result, the environmentalist movement was largely left to its own devices and its moderation never seriously challenged.

Access to administrative decision-makers has been the main route by which British environmentalists have influenced policy; they have found the mainstream political parties less accessible and less responsive. The ascendency of right-wing populism in the Conservative Party loosened the party's links with traditional environmental protection organisations. Socialist environmentalists' impact on Labour policy has been limited by the party's preoccupation with the economic expansion presumed necessary to improve

its supporters' material lot. Whilst neither Conservatives nor Labour now risk being accused of not taking the environment seriously, neither sees much competitive advantage in emphasising environmental issues when other issues rank higher in opinion polls.

The net effect is that environmental lobbyists are constrained to be at least polite to the mainstream parties and to offer advice when it is requested. But, reckoning that manifesto commitments are taken lightly and that environmental issues transcend party-political divisions, they see no advantage in attaching themselves to any one party and prefer to deal with holders of decision-making power rather than with contenders for political office (McCormick 1991 p. 41).

This arrangement presents environmentalist organisations with a dilemma: by entering into dialogue with government they may well contribute to protecting the environment in the short term, but only at the expense of neglecting the mobilisation of the public, on which their influence mostly depends. To maintain their access, environmentalists are constrained to minimise confrontation with and embarrassment to decision-makers. But such moderation may be demobilising for supporters who know little of what goes on behind closed doors.

The greater activism of traditional environmental organisations in recent years may have balanced this strategy somewhat, but British environmentalists have almost invariably had recourse to the politics of direct action from tactical choice rather than principled commitment to grassroots democratic participation. When access has been achieved, they have quickly adopted more conventional modes of activity. Only the Green Party has a strong value-commitment to democratic mass participation; the rest of the British environmental movement is more narrowly success-oriented (cf. Jamison *et al.* 1990), and the likelihood is that it will prefer to continue pushing at half-open doors. The institutional framework within which it operates tends to restrict British environmental activism to the conservationist and environmental reformist end of the continuum; radical ecologism is comparatively weak.

Thus the character of the environmentalist movement in Britain is shaped both directly by the formal structures of the political system and by the contingent effects of those structures. The Green Party has been a very minor actor in this play, but consideration of its performance focuses attention on the most unambiguously contingent factor influencing opportunities presented to social movements and social movement parties: the shifting balance of political competition (Rootes 1995b).

During the 1980s, whilst Greens were securing election to national parliaments across Western Europe, in successive British general elections they averaged little over one per cent of the vote. The simplest explanation for this electoral failure, and what most distinguishes Britain from countries where Green parties have flourished, is the operation of an electoral system which makes elections contests between the two or three candidates or parties who appear most likely to have some chance of winning. The problem for the Greens has been how to surmount the threshold of credibility beyond which diffuse support is translated into votes. Despite surveys suggesting considerable potential support for a Green party in Britain (Parkin 1989, p. 223; Inglehart and Rabier 1986, p. 466), even members of environmental organisations do not usually vote for Green candidates in national elections (Rüdig and Lowe 1986).

It came as a considerable surprise when, in the 1989 European Parliament election, British Greens achieved 15 per cent of the vote, a higher share than their counterparts elsewhere in the European Community. The most parsimonious explanation of this remarkable result is that it was made possible by a change in the balance of political competition among mainstream political parties.

By June 1989 all the major parties were in disarray. The Conservatives, weakened by the unpopularity of the poll tax, were, as the party in government, bound to lose support in a 'second-order' election at mid-term in the national parliamentary calendar. The Labour Party was better placed than for some time, but its abandonment of unilateral nuclear disarmament had alienated some supporters and left the Greens alone committed to unilateralism. The Liberal Democrats still suffered from adverse publicity attracted by wrangling between Liberals and Social Democrats in the course of their incomplete merger; heavy losses in county council elections in May exacerbated the decline in their opinion poll ratings just as campaigning in local elections had exhausted their supporters' energies. In the European election, Liberal Democrats concentrated their resources in the one division they believed they had any chance of winning, and campaigned little elsewhere.

The competition the Greens encountered in June 1989 was, then, less formidable than at any previous election. They were especially well-placed to gain from the weakness of the Liberal Democrats; the Liberals had not only become the traditional party of protest but had a relatively good record on environmental policy. For much of the 1980s, when on the basis of European comparisons the Greens might have been expected to make progress in Britain, the Liberal-SDP Alliance had appeared the best hope of political innovation.

Both poll data on Green voters' previous allegiances and local and regional variations in the distribution of the Green vote demonstrate the effects of political competition. The local balance of political competition explains both the Greens' greatest successes and their failures: their best results were in safe Conservative seats and their poorest were in the few areas in which another minor party campaigned strongly.

Nothing more clearly demonstrates the extent to which the Greens' success in 1989 depended upon an extraordinary state of political competition than the contrasting result in the 1992 general election. The Green Party fielded more candidates than ever, but their average share of the vote was just 1.3 per cent. National general elections are always unpromising contests for the Greens, and the 1992 election was the most closely fought for many years. Greens fared only slightly better (3.2 per cent) in the 1994 European election, fiercely contested by Labour and widely regarded as a referendum on the Conservative government.

The fact that whatever electoral success the Greens have enjoyed in Britain has come in 'secondary' elections demonstrates the importance of the conditions of political competition. Though they are influenced by structural arrangements, they cannot simply be reduced to them.

**The campaign against the poll tax**

The campaign against the poll tax which developed from 1987 to 1990 had no closer

connection with the environmental movement than the administrative accident that the implementation of the tax (a *per capita* local charge replacing local property taxation) was overseen by the Department of the Environment. Yet, despite efforts to represent it as an instalment in the class war, the campaign drew on some of the same sources of support as the environmental movement. Although many poor people actively participated in the campaign (Bagguley 1995), it was moral outrage against the inequity of the tax rather than simple hardship that produced such widespread condemnation and resistance. The campaign resulted in the repeal of the tax and the removal of Prime Minister Thatcher, but it also performed the first task in the formation of a social movement: the alienation of large numbers of people, especially young people, from 'normal' politics. It has been argued that in Scotland it mobilised a whole new generation outside the mainstream political process (McCrone 1991, p. 452).

The fact that the campaign in England was punctuated by violent confrontations may be evidence that the obduracy of the Thatcher government, refusing even to discuss abandoning the tax, had produced an unambiguously 'closed' political opportunity structure which in turn had excited a predictably confrontational response. However, it first needs to be considered that the great majority of the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of instances of collective protest in the most widespread campaign of civil disobedience in Britain this century, did *not* involve violent confrontation. (Press reports highlighted the few instances of spectacular confrontation and under-reported the many moderate or good-humoured protests.) It needs to be explained why *some* protests became confrontational whereas many more did not. Such an account might involve the dynamics of protest, including patterns of interaction with local council officials and police, and the presence or absence of prior media attention which might attract participation by people seeking confrontation or which might encourage authorities to expect the presence of people disposed to violence. But the incidence of violent confrontation can scarcely be explained in terms of political opportunity structures.

Some activists' accounts of the riot in Trafalgar Square on 31 March 1990 suggest that it was a deliberate product of policy designed to discredit the campaign by raising the spectre of revolutionary violence and smothering it in the law-and-order issue (Burns 1992 pp. 100–4). Even if this were so, it was not the political opportunity structure which was the cause of confrontation, but more short-term, contingent tactical or strategic decisions, whether taken by the government or, as seems more likely, by the police. It makes no sense to call such short-term and contingent matters 'aspects of the political opportunity structure'.

It might initially appear that an explanation in terms of political opportunity structures has more to offer in explaining the different character of the campaigns against the poll tax in Scotland as opposed to England. Whereas the campaign in England was punctuated by violent incidents, its counterpart in Scotland was almost wholly peaceful; on the same day as the Trafalgar Square riot, a 50,000-strong demonstration in Glasgow passed without serious incident. The tax was introduced a year earlier in Scotland than in England, and this was strongly objected to on constitutional grounds. An 'opportunity structure' approach might suggest that the Scots, seeing themselves confronted by an entirely closed political system, should have been *more* likely than the English to have taken recourse to violent confrontation.

A more plausible explanation can be found in the attitudes of established political parties toward the campaign. In Scotland the radical position—non-payment of the poll tax in defiance of the law—was vigorously endorsed not only by radical left groups but by the Scottish National Party (SNP), an established party with parliamentary representation. In England, by contrast, non-payment was not endorsed by any major party; Labour and the Liberal Democrats both opposed the tax but urged their supporters to comply with the law. The result was that, whereas the Scottish campaign was effectively conjoined with the relatively respectable cause of Scottish nationalism and more or less integrated into institutionalised politics through the SNP, the non-payment campaign in England was formally excluded from institutionalised politics and so was much more vulnerable to the efforts of hostile politicians and journalists to represent it as the work of militant leftists, Trotskyists and anarchists. The resulting association of the campaign in England with groups regarded as 'extremist' and 'troublemakers' shaped the official response, especially by the police.

Were the differences in the patterns of political opportunities and constraints confronting English and Scottish protesters genuinely 'structural'? The main difference consists in the fact that in Scotland a respectable minor party endorsed the non-payment campaign, partly as a tactical manoeuvre to enhance its visibility for the coming general election. Undoubtedly this altered the configuration of political forces confronting opponents of the poll tax, but what sense does it make to describe this short-term arrangement as a matter of 'political opportunity structure'?

## The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) was, for most of its existence, synonymous with the British peace movement and associated in popular imagination with mass demonstrations. It began, however, in 1958 as a campaign by an élite group of left-leaning intellectuals, who hoped to achieve Britain's unilateral renunciation of nuclear weapons by pressuring the Labour Party, then in opposition, to commit itself to unilateralism. So confident were they of their own position as élite opinion-makers that they not only did not seek mass mobilisation but were taken aback by the numbers of people attracted to their initial public meeting and the wave of marches and protest rallies they helped to unleash (Taylor 1988, Rootes 1989). Thus CND neither organised nor unequivocally endorsed the first of the Aldermaston marches which later became its most public face. The advocates of confrontational tactics of civil disobedience, the Direct Action Committee (DAC) and, later, the Committee of 100, were younger and more radical, quite distinct from the CND leadership.

Its architects conceived of CND as an élite campaign; yet, by the end of 1959 (Taylor 1988 p. 30), CND had become committed to the tactics of the mass social movement. Its leaders did not embrace mass movement politics from the conviction that the political system was closed to them; both the victory of CND policies at the 1960 Labour Party conference and their frustrating defeat a year later lay ahead of them. Rather, they were carried along by the momentum of the movement they had unintentionally unleashed; most remained opposed to civil disobedience and their relations with DAC and the Committee of 100 became increasingly conflictual.

It might plausibly be argued that one reason for DAC members' preference for direct action over the politics of pressure groups and lobbying was that *because* they were relatively young they were relatively excluded from access to the political system, that for them the structure of political opportunities was such as to make confrontational politics the more attractive option. What cannot be deduced from their action is that the political system was *in general* closed.

This example exposes one shortcoming of the use often made of the concept of political opportunity structure. The attempt to characterise a *whole* political system over-generalises and obliterates the sociologically crucial consideration that different individuals, groups and classes of actors are differently resourced for different kinds of political action. Thus the most salutary lesson of resource mobilisation theory is missed, while its chief limitation—the assumption of calculative rational choice as the universal basis of action—is all too faithfully reproduced.

Any attempt to explain the choice of tactics by CND and DAC must reckon with the actors' political values and the way in which tactical and strategic preferences were dictated by those values. Thus the preference of members of DAC and the Committee of 100 for direct action and civil disobedience stemmed from the exemplary value they attached to direct mass participation, and to the role that they believed such tactics might play in the long-term project of radical social and political transformation. In this they appear to have been more influenced by the example of Gandhi than by assessment of the structure of political opportunities in contemporary Britain. Nor should we entirely discount the influence of elements of youth culture whose quest was for fun as much as for political reform. In the case of CND in the late 1950s and early 1960s, direct action was one com ponent of a counter-cultural style, of a youth subculture seeking to distinguish itself from the social as much as the political mainstream.

## Implications of the British case

Despite the alleged relative weakness of new social movements and the Green Party in Britain, on most measures the British seem to have embraced the 'new politics' with about as much enthusiasm as most other West Europeans. Their *expression* of enthusiasm for the 'new politics' has, however, been severely constrained by the institutional structure of government and politics. This demonstrates both the value and the limitations of political opportunity structures as an explanatory tool. On the one hand, the expression of the 'new politics' in Britain is shaped by the prevailing political opportunity structure; on the other hand, despite the existence in Britain of a peculiarly unfavourable opportunity structure, a Green Party and new social movements *have* developed, as has the attitudinal base usually regarded as necessary for a new politics of social movements and successful left-libertarian or ecological parties.

The characterisation of a national political opportunity structure needs to be carefully qualified. Systems may be relatively open or closed to different kinds of issues and/or groups, and this makes global categorisation hazardous if not entirely arbitrary. British governments have responded to different movements in a more differentiated way than a strictly structural conception of political opportunities would allow. They have been more accommodating to the environmental movement than to the anti-poll-tax movement or to

CND. Although the image of the Thatcher government was that of a closed and relatively authoritarian government, it was only selectively closed. It was certainly closed on matters of industrial relations (it ended both formal and informal mechanisms which had previously given organised labour access to public policy-makers) and it deliberately courted confrontation with mine workers, but it remained surprisingly open on environmental matters (Flynn and Lowe 1992). Why?

Some policies and policy areas are perceived to be more central than others: thus Britain's possession of an independent nuclear deterrent has been regarded by both Labour and Conservative governments as a key component of defence strategy; the poll tax was seen by Thatcher and her advisors as embodying a central tenet of their ideological commitment to individual responsibility. Environmental issues, by comparison, were diffuse and could be played pragmatically. Moreover, whereas the former issues could be represented as causes espoused by the government's most socially and politically deviant opponents, the environmental movement spanned a broad spectrum of groups whose supporters were often socially respectable and established, and whose politics, not usually articulated in terms of party preference, covered a broad spectrum but stopped short of the stigmatised extreme left. Another element in the pattern of government response was its own temporally variable and essentially pragmatic strategy of conflict management: from 1979, the Thatcher government's priority was the defeat of trade union power. In order to conserve energy and political capital for that struggle, major confrontations with the environmental movement were avoided; a decade later, recognition of the high levels of diffuse popular support for environmentalism discouraged all but the most maverick politicians from confrontation with the movement.

## THE DIMENSIONS OF CONTEXT

I have argued that the concept of political opportunity structure is over-loaded when it is extended beyond those elements of the political environment of collective action which are genuinely structural to others which are contingent or simply conjunctural, and I have shown by reference to British experience that the development, strategy and outcomes of collective action are influenced by just such contingent and conjunctural factors. This range of factors can only be encompassed by the concept of political opportunity structure at the expense of extending the term further than considerations of theoretical parsimony or fidelity to the English language sensibly permit.

We have now reached a point at which it is necessary systematically to lay out those dimensions of context which bear upon collective action. Many contextual factors which shape collective action are contingent or conjunctural, but some are more contingent or conjunctural than others; some are relatively fixed, while others are highly variable. Although the extent to which this is so varies from time to time and from place to place, it is possible to hazard some generalisations about the relative fixedness or variability of the principal factors involved. What follows is an attempt to arrange these dimensions, starting with the most fixed and moving towards the most contingently or conjuncturally variable.

## Political institutional structures

The governmental institutions of national states are relatively fixed and enduring. They can and do change, but fundamental changes amounting to political revolutions are rare and, in advanced capitalist societies, unknown. Constitutional changes, at least in states where constitutions are taken seriously, are usually modest and infrequent. Even electoral systems, in most cases a relatively minor technical detail of democratic systems, albeit one of immense significance for the development and outcomes of oppositional challenges, are usually remarkably stable over time (for their impact on environmental movements see Richardson and Rootes (1995)). If the status of these formal institutional arrangements as 'political opportunity structures' is unambiguous, that of the informal practices associated with them is more problematic.

The problem is especially acute in a 'stateless' society like Britain, where, in the absence of a written constitution, custom and convention prevail. Nevertheless, the customs and conventions which are fundamental to the British 'constitution' have changed little in over a century. It is hyperbole to assert that the erosion of the principle of ministers' responsibility to parliament and the subordination of local to central government together constitute a 'Thatcherite revolution', not least because recent changes in custom and practice are so easily reversible by another government.

The strictly political contexts of collective action are not, however, confined to the level of national government. Local and regional political systems may be at least as important, especially in less centralised states such as federal Germany or confederal Switzerland. Where they are subsidiary to central government, local and regional systems may be less durable than national political systems, but they are nevertheless relatively stable over time.

The international political context is more problematic. The impact of international developments on collective action within states is sometimes profound, most obviously in the case of peace movements. The establishment of inter- and supra-national organisations such as the United Nations and the European Union, as well as increasingly elaborate attempts to regulate international conduct by treaties and conventions, has, during the past half century, brought greater stability in relations between states, but this remains an arena in which political arrangements are only contingently stable. The intrusion of events, and the diffusion of ideas and examples from across national boundaries is yet more contingent.

Also problematic is the status of such features of political systems as party systems and political alliances.[3] These often are of long standing, but assimilating them to political structures minimises the extent to which they are contingent upon those structures. This is demonstrated by the rearrangement of party systems and alliances in Italy and New Zealand in response to the transformation of those countries' electoral systems (away from proportional representation in Italy and towards it in New Zealand). But party and alliance systems are not simply the contingent products of electoral systems; they are also legacies of cultural differences and historical conjunctures. Yet even these legacies are not immutable; they must be continually reproduced in consciousness and in practice. If the institutional supports for practice are dismantled, consciousness proves more malleable than might have been supposed. Party and alliance systems do confront

collective actors as relatively obdurate features of the environment, but, given their essentially contingent character, it better serves the purposes of analysis to exclude them from the concept of 'political opportunity structures'.[4]

## Social and cultural contexts

The impact of social and cultural conditions upon collective action is profound, and because the principal components of social structure and culture appear so resistant to all but the most glacial processes of change, it is tempting to treat them as fixed elements of the environment. Nevertheless, if the institutions of politics are so relatively stable over time as to be capable of being treated as if they were inert, the social and cultural contexts of collective action are, in principle, in a state of eternal flux, reproduced by the plethora of informal practices of entire populations. Because social and cultural change usually occurs in an incremental manner, it may be so gradual and so apparently contradictory that its impact can only be assessed with the benefit of long hindsight. Viewed from the perspective of any particular instance of collective action, social structures and culture may appear both relatively stable *and* changing.

If society and culture appear to actors as fixed backdrops to their action, longer perspective reveals the importance of social and cultural changes to the shaping of collective action. Changes in demographic and occupational structures underlay the rise of radical student movements (Rootes 1990) and women's movements from the mid–1960s; changes in the balance of resources available to collective actors are systematically recognised in Resource Mobilisation Theory, the new orthodoxy in the theory of social movements. The impact of culture is more controversial, but the concept of 'political culture' has lately been rehabilitated; both the durability of political cultures and their capacities for change are now better recognised. Values (Inglehart 1977, 1990), knowledge (Eyerman and Jamison 1991) and repertoires of political action (Tilly 1988) may be modified or created in the course of collective action, but they are nevertheless in large part the products of actions of the predecessors of present generations. This cultural inheritance is part of the environment within which, and some of the material with which, collective actors must work in order to fashion their action. Because it, like social relations generally, must be reproduced by practice, and because in the course of being reproduced it is inevitably modified, it cannot sensibly be assimilated to 'political opportunity structure'.

## Ideas, knowledge, values and repertoires

If ideas, knowledge, values and repertoires constitute part of the relatively stable cultural background to collective action, they are also key variables in stimulating collective action. The apparent stability of social-structural and cultural conditions is produced by regarding them as highly aggregated phenomena in macro-historical perspective. But if the background to collective action can be painted with a broad brush, particular instances of such action are generally responsive to micro-historical peculiarities and short-term changes. A brush sufficiently broad to paint the outlines of a national culture will be unsuitable for indicating the details of particular contexts of actual instances of

collective action; ideas and values which are mere details in the big picture of national cultures may be extremely potent in shaping local actions.

The broad picture of popular culture may even be irrelevant to the ideas, values, perceptions and actions of agitated minorities. Active participation in collective action, especially less conventional and more contentious kinds of direct action, is both a minority activity and one socially skewed in its over-representation of the highly educated and the relatively young (Barnes, Kaase *et al.* 1979; Dalton 1988, pp. 68–70; Parry, Moyser and Day 1992). Hence it is the perceptions, knowledge, ideas and values of relatively small minorities of the population which are crucial to formulating repertoires and strategies of collective action. The perceptions and values of the mass of the population may be more important to responses to that action—and may thus affect its course and ultimate outcome—but less obviously so than the perceptions and values of those even smaller minorities, the élites who have the power to shape the official reaction to the challenges of collective action.

The impact of state structures and other contextual 'givens' upon collective action is never direct and unmediated; it is always mediated by the perceptions and evaluations of the actors and their adversaries and allies. For those taking collective action, it is not simply a question of whether a political system is objectively open or closed, but also whether (and how) it is *perceived* as open or closed. Even the perceived existence of opportunities and constraints does not mean that they will automatically be seized or accepted: collective actors do not simply shape their action to fit pre-existing contours of the political landscape. Actors' beliefs and values may constrain them from seizing opportunities, and may stimulate them to seek to create new opportunities for action consistent with their values. The extent to which they do so varies, not least in accordance with the dictates of the values and political theories to which actors subscribe. Some theories permit or encourage forms of action likely to lead to success, whereas others define 'success' in unconventional ways, dictate strategies which inhibit the seizing of opportunities, and produce few instrumental effects (Bouchier 1979; Breines 1980, 1982, 1989).

Nor are actors' values and theories immutable. Levitas (1977) found that even nineteenth-century Christian socialists were quite pragmatic in adapting strategies in the light of opportunities. Similarly, Dalton (1994), attempting to develop a corrective to resource mobilisation theory's treatment of values as peripheral and 'political opportunity structures' as fixed features of political systems which similarly constrain all actors, hypothesises that environmentalism, like other social movement activity, is 'ideologically structured action': the values and theories which guide action shape it so profoundly that ideologically kindred groups act similarly even in radically different political systems. After comparing 'new social movement' organisations, like Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, with older, more conventional conservation and wildlife protection groups in ten EC states, Dalton found differences between new 'ecological' and older 'environmental' organisations in the same country surprisingly muted. Environmentalist action is, Dalton concludes, 'ideologically structured' but, as practical action designed to achieve results, it is also profoundly shaped by locally prevailing patterns of opportunities and constraints.

Not all social movements are equally shaped by political opportunity structures. Kriesi

(1995, pp. 192–3) distinguishes between 'conjunctural' movements, heavily dependent on the political opportunity structure and which react strongly to changes in it, and 'linear' movements which are much less affected. Subcultural movements may be relatively insulated from the effects of the political opportunity structure, whereas counter-cultural movements, which 'constitute their identity mainly in conflictual interactions with authorities or third parties', are more susceptible. Instrumental movements such as the environmental movement, Kriesi suggests, are particularly vulnerable to the impact of political opportunity structures. Rucht (1988) argues that environmental movements are reactive and instrumental and produce strong organisations, whereas women's movements are proactive and expressive, rely on grassroots mobilisation, and do not produce strong, durable organisations. Yet in the US, unlike Western Europe, there are strong formal women's organisations. The explanation, he suggests, lies in 'the specific character of the [US] political culture', with its strong pragmatic tradition, and the 'politico-institutional setting' characterised by 'relatively open access to the decision-making system, which encourages lobbying' (Rucht 1988, pp. 323–4).

Strategies and tactics adopted by actors are influenced by their values and theories, but those values and theories are embedded in historical and social contexts and so are strategies and tactics. Repertoires of political action are built up over long historical periods (Tilly 1988), so that whilst a new generation of actors does not simply reproduce past forms of action and may well be creative in its development of them, innovation tends to be modest and incremental. Thus, irrespective of actors' values, the repertoire of actions available in a particular place and at a particular time is limited and is likely to moderate the differences between actions inspired by different values.

Given all that has been written about the role of values in the shaping of political action, the relative neglect of cognition is surprising, for what actors know or perceive to be true about political situations is at least as important to the construction of collective action as is the *evaluation* of what is known or perceived (Rootes 1983; Edmondson and Nullmeier in this volume). At one level, knowledge is, like repertoires, an inheritance which may be added to, partially forgotten, rediscovered or reinterpreted. Knowledge, in this sense, is the accumulation of building blocks for interpretation, its distribution spatially uneven and confined by language and culture. Both erroneous 'knowledge' and ignorance have consequences. The belief that opportunities are lacking will generally discourage collective action even when the actual obstacles are few, but although the erroneous belief that there are few or no obstacles to successful collective action may encourage action, it will only rarely impel the creation of opportunities where none existed. Actors' perceptions of patterns of opportunities and constraints confronting them are thus extremely important to decisions to act and to choices of strategies and tactics in the pursuit of collective goals.

No less important are the perceptions of their actual or potential allies. If potential allies perceive the goals and strategies of collective actors as compatible with their own, and judge the latter's chances of success to be high, they are more likely to act in ways which enhance the opportunities for collective action to achieve success. If, however, potential allies' perceptions diverge radically from those of collective actors, they are more likely to remain bystanders or even obstruct action they may perceive to be counter-

productive.

Perhaps even more important to shaping collective action are the perceptions of its actual or potential adversaries. The responses of established political élites to collective action vary according to their perception of the legitimacy of the aims and social characteristics of collective actors and forms of collective action. A form of action which is tolerated when taken by one class of actors may be repressed when taken by another. Crucial here are authorities' perceptions of the threat collective action poses to their own security or to public order generally, or alternatively, their perceptions of the degree of sympathy for collective actors among strategic groups or the wider public. If élites' perceptions are important determinants of their strategic responses to collective action, no less so are those of their agents, the police. There is much evidence that police responses to protest are strongly influenced by their perceptions of the threat posed to order, and that these perceptions are in turn influenced by their perceptions of the aims and social characteristics of protesters (della Porta 1996). Police are less likely to perceive as threatening—and brutally to repress—the readily intelligible and 'legitimate' industrial protests of working-class family men than what they see as the ideologically motivated actions of young, socially deviant 'professional demonstrators'.

Neither collective actors' perceptions nor those of their allies and adversaries should be seen in isolation. Although the perspectives of élites and challengers can be represented in a highly schematic and stereotypical way, such abstract generalisations are of limited heuristic value because perceptions are not fixed, but are products of complex processes of interaction involving past actions, received reputations, present actions and declared intentions. Because so much of this interaction is highly contingent and essentially conjunctural, perceptions which are crucial to the outcomes of encounters between collective actors and others are constantly being reformed and revised.

The knowledge and perceptions of the principal actors in this drama are increasingly mediated by mass media, which not only communicate images of collective action to the living-rooms of the world, but also both contribute to the knowledge and shape the perceptions of actors themselves as well as of their adversaries. Gitlin (1980) documents how media coverage of the US new left both served as a means of communication among geographically dispersed groups and affected the movement's internal dynamics. Likewise, van Zoonen (1992) shows how its media image impacted upon the self-image and subsequent action of the Dutch women's movement. The interactions between mass media and collective action are complex, and rapid technological change has so unsettled both patterns of ownership and control and the cultures of media professionals that past practice may be a poor guide to the future. Suffice it to say that mass media are an inescapable dimension of the contexts of collective action in the modern world and one that may be both overtly and covertly politicised.

## CONCLUSION

It is no accident that the structural approach has been developed in the context of comparative analysis. When comparing political phenomena, especially phenomena as complex as collective political action, the analyst is drawn to what appear fixed points in

a turning world: the structural arrangements of social and political systems. But as we have seen, the metaphor of 'structure' is problematic, the more so as one moves beyond the most entrenched institutional arrangements of political systems. Problems arise when fixity, and structural status, are attributed to phenomena which, with the benefit of a wider lens or a longer time exposure, would be seen to be contingent or simply conjunctural.

It would be a mistake to abandon structural analysis entirely, because there *are* consequential elements of the political context of collective action which are genuinely structural. The trouble is that so much which is not really structural has been collected under the umbrella of 'political opportunity structure'; by purporting to explain more than *can* be explained in structural terms, analysts risk bringing the concept into disrepute and unwittingly encouraging flight towards accounts in which contingency and 'culture' are all. We should not abandon structural analysis, but we need to recognise its limitations, and to complement it with other strategies.

The search for structural regularities should not be allowed to obscure the fact that explanations in such terms are inevitably partial, albeit that the extent to which they *are* partial varies from case to case, place to place, and time to time. We should not underestimate the extent to which social movements are, as John Dunn (1972, p. 233) said of revolutions, 'performances of great complexity'. It is not a matter of choosing between explanations in terms of action or of structure, but of devising explanations that properly balance considerations of both. Collective action is a dialectical process, a complex journey towards an imprecisely defined destination with side-trips and diversions, opportunities seized or foregone, constraints avoided, surmounted or conceded in a series of more or less complex interactions with other actors encountered in its course.

It is tempting to be impressed by the uniqueness of each case. Thus Flam, summarising the results of a comparison of anti-nuclear movements, remarks that

> the degree of openness of states is…an interactive-temporal product—a synthesis of pre-existing and *ad* novo-created entry rules and arenas as well as movement and elite activities aimed at their utilisation, blockage, surpassing and modification. A radical theoretical implication of this approach is that the determinants of 'openness' to movement contestation change over time. Each encounter has its own, sometimes unique, set…
>
> (1994, p. 303)

Such a perspective has the merit of emphasising the processual character of collective action, but it would imply that the relationship between collective action and its political contexts cannot satisfactorily be theorised in the abstract, even for a single state; that there are so many dimensions of possible variation and the relationships among them are so indeterminate that any attempt at theorising would amount to little more than a simplified systematisation of past experience.

Such a radical conclusion must leave the analyst, especially the comparative analyst, uncomfortable; but it is not the whole story. Diani and van der Heijden (1994, pp. 378–80), considering the same cases as Flam, conclude that whilst there is a great deal about

anti-nuclear movements which cannot be explained in terms of political opportunity structures, the concept can be useful in explaining the early stages of movement development. More generally, they suggest that much about anti-nuclear movements could be understood by considering interplay between political opportunity structures and élite responses.

Because the development of collective action is a dialectical process, it is unrealistic to expect a structural theory of such action to have great predictive power. But the concept of political opportunity structure, stripped of its excess baggage, may yet have heuristic value, especially in the initial stages of comparative research. If we are unable to propose a systematic theory of the impact of political context upon collective action, we can certainly be clearer about the dimensions of context involved and about the extent to which any can sensibly be described as 'political opportunity structures'. There are many aspects of the context of collective action in which scrupulous investigation might discover pattern, but it is neither necessary nor desirable to label everything which displays pattern as 'structure'.

## NOTES

1 Tarrow (1991, pp. 34–6) distinguishes four main 'aspects of opportunity': the openness or closedness of the polity, stability or instability of political alignments, presence or absence of allies or support groups, divisions within the elite and its tolerance or intolerance of protest. Tarrow appears ambivalent about whether to label these 'political opportunity structure', referring at one point to 'systemic and proximate opportunity factors'. However, important though all are to the outcomes of protest, only the first is genuinely structural; the others are essentially contingent. Tarrow (1994, ch. 5) is content to embrace all as changing and stable aspects of political opportunity structures which, given that he (rightly) ascribes greater explanatory value to the former than the latter, seems particularly perverse.

2 The following section draws on Rootes 1995a.

3 In their most recent work, Kriesi *et al.* (1995, p. 53) treat 'alliance structures' separately as 'the less stable elements of the political opportunity structure'. They also treat as a stable part of political opportunity structures 'national cleavages structures'—traditionally politicised cleavages between centre and periphery, religious confessions, rural and urban interests, and classes.

4 The authors whose conception of political opportunity structure is closest to that advocated here are Diani and van der Heijden (1994, p. 368). They treat the more fluid aspects of political context as aspects of 'conflict management' and restrict the term 'political opportunity structure' to 'the legal-political framework that any movement has to confront when making its claims', those 'variables that may be expected to remain relatively stable, at least in the mid term…openness of political and legal-administrative institutions and the number of actors in a given polity'. Why the number of actors in a polity should be a structural feature is not clear, since it is in principle considerably more variable than the other elements of the legal-political framework.

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# 6
# Soil pollution, community action and political opportunities

*Kees Aarts*

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with both the formation of collective action groups and their prosecution of their political purposes. It uses four separate examples to show that the relations between collective action and political context are not adequately dealt with in conventional theoretical terms—and that they raise a number of complex and challenging issues for the study of political interaction. The explanatory power of political context for the organisation and performance of interest groups has until recently, in fact, received little attention in theories of collective action. This is remarkable, since many typical group interests are really political interests, i.e. constitute claims on the political system. Instead of exploring the links between collective action and elements of the political context, collective action models have largely concentrated on individuals' decisions to contribute—treating these (counterfactually) as politically neutral acts. Their central concern is the representation of common interests *by,* not for, a group.

A major exception to this neglect of politics is found in some more recent literature on social movements. [1] Kitschelt (1986), Klandermans and Tarrow (1988), Klandermans (1988), Kriesi (1989), Kriesi *et al.* (1992), to name but a few important contributors, have analysed the political context (which they term 'political opportunity structure') as an explanatory factor in relation to the mobilisation of various social movements in Western Europe and the United States. They contend, summarily stated, that given a reservoir of activism in the society and given the existence of social networks, the likelihood of 'insurgency' increases when certain changes take place in the political context (Klandermans 1988, p. 174).

This paper aims at developing an analysis of collective action in which the political context is incorporated. In doing so it dissents even from aspects of the analyses suggested by the above-named writers. Starting from collective action theory in the Olsonian tradition (Olson 1971), elements from the political context of interest groups will be added, to test their adequacy in dealing with empirical material. Thus the various steps will be illustrated with data from a comparative study of four residential quarters in the Netherlands with polluted soil (Aarts 1990).

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next section, the field of application—soil pollution in residential areas in Dutch municipalities—is introduced. This is followed by a brief description of four selected cases, which provide material for testing some elements of collective action theories.

## SOIL POLLUTION IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS IN THE NETHERLANDS

### History of the issue

Soil pollution gained sudden recognition as an environmental problem in the Netherlands in April 1980, when the inhabitants of 268 newly built houses in the town of Lekkerkerk were informed that their homes had been built over a former waste dump containing dangerous chemicals. Public reaction was overwhelming. Within weeks, the Dutch parliament approved a new law for expropriating the houses; within two months a clean-up started. Co-ordinated by national government, some 1,300 (remainders of) barrels containing chemical waste were removed from the Lekkerkerk soil. The inhabitants were eventually financially compensated and were able to move to other housing. The Lekkerkerk quarter was restored for the enormous sum of about Dfl. 200 million (per house, this was three to four times the original purchase price).

The initial shock of the Lekkerkerk case had other effects. A government committee investigated its administrative background and history, producing a telling report on environmental consciousness and chemical waste in the Netherlands (Commissie Bestuurlijk Onderzoek Lekkerkerk 1981). The Minister for Public Health and the Environment requested all provinces for lists of sites where chemical waste might have been dumped. In the same year, 1980, this resulted in no fewer than 3,857 suspected sites over the country. In June 1980, the Minister, together with the provincial governments, outlined steps to be undertaken for each suspected site. After assessing the urgency of each, the pollution would be subjected to more detailed research, when further measures could be prepared. Each step would contribute to a provincial programme of priorities for the succeeding step in the next year, within budgetary constraints.

This system of stock-taking and assigning priorities in each province eventually formed the basis for the Temporary Soil Cleaning Act of 1983. Although this Act has now been replaced by another,[2] its basic structure is similar. The seriousness of soil pollution is estimated by the level of concentration of harmful metals or chemicals, combined with the use of the site. Generally, cleaning a polluted dumping ground will have a lower priority than cleaning a children's playground. According to the Temporary Soil Cleaning Act, provincial governments outline plans for sites to be investi gated or cleaned each year, on information provided by the municipalities. Most financial costs are paid by the national government; a substantial contribution, however, consisting of a threshold amount plus ten per cent of additional costs, is charged to the municipality (see the 'Soil Protection Guide').

### Provisions for citizens

The system underlying the Temporary Soil Cleaning Act regulates the responsibilities, duties and powers of the three levels of Dutch government: national, provincial and municipal. It does not deal with the rights of individual citizens who happen to live on polluted soil.[3] Only a small number of all polluted sites in the Netherlands involve residential areas, and the government has preferred universally to apply the 'polluter

pays' principle rather than government compensation by law. For individual citizens, legal action against polluters, if they can be identified, is essentially only a theoretical possibility. Legal procedures like this take years, are very costly, and legal proof is complicated by time-lags, altered regulations concerning waste dumping, and changing environmental consciousness.

The problems facing citizens in residential areas on polluted soil can be classified into three categories: physical health, psycho-social health and financial consequences. These have been recognised in the 'Soil Protection Guide' as indicating areas where, although formal regulations are missing, citizens may need government help ('Soil Protection Guide', II, pp. 36–8). This may consist, first, of support by the government prosecutor in defending claims against the polluters. Secondly, according to the 'Guide', the municipal government is responsible for finding solutions for serious individual cases. Usually the citizens involved are unaware of the soil pollution before its official discovery; the problems they face in consequence constitute stimuli for collective action directed at the municipal government.

Problems of *physical health* have sometimes been attributed to soil pollution, but in fact little is known about the precise health risks of exposure to contaminated soil. They depend on the nature of the toxic substances, their concentration, the length of exposure, the mode of exposure, the physical state of those involved, among other matters, all varying even inside single cases of soil pollution. Convincing proof that health problems are caused by soil pollution is still lacking; the practical relevance of health problems should not therefore be exaggerated.

More important than problems of physical health is the *fear* that these problems will cause damage, for example because children have been playing outdoors for years in a polluted spot. This fear is one example of a *psychosocial* problem for citizens. Other examples are a lack of trust in politics and in scientific expertise, and social unrest.

Finally, *financial* problems are usually the most tangible consequences of soil pollution for citizens. According to the Temporary Soil Cleaning Act, financial damage is only compensated for insofar as it is caused by cleaning the soil. Damage by the pollution itself is not compensated for because of the strict 'polluter pays' principle (see above).

The financial effects of soil pollution can be diverse, ranging from the loss of home-grown vegetables and fruit to sharp decreases in the value of property. Since home-ownership in the Netherlands often involves a mortgage approaching or even exceeding the liquidation value of the property, the discovery of soil pollution usually implies that home-owners will be unable to sell their houses and move. Tenants, too, face considerable costs if they want to move to other housing. Legal assistance to citizens of a residential area on polluted soil is yet another type of financial damage. The conclusion must be that the combination of psycho-social problems and (anticipated) financial damage provides a strong incentive for collective action on citizens' parts in order to further their interests. Collective action will, at least initially, be directed towards municipal governments.

## THE FOUR CASES

Residential quarters affected by soil pollution provide excellent cases for the study of collective action (Aarts 1991, pp. 33–4). Since these quarters are spatially limited, the latent interest group can relatively easily be operationalised: the inhabitants. Moreover, spatial concentration makes it more likely that the members of the latent group are aware of their mutual interest, which is a common, but often implicit, assumption of all collective action models. There is also a clear temporal limitation in these cases. The discovery of soil pollution in a residential area can usually be reduced to days, or weeks at most, during which the news is broken to citizens involved. The crisis-like nature of this news also contributes to the awareness of collective interest. Finally, the same can be said for the thematic limitation of soil pollution: it provides a clear and limited theme for citizens' collective interests.

For the analyses of collective action reported here, four cases were selected, on criteria derived from factors influencing group organisation, group size and group resources (see the next section below). The cases are briefly described (for details, see Aarts 1990).

1 Maassluis, Steendijkpolder-Zuid. A large, newly built residential area comprising about 800 houses in the city of Maassluis, a medium-sized town near Rotterdam, was found in summer 1983 to have been built on strongly polluted silt from the port of Rotterdam. In this area of the Netherlands, the polder soil must be consolidated with other material in order to support the weight of the houses. Not long ago, rubble, waste and silt were, beside sand, the favourite materials for this purpose. The citizens living in this quarter can be described as a relatively large and resourceful latent interest group.

2 Stein, Havengebied. In the spring and summer of 1983, soil in the old district of the small town of Stein in Limburg was found to be polluted with high concentrations of lead and cadmium. Vegetable gardens belonging to 100 to 200 houses had been contaminated with lead from nearby port facilities at the Julianakanaal, posing a serious threat to public health. The citizens in this quarter can be described as a relatively small group without many relevant resources.

3 Hengelo, Old Ruitenborgh. Early in 1981, investigations started into the pollution of the soil beneath a newly built residential neighbourhood, about 70 houses in the industrial town of Hengelo, near Enschede. It appeared that the houses were built on a chemical waste dump. The latent interest group in this case can be described as relatively small, but resourceful.

4 Dordrecht, Merwedepolder. In the autumn of 1981, this large newly built quarter of about 680 houses transpired to have been built on two former waste dumps containing chemicals, as well as on strongly polluted silt from the port of Dordrecht. The citizens can be described as a relatively large group. Relevant group resources are present, but the group cannot be described as particularly resourceful.

These four cases have in common that the soil pollution was discovered in the aftermath of the upheaval about Lekkerkerk (see above). In the early 1980s, soil pollution was

recognised as a national problem of great importance, with corresponding media attention. New discoveries made headlines. At the same time, the towering costs of the Lekkerkerk clean-up combined with the growing list of many thousands of suspected sites led the government to conclude that the powerful measures taken in Lekkerkerk could not be generally applied. The discrepancy between the perception of the problem and the means available for solutions was abundantly clear. This provides the background for the collective action problem in the four districts mentioned.

The following sections explore the relevance of some common theoretical explanations for collective action and for interest-group success, where it will be concluded that they fall short of satisfactory descriptions of the four cases studied here. The political context of collective action may provide the missing clue.

## THE ORGANISATION OF INTERESTS AND THE POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE: GROUP SIZE, THRESHOLDS, RESOURCES

Modern collective action theories often include three distinctive but related explanations for the organisation of interest groups: the size of the group, its heterogeneity and the resources available to the group and its members. All three can be traced back to Olson's work.

Olson begins with the latent interest group, the furtherance of the group interest depending on organisation of the group. As a public good, collective action is characterised by the facts that no one in the group can be excluded from the benefits it brings, but that the costs apply to activists only (Olson 1971, p. 14). The likelihood of collective action is related to the *size* of the latent interest group, Olson claims. For three reasons, he argues, smaller groups have better prospects of getting organised than larger groups do. First, the larger the latent group, the smaller each individual share of the benefits of collective action will be. Secondly, the larger the latent group, the less likely it is that group members will start negotiations concerning their common interest. Thirdly, the larger the latent group, the larger are the costs for the co-ordination and information needed for organising the group (Olson 1971, p. 48).

These reasons have been challenged on both theoretical and empirical grounds (Chamberlin 1974; McGuire 1974; Hardin 1982; Schelling 1978; Van de Kragt *et al.* 1983; Rapoport 1985). But although Olson's argumentation is not convincing on all points, his critics have never moved to the opposite position, that in the process of mobilisation larger interest groups have a comparative advantage over smaller ones. Therefore it seems justified to take group size as a theoretically well-established explanatory factor for (the absence of) group organisation. It is only one such factor, though; empirical research has failed to offer convincing evidence of a *decisive* role for size. Some authors report the expected relationship (e.g. Kim and Walker 1984), others did not find it (e.g. Marwell and Ames 1979, 1980; Oliver and Marwell 1988); still others report the organisation of larger as well as smaller groups, without elaborating the relationship between size and organisation (e.g. Moe 1980).

Critics of Olson's third argument for a negative relationship between group size and

the chances of organisation—the larger a latent group, the greater the necessary costs for information and co-ordination—maintain that latent groups can often be organised by a small subgroup. If such a subgroup distinguishes itself in some way from the rest of the latent group (i.e., if it is not a random sample from the larger group), the effective size of the group is smaller than its actual size, which enhances prospects for organisation. This principle underlies *threshold* theories of collective action, developed by Granovetter (1978), Oberschall (1980), and Oliver *et al.* (1985). The thresholds may be of a psychological nature, but they may also depend on social characteristics of the group and/or its members—where the availability of resources relevant for collective action is considered important for the organisation of the group.

An important element of these threshold models is the presence of bandwagon effects. It is assumed that group members decide sequentially on their individual contributions, that those with the lowest thresholds will be the first to decide and contribute, and that their behaviour causes a chain reaction among the other group members, who join the bandwagon.[4] Bandwagon effects however are not necessary preconditions for threshold effects. Olson argues that the 'largest' group members—'large' referring to the value they attach to the public good—are the most likely, but probably they are also the only contributors to collective action (1971, p. 29). Oliver *et al.* (1985) discuss the heterogeneity of resources for collective action as an explanation for group mobilisation.

The introduction of individual thresholds for collective action in a latent interest group has re-emphasised the importance of individual differences in valuation and in resources for collective action; heterogeneous groups are more likely to be organised than homogeneous ones. Particularly with regard to heterogeneity of resources, this hypothesis tends to be supported (Oliver *et al.* 1985; Heckathorn 1993), though empirical research is scarce.

The present four cases of soil pollution were initially selected on the basis of a relative assessment of their size and resources. The size of the groups did not cause particular problems, since the latent groups were all well circumscribed in advance (see above). The operational meaning of 'individual and group resources' is more complicated (cf. Jenkins 1983, p. 533). I have concentrated on available evidence for the following: monetary resources, educational resources and relevant individual skills. The initial selection of cases rested on external characteristics of the districts, especially housing types. The resulting design is summarised in table 1.

This design was validated *ex post facto* with data from various sources.[5] According to this and the theoretical expectations outlined, the best prospects for group mobilisation exist for the small, resourceful group in Hengelo. The worst prospects are to be found for the large, relatively deprived group in Dordrecht. Maassluis and Stein provide intermediate cases.

However, the picture emerging from the actual course of events in the four quarters differs substantially from these simple expectations.

First, in all four cases a citizens' organisation was eventually established; but the mobilisation efforts among the cases differ considerably. The large, relatively deprived group in Dordrecht organised immediately after traces of pollution under the houses in Merwedepolder had been found. The nature and level of pollution differed over various parts of this quarter, and the founders of the citizens' organisation lived in the most

seriously polluted district, about 200 of the 680 houses. The organisation was quickly formalised into an association aiming to represent the inhabitants' interests, without political party connections. Specialised committees were formed to

*Table 1* Size and resources: initial design

|  |  | Size | |
|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | small | large |
| Resources | many | Hengelo | Maassluis |
|  | few | Stein | Dordrecht |

unite the available medical, psycho-social, chemical, legal and public relations skills, whose presence refutes any claim that this was a homogeneously deprived group. From the start, the citizens' committee exerted pressure on all levels of public authority. Its (dues-paying) membership numbered over 650 within nine months; the highest degree of organisation (practically 100 per cent) was found in the most seriously polluted district.

The small, resourceful group in Hengelo also quickly organised. Its chairman was a journalist who accidentally acquired information from government-sponsored research into the district's soil, and passed it to a regional newspaper. The organisation was founded immediately by about 60 inhabitants. Here, as in Dordrecht, mobilisation was highest among those living in the most seriously polluted district (about forty houses); as in Dordrecht, most active members came from here. The latent group in this case consisted entirely of home-owners, so that the group was homogeneous in this respect.

The picture that emerges in Stein is entirely different. The lead pollution was first publicly noticed in early 1983 by a member of the Limburg Provincial Estates (the provincial parliament) for the Democrats 66. After an investigation into the mysterious deaths of cattle, apparently poisoned by lead concentration in hay, this politician brought the issue into the regional press. In just over eight months in 1983, three regional newspapers published not less than 91 articles on lead pollution in the old quarter of Stein. In the same period, the municipal council of Stein debated heatedly, fuelled by special attention from the local Democrats 66 branch, at the time still unrepresented in the council. The main target for the opposition (PvdA and a local list) was the CDA alderman for environmental affairs.

The first signs of popular involvement appeared only in October 1983, when twenty inhabitants petitioned the Mayor and Aldermen, requesting clarity on the pollution issue, which might endanger public health and have financial consequences for themselves. Soon afterwards, the Democrats 66 branch organised another petition with wider support. After the municipal government organised an information meeting, in December 1983, a group of five inhabitants founded a citizens' organisation intended to operate independently from the local political parties, which until then had monopolised the issue. Four of the five founders were relative newcomers in the highly parochial Stein society; three of them were small businessmen, one was a teacher, and the central actor

was a professional environmentalist. They succeeded in mobilising about forty passive and twenty-five active members, whose main activity was joining the communication platforms which already existed in relation to the local and provincial authorities.

Finally, the Maassluis quarter of Steendijkpolder-Zuid was characterised by large size as well as a high level of resources. This was undoubtedly the most resourceful of the four cases. Education, wealth, and specialised skills were all on a higher level than in any of the other districts. A citizens' organisation was founded less than a week after serious soil pollution in part of the district was publicly announced, headed by an inhabitant who was head of the Personnel and Organisation department of a large public utility. The first activists did not live in the part of the quarter where pollution had already been established, but anticipated similar results for other parts of the district. The organisation was not an open association; it was formed as a branch of the community centre which already existed, and counted twenty-eight 'offices' covering the chemical, legal, administrative, public health and informational aspects of the pollution. An executive committee of four persons met each week; regular public meetings and the publication of a newsletter maintained contact with other inhabitants. From the outset, the citizens' activities emphasised the various communication platforms of the local and provincial authorities.

Summarising the mobilisation phase, it is clear that simple notions about the role of group size or resources are of little use here. As far as size is concerned, the two relatively large groups were organised immediately after the pollution was 'discovered', as was one of the smaller groups. The organisation of the fourth group, the inhabitants of Stein, took much longer and lacked momentum, although the group was small. Neither is the general concept of group resources very helpful in explaining collective action. The problem here is that resources are not nearly as uniformly distributed in real-life groups as they are supposed to be in theory In Dordrecht, as well as in Stein, the initiative for organisation was taken by highly selective subgroups of the larger latent group. In Dordrecht, this subgroup consisted of those inhabitants confronted with the most urgent pollution problems. The organisation in Dordrecht (theoretically in possession of few resources) succeeded in mobilising relevant skills. In Stein, the subgroup consisted of foreign elements in an otherwise homogeneous district If it is admitted that homogeneous groups are a theoretical construct, group heterogeneity seems to be a more important explanatory factor for collective action than group resources.

Group size, heterogeneity and resources can be considered recurring elements in formal as well as applied theories of group organisation. But they typically neglect the political context of the latent interest group. An even more serious limitation of much of the literature dealing with Olson's problem is the (often implicit) assumption that group organisation is a necessary condition for political influence or political success. In the next section, I shall look briefly at the other side of interest-group processes, which deals with the political success of interest groups. It will be noticed that, in contrast with the first phase of mobilisation, the political context is considered in the literature to be significant in this second phase.

## INTEREST-GROUP SUCCESS

'Success' is a word which means different things to different people, even if the circumstances are all equal. In this chapter a rather subjective definition is used: interest groups are successful if they attain their goals. These goals are defined by the group itself, and are related to strategic group choices such as the position the group takes towards the political system. In cases of soil pollution, a citizens' organisation will be successful if it succeeds in counteracting or neutralising all the negative consequences of soil pollution it may experience.

Interest-group success, as well as the related concept of influence, are often regarded as situation-dependent (Greenwald 1977, p. 325). A broad distinction can be made, though, between favourable characteristics of the group's *demands* (interests, goals) and characteristics of the *group* itself. As far as group demands are concerned, agreement exists that modest, limited and clearly defined demands have better prospects for success than have extreme, broad, loosely defined demands (Gamson 1975; Greenwald 1977; Wootton 1970). Another characteristic of group demands is the *strategy* with which they are promoted. A recurring result in empirical research is that forceful, vigorous and 'nasty' strategies tend to be more successful than 'agreeable', conciliatory and compromising strategies (e.g. Gamson 1975).

In addition to modesty in demands and vigour in strategies, a third demand characteristic said to contribute to success is the degree of concentration of costs and benefits associated with interest-group success. This factor's relevance derives from the electoral consequences to politicians of acceding to interest-group demands. If politicians strive for the greatest policy satisfaction for the greatest number (because they want to get reelected, or because they want to be good democrats), group interests that benefit many and are paid for by many have a good chance of success, *even without collective action* (Wilson 1973; Hayes 1981). The same would apply to interests that benefit many, and are paid for by a small (electorally insignificant) group. In this case, the small group of contributors would have a strong incentive to organise itself against the proposal. Furthering interests that benefit few and are paid for by many, however, would need organised collective action, and is electorally not very promising. Finally, the prospects for groups interests with concentrated costs as well as benefits are unclear: proponents as well as opponents will have to organise themselves to get their preferences on the political agenda.

The characteristics of the group itself that favour political success, according to the literature, are group size and group resources. Compared with the mobilisation phase, group size now works in the opposite direction, in that larger organised groups are more likely to be successful than smaller groups. Group resources include categories such as money, credit, organisation or expertise (Wootton 1970; Greenwald 1977).

Group demands, group strategies, concentration, size and resources together form five dimensions for predicting interest-group success. The four cases examined in this chapter can only, at best, illustrate the relevance of some of these dimensions. I shall start with the first two, group demands and group strategies. Table 2 summarises the positions of each of the four cases. According to the theories mentioned above, none of the four cases

had excellent prospects for interest-group success: no case can be found in the right upper cell. For two cases, the prospects were particularly bad: Maassluis and Hengelo. Stein and Dordrecht provide intermediate cases; it is difficult to distinguish between the two in terms of the levels of concentration of costs and benefits here. Although the municipalities are the first candidates for covering the costs of interest-representation, in reality the central government often bears most of any costs involved; thus I shall ignore this dimension. Finally, size and resources distinguish in the same way as they did in the previous section (see table 1), but the resulting expectations regarding size are completely different now, while the respective resources have come to include organisational resources.

How is this typology justified, and what does it say about the reality of interest-group success? I shall again begin with Dordrecht. The central goals of the citizens' organisation there have from the outset consisted of removing all pollution, or, if that was impossible, enabling all inhabitants to move out of the quarter. Participation on communication platforms was only one means by which this organisation pursued its goals. The inhabitants initiated many conventional and unconventional activities aimed at influencing the municipal government, culminating in a brief occupation of the city hall in Dordrecht in March 1982. A recurring theme in all these actions was the suspicion that the municipal government was withholding information about the origins and the composition of the soil pollution, a suspicion that eventually proved not entirely mistaken. The relations between the municipality and the inhabitants thus deteriorated considerably.

Meanwhile, the national government had also become involved in the Dordrecht case, while in April 1982 the provincial government took over the main responsibility for the case from the municipality (at this time, the Temporary Soil Cleaning Act had not yet been passed). In June 1982, the provincial government announced the demolition of the houses and the reimbursement of the inhabitants in the most seriously polluted part of the quarter—the part where the citizens' organisations had been founded. For the other parts of the district, it was stated that various measures would be taken to remove the worst pollution. The inhabitants of the former part of the district thus attained one major goal: they were enabled to move to other houses, which they did. The inhabitants of the other areas remained with the less exhilarating prospect of living in a partly demolished district

*Table 2* Group demands and group strategies

|  |  | *Strategies* |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | *Conciliatory* | *Vigorous* |
| Demands | limited | Stein | — |
|  | broad | Maassluis | Dordrecht |
|  |  | Hengelo |  |

where the pollution problem remained as present as ever. They thus took the lead in the

citizens' organisation. After two more years of citizens' actions, the municipality of Dordrecht eventually decided in March 1984, to offer all other inhabitants of Merwedepolder, home-owners as well as tenants, financial compensation in case they wished to move out. *All* home-owners subsequently availed themselves of this offer. Details of the compensation measures were fought out in court; only in December 1993 could the executive committee of the citizens' organisation announce—in the 156th edition of its newsletter—that it considered its work near completion.

On a smaller scale, the citizens' organisation in Hengelo had broad demands too, but followed a more conciliatory or 'agreeable' course of action than the one in Dordrecht. The organisation was also much weaker, in the sense that it lacked specialised skills and consisted of only an executive committee, plus the public face of its chairman, the journalist.

The citizens' organisation in Hengelo voluntarily abstained from further contacts with newspapers, once it took seats on the communication platform of the local and provincial authorities, in January 1983. Its general goal was, however, quite broad: it aimed at removing all pollution from the quarter while retaining the houses. In this respect, the organisation's view was diametrically opposed to that of the engineering firm that conducted the investigations on behalf of the provincial government. The latter proposed to remove the forty houses from the most seriously polluted part of the district, and to isolate the chemical waste on the site. Complete removal of the pollution, it argued, would go beyond the legal framework offered by the Temporary Soil Cleaning Act. The municipality of Hengelo, however, supported the citizens' organisation. It foresaw problems similar to those in Dordrecht if measures were taken for only a part of the district.

The citizens' organisation consisted almost exclusively of inhabitants of the most seriously polluted area. By the end of 1983, a separate solution for their problems became more and more likely. In response, the citizens' organisation explicitly pulled back to these forty houses. For a period in the summer of 1984, it appeared that the provincial and local authorities were agreeing with the inhabitants on a solution for the whole quarter. But in July 1984, the Minister for Housing and the Environment, who had to provide the financial means, refused to accept this solution.

In September 1984, however, the Dutch parliament adopted a motion urging the government to purchase the relevant forty houses. It seems likely that this motion was at least partly inspired by the personal political relationships of the chairman of the citizens' organisation.[6] Another motion containing a satisfactory solution for all inhabitants of the quarter, proposed by a PvdA Member of Parliament, was defeated. By the end of 1984, the Minister announced that he would purchase the forty houses; no measures were proposed for the other parts of the quarter. Soon afterwards, the chairman of the citizens' organisation resigned, since his goals had been reached.

The remaining inhabitants were of course angry about this course of events, but relied on the municipal government to further their interests. By the end of 1985, the municipality provided a one-off subsidy for most of the home-owners in the less seriously polluted parts of the quarter who wanted to move. A large majority of the inhabitants took up this opportunity. The forty houses were demolished, other houses were sold for prices below their original value, and by 1987 the chemical waste dump had

been isolated and concealed under a small park.

The citizens' organisation in Stein could be characterised as relatively weak. Its strategies were 'agreeable' and its demands limited. Its central activity consisted of providing information from the authorities to the citizens. As mentioned before, this organisation was more or less formed in protest against the politicisation of the lead problem. But according to various sources in the village, this politicisation of issues is the lifeblood of politics in Stein. Stein and other southern towns of the Netherlands stand out from the Dutch context as relatively clientelistic political systems; personal as well as political problems are commonly submitted to a council member or alderman, who does his best in exchange for the promise of a vote. In this case, though, the position taken by the citizens' organisation was to some extent accepted by the inhabitants, but did not gain much sympathy from local politicians.

It is remarkable that, once further investigations into the seriousness of the lead pollution had started early in 1984, the interest representation of the inhabitants by their organisation as well as by the political parties was very successful. In the autumn of the same year, the authorities and the inhabitants reached agreement on cleaning measures; these included financial compensation for all inhabitants with losses from the clean-up, which was completed in spring 1985, with total costs amounting to almost Dfl. 6 million—less than half the costs incurred in Hengelo, where the pollution was not removed but isolated. This illustrates important discrepancies in the financial consequences of the various cases.

Finally, the demands and strategies of the organisation in Maassluis were similar to those in Hengelo. However, the size of this group was larger, and the costs associated with a solution were accordingly higher than in Hengelo or in Stein, though much lower than in Dordrecht. This organisation's central demand was initially simply formulated as a quality investigation into the pollution, but was followed by a demand for a thorough clean-up. Soon after its formation, the executive committee formulated its strategy. It was of course aware of the recent problems between citizens and authorities in nearby Dordrecht. The Maassluis organisation explicitly selected a strategy based on the idea that a citizens' organisation should try to affect the policies of democratically elected authorities; this was based on a conception of a larger model of political processes, in which the citizens' organisation is just one of the parties involved.

The Maassluis organisation painstakingly followed its selected strategy. It participated in multifarious communication between authorities, engineering firms and inhabitants; it provided expert comments on all aspects of the investigations. But these investigations took much more time than was foreseen. After two years, early in 1985, the citizens' organisation considered additional means for pressurising the authorities, and was confronted with demands for financial support for inhabitants who wanted to move but could not sell their houses. On behalf of many tenants in the district, the citizens' organisation supported a unilateral reduction of property taxes and a refusal to pay the yearly rent increase. But almost all of these initiatives were unsuccessful.

As, finally, by 1986 the investigations all pointed to the need for a clean-up of the area, the debate now moved to deal with the extent of the pollution. The citizens' organisation adhered to strict norms about the removal of polluted soil, but the provincial government preferred to remove less. Since it thus appeared that the authorities' measures might

eventually prove opposed to its preferences, the citizens' organisation began to consider possibilities for financial assistance in urgent cases. This was discussed by a parliamentary committee in September 1986, but it bowed to the Minister's reluctance to accept any general rule. The debate continued for years; only in 1992 was a decision taken—and that in favour of a very limited clean-up.

This review of interest-group success in the four cases concerned shows that the inhabitants of Stein, Dordrecht and Hengelo were relatively successful. It is however difficult to relate the success in Stein to the activities of the citizens' organisation itself. The organisation was not particularly active, and never played a prominent role in interest representation. A different explanation is needed, and I shall turn to this in the next section. In Dordrecht, it took some years before the interest representation could be termed successful, but here the citizens' organisation clearly did play a central role in the political process. In Hengelo, the organisation also played an important role, but it failed to preserve the unity of the quarter. Its own success meant only a partial success for the district. Compensation measures for other inhabitants were undertaken thanks to the municipal government.

The citizens' organisation in Maassluis remained without tangible results for many years. It was also unsuccessful in representing inhabitants' interests, despite its resources and its conciliatory strategies. This outcome may have been caused at least partly by the combination of conciliatory strategies, broad demands, and a persistent organisation that did not alter its course.

The success of the organisation in Dordrecht may at least partly be attributed to its choice of vigorous strategies. But neither the course of events in Stein, nor a number of the differences in interest-representation between Hengelo and Maassluis, can be explained by resources or by size (in the sense that larger groups are more likely to be successful). It is more likely that size has an impact opposite to expectation, since one rule in decision-making is that ten single Dutch guilders are more easily spent than one ten-guilder note. In other words, the same cleaning budget will more willingly be spent on ten smaller polluted sites than on one big site, other things being equal. Concentration of costs and benefits does not differentiate between these cases either. To account for some of the obviously different treatments of otherwise comparable problems, I now turn to the political context.

## LOCAL 'POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES'

The 'political opportunity structure' of collective action is closely related to some of the factors influencing interest-group success, discussed above. The political opportunity structure of an interest group is said to depend on properties of the political system, until now typically the nation-state, on which it makes its demands. To analyse political opportunities in a cross-national context, Kitschelt (1986, p. 58) distinguishes between a nation's specific configuration of resources, its institutional arrangements and historical precedents for mobilisation. More specifically, Kriesi *et al.* (1992, p. 220) divide the political system's relevant properties into its formal institutional structure, its informal procedures and dominant strategies towards challenging organisations, and the power-

configuration relevant for the confrontation between system and challenging organisations.

Not all the distinctions made for the purpose of cross-national comparisons can be transferred to the subnational level of analysis. For a comparative analysis of Dutch municipalities, the formal institutional structure may be regarded as a constant, since Dutch local government is highly uniform in this respect. The Netherlands can be characterised as a strong unitary state with territorial decentralisation of government to relatively independent provinces and municipalities. However, the largest portion of the municipal budgets is determined by allocations from the central government for specific purposes, and the share of local taxes in the municipal budget is very limited, so that the discretionary space for municipal government is in effect narrow. Moreover, as has been indicated above, the Temporary Soil Cleaning Act of 1983 did not mandate the municipalities, but gave shared responsibilities to central government, provinces and municipalities.

For the inhabitants of polluted quarters, the municipality will be the first level of government to be approached. This was established in the first sections of this paper. Dutch municipalities are headed by councils, simultaneously elected by a listwise proportional method for a four-year term. In the 1970s and 1980s, the councils in most parts of the country were dominated by the national parties. For a long time, councils in the south (Brabant and Limburg) still had relatively strong local lists, but in the 1970s, local branches of the national parties gradually replaced these local lists.[7] The executive arm of local government consists of the mayor (appointed by the crown) and the aldermen (appointed by and from the council).

The other two properties of the political opportunity structure may vary between municipalities. The least problematic are the informal procedures and dominant strategies. Given a uniform formal institutional structure, informal procedures and dominant strategies towards challenging groups provide a general political context for collective action.

The informal procedures and dominant strategies of the political system are sometimes described as either exclusive or integrative (Kriesi *et al.* 1992, p. 222). Exclusive strategies are said to be distinguished by repression, confrontation and polarisation, while integrative strategies are seen as more facilitative, co-operative and assimilative. At national level, the predominant strategies may be determined by traditions. At the Dutch municipal level, however, it is more difficult to determine local traditions in terms of repression or assimilation. But it may be expected that integrative strategies, as an indication of an open political input structure, facilitate mobilisation and success. Exclusive strategies, on the other hand, are characteristic of closed political input structures and will hinder collective action.

The power configuration between the political system and challenging organisations depends on the configuration of power in the party system and the relations between these parties, according to Kriesi *et al.* (1992, pp. 231–3). In the analysis of (new) social movements, where the conceptualisation of political opportunity structures was developed, parties of the left may be expected to be particularly relevant for mobilisation opportunities. But in our analysis of citizens' action in polluted quarters, this relationship is far from evident. The problems with which these citizens were confronted as a

consequence of soil pollution were recognised equally by all major political parties in the country. There was not, a priori, more willingness by one party than another to represent these citizens' interests. The impact of the power configuration of political parties on collective action will therefore be treated here as an open question. It is however possible to formulate a general expectation. The prospects for interest-group success will be greater if the group finds active support from local political parties. It would not be very helpful if party representatives merely agreed that pollution is serious, but it would help greatly if representatives actively supported the group's cause in the municipal council and at higher government levels. At the same time, however, political support of this kind would diminish both the need and the incentives for organisation. Group organisation could still contribute greatly to success, but the assimilation of group goals by the party system removes one of the major reasons for collective action generally.

What about the political opportunity structures of the four cases described here? How can they be characterised? To start with Dordrecht, it has been noted that the relations between the inhabitants of Merwedepolder and the local authorities were very bad from the period of the discovery of the pollution until late in the 1980s. The public announcement of the pollution by an alderman in September 1981 backfired, and the citizens' organisation immediately took the initiative and called its own meetings, to which representatives of the local government were invited. From then on, the organisation followed a confrontational strategy towards the municipality, initially in charge of the pollution affair. This strategy was often met with a similar strategy choice on the authorities' part. The situation altered to some extent when the provincial and national authorities took the lead in April 1982; but throughout the entire period, the strategy choice of the citizens' group appears to have been more important than the strategy choices made by the political authorities.

The selection of informal procedures and strategies by political authorities does not seem to have been important either in the formation of the citizens' organisation in Dordrecht or in the decision-making process concerned. Neither were the ideological differences between politicians at any level of government or the local power distribution of any significance. The actual course of events in this case could be accounted for without reference to political parties.

The citizens' organisation of Hengelo had to deal with a newly elected alderman for environmental affairs from the Democrats 66, the only alderman from a smaller party in a council dominated by the three large ones, CDA, VVD and PvdA. Democrats 66 can be regarded as a 'new politics' party, with an emphasis on environmental and other 'post-materialist' issues. The alderman eventually came to represent the polluted district, both within the municipal government and towards the provincial and national government. This coincidence probably contributed to the success of interest representation in Hengelo, which continued after the most seriously polluted area was granted special status by the national parliament (it will be remembered that this status was assigned after a Democrats 66 motion was adopted). Thus, in Hengelo the strategy of politicians responsible for the case as well as the power structure in the municipal council probably contributed to the final result.

Some factors relevant for interest-group success were comparable in Hengelo and Maassluis. Both organisations had formulated broad demands and had chosen

conciliatory strategies. Yet the citizens' organisation in Hengelo was definitely more successful than the organisation in Maassluis, notwithstanding the impressive organisational resources of the latter. The aldermen of Maassluis were from CDA, PvdA and VVD. The local authorities did not follow a particularly exclusive strategy towards the citizens' organisation and at times even co-operated with the organisation in exerting pressure on the provincial authorities. But in the early years after the discovery of the pollution, the political power configuration played no significant role in Maassluis. Although this has changed more recently (the chairman of the citizens' organisation became a member of the municipal council for CDA), the latent political dimensions of soil pollution never came to the fore in Maassluis.

Finally, Stein is, after Hengelo, a second case where the political context provides the clue for understanding the success of collective action. I have already mentioned the particular, clientelistic political culture of Stein. The pollution affair (it had become a real 'affair' in local political life) could be regarded as a manifestation of a local political power struggle. One side was taken by Catholic politicians from the CDA, which had just secured a one-seat majority in the municipal council in 1981, but which had been losing the larger battle for political dominance since the early 1970s, in Stein as well as in the rest of the southern provinces. Together with PvdA, Democrats 66 was one of the challengers. These parties picked up the soil pollution issue to demonstrate the isolation of the CDA-dominated local politics; the issue was thus heavily politicised. The impending change in the local balance of political power was in this case probably the single most important factor explaining the relative ease with which a solution was eventually found and carried out. It can in fact be doubted, in the case of Stein, whether the performance of the citizens' organisation itself made any real difference to the course of events. For the record, the local elections of 1986 in Stein led to a swing: PvdA and Democrats 66 won one seat each, which was sufficient to deprive CDA of its majority, and thereby of its monopoly on executive power.

## CONCLUSIONS

For an understanding of collective action processes in cases of soil pollution, simple collective action theories are inadequate. Both theories in the Olsonian tradition, explaining individual decisions to join an interest group, as well as the more realistic but also relatively loosely constructed theories of resource mobilisation, fall short of explaining the mobilisation of latent groups. Moreover, mobilisation itself is perhaps not the most interesting concept in the study of collective action. Mobilisation is merely a first, and sometimes a dispensable, step towards interest representation, and this first step as well as those following are conditioned by the contexts in which latent groups operate. It is therefore necessary to take this context, especially the political context of these groups, into account; but here, contextual theories describing 'political opportunity structures' have not been found helpful.

The question remains why some social problems are adopted by the political system as a matter of course, while others, such as the soil pollution issue, are only politicised in special cases. Here, only a few observations on this point can be made, all relating to the

*nature of group interests.*

Party systems at any level of government survive on competition, which occurs in various forms. In the most common conception of political competition in electoral research, the issues to be decided upon are taken as given, and the parties compete with each other for electoral support on these issues. This form of competition is therefore associated with *position issues* (Butler and Stokes 1971); it applies particularly to problems that can be assimilated by the dominant ideological dimensions of politics. These prob lems are likely to be articulated by the parties, and are therefore not exclusively dependent on the emergence of collective action.

But although position issues lie at the heart of theories of democratic elections, they are in fact merely one form of political competition. Another form of competition emerges when a problem is recognised by all parties and by all voters, when all agree on the best solution (the 'ideal state') for the problem, but disagree over the means by which to reach this solution. Problems of this kind are difficult to exploit in an electoral setting, since the debate would focus on the validity of alternative means, instead of the political ends. These problems may be regarded as *valence* or *style issues* (Stokes 1963). The question is no longer what positions various parties take on these issues, but which party succeeds best in becoming associated with the desirable 'ideal state' (Butler and Stokes 1971, p. 236). This question becomes more important for the parties when the problem is salient for the electorate at large.

The problems facing the inhabitants of residential quarters on polluted soil were typical valence issues, to which questions of knowledge and technology were central. All parties agreed on the desirable 'ideal state', in which the soil had been cleaned up and everyone was enabled to live the life of his or her own choice. The problematic 'real state' was a salient issue in the early 1980s, in the first place for the citizens involved. But a political debate really never got off the ground. Political differences were expressed in terms of disagreement about means instead of ends, and often became bogged down in technicalities. This proved fertile ground for collective action. Interestingly, precisely this field of collective action—as yet relatively unamenable to conventional theory—seems likely to expand as citizens become more involved in extending the area of political action to cover public issues which affect their own everyday lives.

## NOTES

1 Older contributions which deal with the political context as an explanation for collective action include the literature on political entrepreneurs (Wagner 1966; Frohlich *et al.* 1971; Moe 1980) and on policy arenas (Wilson 1973; Hayes 1981).

2 For the Act, see the parliamentary documents in *Tweede Kamer, zitting 1980–81, 16821*. The temporary nature of the Act followed from the preparation of a more general Soil Protection Act, which was well under way by 1980. The Temporary Act would become a part of the Soil Protection Act. This integration took place in 1994. The regulations concerning soil pollution have been collected since 1983 in a separate and regularly updated edition of the Ministry of Housing and the Environment, which has acquired the status of the most important policy document:

the *Leidraad Bodembescherming,* or 'Soil Protection Guide'.

3 The only exception to this rule is that citizens may be compensated for losses relating to the *cleaning* of the soil, e.g. when they have to move out temporarily for a cleaning operation.

4 Refer to Sugden (1985) for a criticism of the psychological model underlying bandwagon effects.

5 For Hengelo, Maassluis and Stein, information provided through a survey held in 1983 proved to be particularly useful. The survey, on Psycho-social Aspects of Soil Pollution, held in these three quarters and in a fourth not analysed in this paper, was conducted on orders from the Minister for Housing and the Environment. It was directed by J.de Boer, P.Hoefnagel and J.C.van der Wouden, and is available from Steinmetz Archives in Amsterdam (study number P0928). Data on Dordrecht are summarised in Aarts (1990, pp. 147–52).

6 The chairman had a close family relationship with a member of parliament for Democrats 66, which according to himself has facilitated his organisation's contact with the Democrats 66 politician who eventually put forward the winning motion. Source: interview with the chairman, 22 December 1988.

7 The more recent municipal elections of 2 March 1994 witnessed a new surge of support for local lists.

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# 7

# Context and interpretation in managing the long-term unemployed: implementing an 'active labour-market policy' in Dutch cities

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## INTRODUCTION: THE LABOUR-MARKET CONTEXT

The Dutch welfare state ('verzorgingsstaat') is one of the most encompassing in the contemporary world (Esping-Andersen 1990). Its basic structure dates back to the 1950s, to a broad, firmly-rooted post-war political compromise between social and Christian democrats. The Dutch welfare state flourished in the 1950s and 1960s on a favourable economic tide, but encountered problems as severe international economic and monetary tremors produced a sharp rise in structural unemployment. In the two decades that followed, unemployment continued to rise in the Netherlands and an increasing number of unemployed people became dependent on social benefits. This precipitated a crisis. In the first half of the 1980s it was the financial burden that dominated public debate; but in the second half of the 1980s the crisis was increasingly perceived to have a moral and administrative dimension too. Hence discussion included attitudes towards work and labour-market participation, together with the organisational set-up of the welfare state. This resulted in a political revaluation of labour, combined with calls for institutional change in order to save the Dutch welfare state, which was thought to be on the brink of collapse (Van Doorn and Albeda 1991; KVSH 1992). Above all, non-participation in the labour market and dependency on social provisions were increasingly condemned from social and ideological viewpoints (Koch 1979; Engbersen 1990). At first, blame was primarily ascribed to the administration for being too permissive in granting benefits. But soon 'blaming the victim' gained ground in public debate, as perverse effects of social security arrangements (especially fraud) became visible and attracted extensive media attention.

Attempts to tackle the unemployment problem traversed a number of stages. The first began in 1982 as part of the general 'retrenchment policy' of the incumbent confessional-liberal government. At this stage the government employed a mainly budgetary strategy, cutting benefit levels and increasing the gap between benefits and minimum wages. The lower benefit levels were meant as an incentive for the unemployed to offer their labour on the market. However, parallel to these measures, dependency on social security benefits continued to grow, despite the creation of a large number of jobs in the second half of the 1980s. Slowly but surely, dissatisfaction grew with a one-sided budgetary approach to unemployment. The focus shifted towards the effectiveness and efficiency of labour-market brokerage.

A second stage developed in the late 1980s. In addition to budgetary measures, the government resorted to 'active labour-market policy' measures (an OECD concept from the 1960s) in order to raise labour-market participation (not least among ethnic minorities); a low level of participation was felt to be the main reason for the heavy burden resting on the Dutch welfare state. 'Active labour-market policy' in the Netherlands is based, among other things, on a combination of the decentralisation of responsibilities from the central government to local administrations with an intensification of individual guidance for unemployed people to enhance their chances on the labour market. Later on, intensified individual guidance was accompanied by further measures, such as additional education, work experience programmes and job schemes.

The government aimed at reintegrating unemployed individuals by improving brokerage conditions. This resulted in the Employment Service Act of 1991, by which the Employment Service was functionally decentralised, partly privatised and tripartised. In combination with 'active labour-market policies' at the local level, new incentives were created for co-operation between the Employment Service and the Social Services. Co-operation between these agencies is considered a crucial element for the implementation of this policy.

By restructuring the Employment Service, the government resorted to what could be termed 'institutional engineering'. A main aim of this chapter is to focus on the actual effects (and therefore the success in institutional engineering terms) of the implementation of the 1991 Act on co-operation at the local level. Our aim is less to investigate the possibility of co-operation than to discover whether co-operation is achieved in public collective action of this kind, and in what way the co-operation involved is organised. We shall compare situations in the cities of Leyden, Rotterdam and The Hague, which have similar socioeconomic problems concerning unemployment. On the basis of comparisons between the three, we shall isolate local factors which, in combination with the national Act, will be shown to give rise to city-specific patterns of co-operation. At the same time, this will indicate how difficult it can be to develop systematic expectations about the development of political collective action without taking into account specificities of contexts which on the one hand shape patterns of power and influence, and on the other, affect the development of local knowledge in terms of organisational self-perceptions.

Our analysis is based on research carried out in 1993 on the Employment Service and Social Services in the three cities under study. Though social security arrangements consist of both social insurance and social welfare, we concentrate here on the latter. Empirical data used in this paper mainly derives from interviews with key figures, and from official and internal organisational documents. In the second section, we expound an analytical framework through which to study patterns of co-operation resulting from the national Act. This framework emphasises the self-definition of the core business (their organisational goals) on the parts of the Employment Service and the Social Services respectively. The third section examines incentives for co-operation deriving from government policy and Acts, which provide structural expectations in terms of the general characteristics and goals of local organisations. Then the fourth section sets out to evaluate the actual self-definition of the core businesses, their implementation of the measures in question and the patterns of cooperation they were able to develop.

## A MODEL FOR ANALYSIS

The patterns of co-operation in the cities of Leyden, Rotterdam and The Hague can be described as collective action occurring between the Social Services and the Employment Service. We approach this collective action from an institutional perspective based on the work of Mary Douglas. In organisational analysis, institutional factors are increasingly considered crucial for explaining forms of collective action and any success it may experience (Powell and DiMaggio 1991). In order to use an institutional perspective to study the behaviour of organisations we shall start with by outlining what we mean by 'institution'. We shall then show that institutions run *across* formal organisations: this implies that no analysis of relations between institutions and their contexts can take it simply that the bounds of institutions are given by organisations' official beginnings and endings. Hence we shall present a typology of human service organisations that can be used to specify the institutions under study and their specific patterns of cooperation. We end this section with some empirical questions.

In *How Institutions Think* (1986), Mary Douglas tries to encourage 'more probing into the relation between minds and institutions' (p. 7). Her main assumption is that co-operation and solidarity are 'only possible to the extent that individuals share the categories of their thought' (p. 8). Here Douglas is using a double-stranded view of social behaviour:

> One strand is cognitive: the individual demand for order and coherence and control of uncertainty. The other strand is transactional: the individual utility maximizing activity described in cost-benefit calculus.
>
> (1986, p. 19)

According to Douglas, the role of cognition in the formation of social bonds is the under-represented case. Social bonds can be understood as conventions that are produced and reproduced as instruments of co-ordination between parties (not just individuals). For Douglas, quoting Lewis, what is accepted behaviour is a matter of convention:

> Minimally, an institution is only a convention. David Lewis' definition is helpful: a convention arises when all parties have a common interest in there being a rule to insure coordination, none has a conflicting interest, and none will deviate lest the desired coordination is lost (Lewis 1968). Thus, by definition, a convention is to that extent self-policing.
>
> (Douglas 1986, p. 46)

According to Mary Douglas's argument, rules are just one aspect of an institution. The other important element is cognition. An institution is not just an infrastructure for co-ordinating behaviour; institutions must give a satisfying answer to the question why people behave in a certain way. As Douglas puts it, 'For a convention to turn into a legitimate social institution it needs a parallel cognitive convention to sustain it' (p. 46). Thus, the legitimacy of institutions is to an important extent due to cognitive factors. In

our case, the cognitive factors involve the justification given both by the Regional Employment Board and by the municipal Social Service for accomplishing or withholding co-operation.

Douglas's definition of institutions in terms of shared categories of thought has important consequences for explaining collective behaviour. Identifying the rules, both formal and informal, that shape the pattern of co-operation is not sufficient; it needs to be supplemented with analysis of the degree to which they are supported by the actors involved. 'Institutional organisation is now widely treated as a way of solving problems arising from bounded rationality' (Douglas 1986, p. 47). Institutions are not set up by omniscient human beings; bounded rationality is a fact with which the human species must live. It is the demand for coherence, order and control of uncertainty that gives rise to institutions: institutions make the behaviour of other actors more predictable by introducing routines and rule-like regularities.

The goal and structure of an institution can be contested by people who do not share the same categories of thought, but this possibility is not well elaborated in *How Institutions Think*. In this paper, therefore, we probe this element of institutional theory, that is co-operation in an environment of *conflicting* conventions both within and between organisations. Douglas herself does not refer to formal organisations; the reason for this may be that conventions run across formal organisations, and do not necessarily coincide with their formal structures. An organisation is not a unitary actor encompassing uniform, shared categories of thought; it tends, rather, to be characterised by pluralism. Conventions within one organisation are often conflictual, and conflicting conventions involve different views on the way the organisation should solve its problems. Such conflict may be settled by adopting one official convention that is presented in official documents and supposed to be supported by the members of the organisation. However, other conventions may survive this process of domination, and may be discovered in subunits of the organisation.

Data on organisations collected by researchers often includes such conflicting conventions. Data from interviews, for example, may well provide information, ideas and opinions reflecting the cognitive conventions of a particular organisational unit. The researcher seeks to reconstruct this information, these ideas and opinions, into a coherent 'metaphor of the organisation'. In this process of 'cooking the data', the clarity of the argument often conflicts with the empirical diversity actually found. For this reason, in the mind of the researcher a convention is selected which he or she sees as representing the organisation. There may well be tension between this reconstructed convention and the dominant convention about organisational goals officially selected by the organisation itself. Although we are aware of this, we shall focus here on the official dominant convention on organisational goals, and shall refer to it as the *core business* of the organisation. Tracing core businesses will provide empirical evidence of cognitive aspects of collective action within organisations.

The perceived core business of organisations involved in active labour-market policy is implemented by means of what may be termed human service technologies. A typology of human service technologies is provided by Hasenfeld, who defines the concept as follows:

> A *human service technology* can be defined as a set of institutionalized procedures aimed at changing the physical, psychological, social, or cultural attributes of people in order to transform them from a given status to a new prescribed status. The term 'institutionalized' denotes that the procedures are legitimized and sanctioned by the organization.
>
> (Hasenfeld 1983, p. 111)

Hasenfeld distinguishes two dimensions in analysing human service organisations: the types of client organisations serve and the kinds of transformation they seek in their clients. Three different transformation technologies can be distinguished: *people-processing* technologies, *people-sustaining* technologies and *people-changing* technologies.

P*eople-processing technologies,* in Hasenfeld's account, attempt to confer a social label or public status on clients. By dint of such labels, other human service organisations are expected to respond to clients in a predetermined manner, such as by providing subsidies or training facilities to the long-term unemployed. No attempt is made to change the personal attributes of the client. In the case of *people-sustaining technologies,* it is attempted to prevent or retard deterioration in the personal welfare or well-being of clients; but no effort is made directly to change clients' personal attributes. An example is the use of income maintenance programmes by municipal Social Services in the Netherlands. Lastly, *people-changing technologies* aim directly to alter clients' personal attributes to improve their opportunities and well-being. These technologies include, for instance, psychotherapy, education and medical treatment.

Human service organisations are often ambiguous about the objectives of their human service technologies; this can be primarily imputed to ill-defined distinctions between the different technologies. Therefore it is likely in the case of a human service organisation that one of these three technologies is prescribed by law or has been officially selected, while in practice instruments will be used that are properly part of other technologies. For example, while the Social Services may claim that their aim is to alter clients' attributes so they can become productive members of society, critics argue that the services essentially use people-processing and people-sustaining technologies.

The framework for local employment policy introduced by the 1991 law gives ample room for different emphasis at implementation stage on the local level. The main goals are defined by law, but the way in which these goals are to be achieved is not exhaustively prescribed. On the basis of this observation, we might expect to find considerable local variation in the way in which government goals are implemented, as a result of different dominant conventions. Correspondingly, this variation may be supposed to have consequences for patterns of co-operation between municipal Social Services and the Regional Employment Boards. We are therefore interested in the following questions:

- What are the perceived 'core businesses' in the respective human service organisations?
- Has co-operation been achieved between Employment Services and Social Services?
- What patterns of co-operation have developed?
- Is there a connection between patterns of co-operation found and perceived core businesses in both municipal Social Services and Employment Services?

## INCENTIVES FOR CO-OPERATION

### Background

Traditionally in the Netherlands, responsibility for the unemployed was divided among the Social Services, under municipalities, and the Employment Services, under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. In this structure, there was a strict division of tasks. The local Employment Service, as part of the Ministry, implemented national employment policy; its main task was brokerage. The Social Services, as a consequence of local government's responsibility for the poor, focused on financial and social care for the (long-term) unemployed. As a result, co-operation between the two institutions was restricted to what was legally imposed.

Until the economic and monetary tremors of the early 1970s, this division of labour did not produce much friction. However, with rising unemployment a number of problems came to the fore, and finally led to the introduction of the 'active labour-market policy' and the Employment Service Act of 1991. First, employment was no longer mainly frictional but emerged as a structural matter; the Employment Service was confronted with an overload of job-seekers. Further, the Employment Service lacked the means of coping with structural unemployment. One consequence was that it focused mainly on those unemployed people who had good labour-market prospects, in order to meet employers' demands. The Social Services were likewise confronted with an overload of new clients.

As the category of the long-term unemployed was growing, the Social Services became transformed into what may be termed 'social provisions factories' without sufficient organisational capacity to activate their clients. Since the Social Services were not permitted to guide long-term unemployed individuals into the labour market, growing numbers of people appeared condemned to life-long inactivity (Van der Veen 1990).

Secondly, during the 1980s it became clear that both the Social Services and the Employment Service were culturally ill-adapted to the new social and political environment. Further, they seemed unable to alter and adjust their traditional structures and attitudes towards the unemployed.

The late 1980s were characterised by a major shift in political and social attitudes towards the problem of long-term unemployment. A major contributor to this swing was a report by the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR 1987) which reintroduced the OECD concept 'active labour-market policy', and put the problem of long-term unemployment onto the political agenda. Under the heading 'active labour-market policy' several initiatives were developed on the local level.

### New incentives for co-operation

Until 1991, both institutions dealing with the unemployed were in an interdependent relationship through the registration function of the Employment Service. The duty of unemployed people to register as job-seekers was prescribed by the National Assistance Act and entitled them to social security.

Both the government's 'active labour-market policy' and the Employment Service Act augmented this interdependence. Referral and Guidance Organisations (RGOs) were the main expression of 'active labour-market policy' here. RGOs were developed to provide services to the long-term unemployed, such as education, training and counselling. As a result of changing political attitudes, the Employment Service (as part of the Ministry of Social Affairs) started to fund RGOs.

Enhanced interdependence was then institutionalised by the 1991 Employment Service Act, expanding interdependence on operational, political and administrative levels. Operational interdependence will be dealt with in the three cases interrogated below; in practice it involves funding several projects within the framework of the RGOs. Administrative and political interdependence, however, resulted from major reorganisation of the Employment Service in 1991. First, the Employment Service was turned into a semi-autonomous institution. Secondly, its administration was tripartised by introducing trade unions and employers' organisations onto the boards. This new board structure is intended to establish a strong connection between demand and supply on the labour market. Furthermore, it is hoped that shared responsibility in employment policy will lead to responsible behaviour by the social partners. Also, brokerage can be facilitated between them through collective agreements.

Finally, the Employment Service was decentralised. The Employment Service was reorganised into twenty-eight regions, each assigned some autonomy. The regions are administered by a Regional Employment Board (REB); this controls Employment Offices—the implementing bodies—in the municipalities within the region. Some centralisation is still present; the REB is accountable to the Central Employment Board (CEB), a national institution. In the REB, representatives of both employers' organisations and trade unions belong to the board, with local government representatives. National government representatives participate in the CEB.

The main consequence of this reorganisation is that the Employment Service is now much closer to local government. However, there is still tension between the local organisation of the Social Services and the regional character of the Employment Service. In order to allocate its funds, the REB must weigh the interest of one city against the interests of other municipalities in the regions.

According to the Act, the Employment Service's main tasks concern fair and efficient allocation in the labour market. However, the meaning of 'fair' and 'efficient' is insufficiently specified; for this reason, implementation results in different interpretations in different regions in terms of the core business of the REB. The next section will examine the relation between interpretation of the Act and co-operative arrangements which actually occur.

Within the Social Services, a shift in attitudes took place at the end of the 1980s which could be imputed to political and societal pressure to change their aims away from providing financial and social care, towards policies 'activating' clients. In 1988, the Ministry of Social Affairs imposed reorientation interviews on the Social Services, emphasising that all beneficiaries should be evaluated regularly in terms of their labour-market prospects. In major cities the Social Services were involved in introducing RGOs, which served to bring more coherence and direction into the Social Services' activities. The RGOs had to be funded, however, and one option was to seek financial contributions

from the Employment Service. A further incentive to co-operation, following the reorganisation of the Employment Service, was the participation in the REB by local government representatives responsible for the Social Services.

## CO-OPERATION IN THREE DUTCH CITIES

### Leyden

In Leyden, it was the Social Services which took the lead in activating and guiding long-term unemployed individuals as early as 1987. There was no serious co-operation between the Social Services and the Employment Service before 1991; flows of clients between the two agencies were regulated on a formal basis.

#### *The core business of the Employment Service in Leyden*

The core business of the Employment Service can be described as a type of brokerage responding to the demands of the labour market, in accordance with the policy formulated by the Central Board of Labour Provisions. Hence the Employment Service in Leyden to a large extent shares its focus on employer demands with employment agencies in other cities. The goal of the Employment Service is to win back employers' trust, and to extend the group of employers for whom it delivers services. This leads, as in other cities, to an emphasis on efficiency to the detriment of fairness. Clients who comply with employers' demands will prevail over others when it comes to selecting those suitable for referral by the Employment Service. Further, in practice unemployed people are required actively to seek the services of the Employment Service. As a consequence of the commitment following from the agreed national policy focus on employers' demands, the individuals gaining most from the Employment Service's activities are mainly well qualified. Still, the Employment Service in Leyden does not exclude other categories of the unemployed, though they are dealt with in far fewer numbers. Individual guidance for unemployed people with lower levels of qualifications is a relatively minor sphere of its activity.

This core business is reflected in the organisational set-up of the Employment Service and the human service technologies it employs. The Employment Service is sectorally organised into departments; a given department deals with clients in economically related activities. Unemployed people with high qualifications are the natural clientele of these departments. Those in need of counselling are processed by a separate department, 'Orientation and Counselling' (OC). Besides these departments, there is an application training service unit. For some activities, such as language education and additional labour, the Employment Service provides subsidies.

In accordance with its focus on providing services to employers, the Employment Service mainly deploys people-processing technologies through OC. Unemployed people with low prospects on the labour market are referred to other organisations. Only a very small group is supplied with people-changing technologies; these include, especially, language education for ethnic minorities.

### The core business of the Social Services in Leyden

Social and financial care is the core business of the Social Services in Leyden, and this includes promoting general societal participation. As a matter of course, the local Social Services focus on the weaker categories of the unemployed, those with low chances on the labour market. In Leyden, the Social Services have emphasised the importance of a referral and guidance unit in the organisation. Moreover, they have taken on the task of dealing with the long-term unemployed in special projects on a modest scale.

The local Social Services are divided into a Social Affairs section (SA), an Economic Affairs and Employment section (EAE), and a Credit Bank section. The first two sections have units for activating people unemployed for long periods. The EAE is divided into an economic affairs unit and an employment unit, with the employment unit responsible for implementing national employment policies and Acts. They deal with employment projects for unemployed young people and the long-term unemployed (supplementary work). The SA is subdivided into a unit for implementing the National Assistance Act and a unit for 'employment projects' (EMP). The EMP and EAE employment units at present operate separately, and the Social Services is considering merging them together.

The Social Services has sought to bring more possibilities for referral into the ambit of its own organisation. In 1991 a unit for 'employment projects' was created in the SA section (in co-operation with the Employment Service), intended for guidance and referral. To be eligible for participating in individual direction towards employment, a person must have been unemployed for at least two years, or one year if he or she belongs to a social minority.

The Social Services mainly use people-sustaining and people-processing technologies. The technology used in the unit responsible for implementing the General Assistance Act is people-sustaining; the two units for activating the long-term unemployed mainly use people-processing technologies.

The EMP, the unit for referral and guidance, mainly employs people-processing technologies. For example, it refers clients to the EAE so that they can participate in national employment schemes. However, at the EMP, people-processing technologies are closely linked to people-changing ones. The latter are contracted out to other organisations. For example, the EMP refers clients to training and social work agencies for direction towards employment.

### The pattern of co-operation in Leyden: co-ordination

The Social Services and the Employment Service participate in a co-operative arrangement, although both organisations nonetheless retain a remarkable degree of autonomy. Relations are structured by contracts, consultation and funding; hence this pattern of co-operation may be described as co-ordination.

There were four major incentives for co-operation in Leyden. First, when the Social Services began to offer brokerage on a modest scale to their clients, the Employment Service sought co-operation in order to control competition for what it considered its own main activity. Secondly, the Social Services were eager to have their clients directed

towards work by the Employment Service when referral and guidance was over. Since the Employment Service mainly dealt with Social Services' clients with good labour-market prospects, the Social Services sought co-operation with the Employment Service to improve their own referral figures. Thirdly, co-operation was sought because of the financial relationship between the Employment Service and the Social Services with regard to referral and guidance. Finally, co-operation was compulsory on the basis of a policy intended to increase the labour-market prospects of ethnic minorities.

The first steps towards co-operation were taken in 1991. The EMP started as a joint project of the Employment Service and the Social Services, located at the Social Services. The role of the Employment Service remained restricted to funding the EMP and posting some personnel. However, soon the Employment Service was confronted with clients from the Social Services who had completed referral training and career guidance. To regulate the flow, the Employment Service created a special consultant for this group in 1993. Meanwhile, the EMP had started to refer their own clients onwards on a modest scale through employment projects. Both developments prompted the employers' organisation to seek further cooperation arrangements. From 1993 on, co-operation took two forms: on the one hand, the joint intake of new clients and reorientation interviews with them, and on the other, the co-ordination of client files. Talks took place between the client, the consultant from the Employment Service and a social worker from EMP. However, the joint-intake and reorientation-interviews experiment was broken off unilaterally by the Employment Service, motivated by what it perceived as a lack of efficiency and effectiveness.

New efforts to structure the relationship led to a contract between both agencies at the end of 1993, allocating tasks through which the Employment Service withdrew from the EMP and clients were categorised. First, financial support to the EMP by the Employment Service was reduced. Further, arrangements were made to designate which clients are dealt with by the Employment Service and which are the responsibility of the EMP. Since 1994, clients are divided into four categories (A to D). The categories reflect levels of qualifications and capacities for referral. Categories A and B are the responsibility of the Employment Service, while C and D fall into the Social Services' realm. Activation through staircasing job-seekers allows clients to move between categories. The final transition to referral by the Employment Service (from category C to B) is managed by an allocation committee comprised of members of both agencies. With the conclusion of this contract, the co-ordination of client files has changed too: the focus has shifted from joint talks with clients to the co-ordination of files.

### Co-operation and core business

Co-operation in Leyden is mainly pragmatic and anything but formal. Further, it is minimal, from the perspective of both the Social Services and the Employment Service: both agencies retain hold of their own perceived core businesses. This perception has become even stronger in the last few years. Both agencies are convinced, though on different grounds, that they are better off when clear agreements are made on who does what. At the same time, a certain overlap in activities remains. Officially, Referral and Guidance forms part of the Social Services. However, the Employment Service also

provides guidance and referral for the long-term unemployed, referring clients to activities such as language education—which is basically a people-changing technology. There is no link to the contracting-out activities of the EMP unit of the Social Services.

Both agencies are reluctant to form co-operative arrangements and prefer to keep their autonomy. The Social Services have sought co-operation for financial reasons and to assure the intervention of the employment service as a follow-up for clients who have passed the referral training and guidance stage. Co-operation, here, is structured so as to enable withdrawal when necessary and to leave room for alliances with other actors than the Employment Service. The Employment Service, for its part, has to focus on increasing its market share in labour-market brokerage. As a consequence, it is unable to deal with all categories of the unemployed. Thus it supports the Social Services' view that weaker candidates are their own responsibility, defending this by reference to the 'slipstream' thesis, according to which the Employment Service should try initially to win employers' trust by offering them quality workers. When trust is won and the agency has acquired a reputation, it can put forward workers with lower qualifications. Of course, this type of reasoning will work in the short term, but needs some empirical support in the longer term. Finally, there is a strong belief on both sides in the success of the present arrangements. Hence co-operation characterised by co-ordination has acquired a solid, legitimised basis.

### The Hague

In anticipation of the new legislation on labour provisions, The Hague was the first city to develop a co-operative arrangement between the Social Services and the Employment Service.

#### *The core business of the Employment Service in The Hague*

The core business of the Employment Service is defined in the Act (as mentioned above) as efficient and fair mediation between worker and prospective employer. This rather vague aim is implemented as follows. In the city of The Hague/Delft, the demand side of the labour market is the starting-point for any action by the organisation. All services—such as education, information and advice—must be functional for employment referral. Action can only be justified if it leads to immediate results. If immediate results are not foreseen, services for the long-term unemployed must be rendered in terms of social policy and are therefore a task for actors other than the Employment Service, that is for local or national government. The conditions which must be met to avail of the Employment Service's activities stipulate that additional education is only justified if it increases job security, anticipates an existing or expected demand, or functions to solve human-resource problems for the employer.

The Employment Service wished to augment its market share in job referral by 100 per cent (it increased by 15 per cent in 1993, with a goal of 30 per cent in 1994). By increasing its market share, the Employment Service is also aiming to be more effective in referring the long-term unemployed through existing contacts with employers (the 'slipstream' view, as in the Leyden case). To achieve this, the Employment Service uses

the account principle, where the account manager is responsible for both the relationship with the manager and the service provided for the employer. The account manager is assisted by specialists from the various organisations dealing with labour-market policy, including municipal organisations. The account principle places the account manager in the centre of a service network for the employer. The objective is to make the bureaucracy more accessible for the client—here defined as the employer, not primarily the unemployed (*Beleidsplan* 1994, p. 9). This strategy implies a selection in terms of types of applicants dealt with by the organisation: only people with good labour-market prospects meet its demands. Hence this strategic choice for functional additional education leads to the (unintended?) exclusion of the long-term unemployed. For the latter, the Employment Service has made a strategic alliance with the Social Services. They combine activities in a special referral and guidance organisation called the *Werkraat,* on which we shall elaborate in the section on co-operation.

### *The core business of the Social Services in The Hague*

The Social Services is oriented to the supply side of the labour market. Local government policy is to supply social provisions and assist the potential workforce to achieve minimal qualifications in training or education. In 1993 the Social Services renamed itself the Municipal Department of Social Affairs and Employment Projects (MDSAE). In The Hague there are some 32,000 people unemployed and dependent on social benefits. Of these, 15,000 are long-term unemployed, out of work for over a year. About 23,000 people are potential clients of the RGO (this includes the long-term unemployed in the region). About 40 per cent of people dependent on social provisions belong to an ethnic minority, and 80 per cent of the total number of the long-term unemployed possess only primary education. Their main problems are lack of work experience, lack of sufficient education, lack of social skills, financial problems and lack of structure in daily life. Apart from the supply-side problems of the labour market, however, there is also a problem on the demand side of the labour market There is simply not enough demand for low-qualified jobs. To cope with these problems the MDSAE follows a twofold strategy. On one hand, a strategy of skills improvement is pursued, while on the other hand job schemes are provided for people who are motivated but not sufficiently qualified to meet the demands of the labour market. Social care is the last resort.

The Service is subdivided into two policy sections. One is for social matters, concentrating on social provision, the other is for employment projects. All organisational units providing employment initiatives for the long-term unemployed fall under this section, which consists of four units to provide specific services for defined segments of the unemployed labour force. The organisational units are designed to keep or render clients fit for the labour market (*Bijlage 5.1* 1995). To coordinate and monitor the flow of people across all services provided, a routing system has been arranged between a municipal preliminary course and an end course. The preliminary course uses qualification schemes provided by the MSDAE and other departments in the municipal bureaucracy. After this, clients must be referred to a job. This is considered the last step in 'staircasing the job seeker' and is carried out by the joint organisation, the *Werkraat*. The overall routing involved here can be defined by the necessary steps on the staircase

to employment.

The first step is human-processing and people-changing, that is judging what services are necessary for the individual client. The units providing the services take the form of training and work projects and reorientation projects. In the reorientation projects, long-term unemployed individuals are administered a specialised process over the course of four weeks, to determine their level of qualifications and what course of action could give them a chance of finding work. This scheme is intended to bring people out of their isolation, to bring structure into their daily lives and to initiate the improvement of their (social) skills. If these minimal conditions are met, the next step can be taken. If further education is needed, individuals can join training and work projects, which supply practical training in protected environments. This training anticipates working conditions on the regular labour market and can qualify the individual for entering practical job training under an employer's supervision.

The second unit is the *Werkraat,* the RGO. Clients who have been on training programme and who qualify for practical job training under supervision can be given subsidies for training by the *Werkraat*. Consultants from the *Werkraat* have access to all the Employment Service's channels to refer people from long-term unemployment to the labour market, and they also monitor guidance at the end of a course. The consultants from the reorientation projects monitor achievements in the preliminary course. To achieve tight succession between preliminary and end courses, halfway along the preliminary course clients are put in touch with the Werkraat In anticipation of a successful conclusion to training they can make arrangements with an employer, but the client remains under the guidance of the counsellor from the Werkraat for another half year.

The third unit provides job schemes for people who cannot be matched on the labour market. For this segment of the unemployed the MDSAE creates what are termed 'supplementary' jobs. These national employment schemes are provided for long-term unemployed individuals who have been out of work over three years and are over 28 years of age, and young people under 23 (in future, under 27).[1] For people with no prospects on the labour market, social provisions are made and a social worker is provided to deal with relevant problems (people-sustaining technology). At the end of this upgrading of the unemployed person, there can be job referral or, if this option is not open, a return to dependency on social benefits.

The fourth unit is a staff unit and its task is to develop employment projects and handle public relations with employers. It also coordinates and manages the whole section's employment projects. Services are subdivided into those dealing with 'deserving' and those dealing with 'undeserving' people dependent on social provisions. Services supplied by the department of social affairs and employment projects are conditional. The section welfare stresses this conditionality by making contracts with clients; these contracts have no legal status as such but do have meaning as moral commitments. Clients are reminded, for example, of the duties that accompany the right to social provisions. Accepting the services of the employment projects section is not without liability: because the capacity of these units is limited, the opportunities which are offered are supposed to be considered seriously. If the client does not co-operate (and acknowledges responsibility) he (or she) will be sanctioned. Non-co-operative behaviour

is penalised with a cut in monthly benefits.

### The pattern of co-operation in The Hague

The city of The Hague has been energetic in implementing an active labour-market policy. Co-operation between the Social Services and the Employment Service was the first in the Netherlands. In the uncertain environment of the legislative process leading to the new Employment Service Act, the Social Services put pressure on the Employment Service. It was suggested that the authority to perform brokerage (which had until then been monopolised by the Employment Service) might be conferred on other agencies by the national government in order to prompt more competition on the employment-referral market. This rumour was in line with the government's policy of retrenchment and with its philosophy of making more use of the free market in public administration. In anticipation of the new Act, the Social Services threatened to refer its own clients. Under pres sure from a new competitor on the referral market the Employment Service accepted the municipality's proposal to combine services for the long-term unemployed. They set up an RGO in 1987, with half the personnel provided by the city of The Hague and the other half by the Employment Service. This combined expertise was intended to improve services for the long-term unemployed. This strategic alliance with the municipality increased the instruments and expertise available for referral and guidance; such enhanced capacity was considered a winning game for both actors.

All organisational units active in labour-market policy for the long-term unemployed are organised into one department under one director. The way in which the co-operation here is organised can be defined as *integration*. By organising all units under the section 'employment projects', planning and programming of activities comes within one bureaucracy, facilitating co-ordination. The cognitive conventions sustaining the co-operation (better service, more opportunities, more possibilities and more effectiveness) ensure that conflicts in the course of co-operation do not escalate too easily; the costs of *not* co-operating are considered too high. When services are integrated under one director, uncertainty can become more controlled and some coherence is achieved for civil servants and their clients in services provided under the term 'active labour-market policy'.

### Core business and co-operation

The pattern of co-operation between the MDSAE and the Employment Service can be defined, then, as integration. The co-operation involved is a strategic alliance carried out to coordinate services for long-term unemployed people dependent on social provisions. Both organisations justify co-operation from the point of view of their own core businesses: both use a common structure to meet different organisational ends. The Employment Service wants to improve its relationship with employers and to meet demand effectively; here the account manager uses the back-up of the expertise available in a joint structure. The Social Services want to enhance their social and financial policy by using the same structure, so as to activate long-term unemployed workers for the labour market and decrease dependency on social provisions. There is reason to believe

that there is a connection between the pattern of co-operation found here and the dominant conventions apparent in both the Social Services and the Employment Service.

## Rotterdam

In Rotterdam the Social Services took the lead in activating the long-term unemployed as early as 1988, as a result of which both Employment and Social Services developed a joint referral and guidance project for the long-term unemployed. Then, after years of substantial co-operation, this relationship came to a halt. The new Employment Service Act—meant to promote co-operation—alienated both parties.

### *The core business of the Employment Service in Rotterdam*

The Regional Employment Board (REB) was created after the Employment Service Act redefined the goals of the latter structure. Its hitherto extensive co-operation with the city of Rotterdam was perceived as in conflict with the regional function of the REB as defined in the Act. Indeed, intensive co-operation with the city of Rotterdam was perceived as a zero sum game in relation to performance outside the city. Other partners represented in the regional Board reduced the influence of the city of Rotterdam. The REB, therefore, came to see the city of Rotterdam as just one actor among other Social Services; it defined its core business as brokerage in supply and demand for labour in the region.

In 1993, eight existing RGOs were brought under the exclusive responsibility of the REB. The resulting Employment Service is organised in three units. The first unit is oriented to the supply side, and provides referral, guidance and education services to the long-term unemployed. The human service technologies used are people-processing and people-changing. The second unit carries out the brokerage function of the Employment Service on the labour market. It refers unemployed individuals who have high levels of qualifications; the human service technology used is people-processing. The third and last unit concentrates on public relations with employers and access to vacancies. Coordination and planning could be enhanced by integrating referral and guidance organisations in the Employment Service, and the process of integrating the eight RGOs and the Employment Service is still continuing. By integrating all human service technologies within its organisation, the Employment Service is able to adopt an independent course.

### *The core business of the Social Services in Rotterdam*

The Social Services form an organisation which defines its core business as 'social care for all those clients dependent on social provisions'. Social care means that financial benefits are provided and (social) participation promoted. This second goal is labelled 'active welfare policy'. In addition to providing benefits, the Social Services also implement national employment policies for unemployed young people and the long-term unemployed. These schemes for supplementary jobs are organised in two different units, which recruit their clients independently and do not use the RGO unit of the Employment

Service. The main human-service technology used is people-sustaining. The human-processing technology here is of minor importance. Almost no reference takes place to the RGO and the employment units of the Social Services. This contrasts with the other two cities under study. The Social Services, by recruiting their own clients for their employment unit, follow a more independent course in relation to the Employment Service.

### The pattern of co-operation in Rotterdam: alienation

In 1988, an extensive pattern of co-operation was put established between the Social Services and the Employment Service. An RGO was created, funded by the Employment Service and staffed by the Social Services; it was considered part of the Social Services administration. In 1990 a joint administration was established, with civil servants from both the Employment Service and the Social Services. The Social Services changed its name in 1992 to the Municipal Department of Social Affairs and Employment (DSAE) to stress these joint interests. Moreover, in 1991 the joint RGO decentralised its services into eight different units, with the goal of making the organisation more responsive to specific needs and opportunities in the city districts. These units fell under the responsibility of the Social Services until 1993.

This mutual cooperation came to a standstill with the Employment Service Act. The new Act reduced the city of Rotterdam's influence in the Regional Employment Board, and the Board adopted a new stance towards the city of Rotterdam. The REB redefined its core business, stressing a regional function, and this gave rise to a process of alienation. The reason for this crisis was the perceived unequal balance for the Employment Service between the amount of funding it received and its influence on policy. Its status of 'new actor' was used to reduce the city of Rotterdam's influence on the RGOs. This resulted in a divorce, an indicator of which is the declaration of an 'active welfare policy' as opposed to an active labour-market policy. In 1993 the Employment Service took over the formerly joint RGO organisation. Both organisations took more independent courses, and the resulting pattern can be described as alienation.

### Core business and co-operation

In Rotterdam the new Employment Service Act was counter-productive in enhancing cooperation. The REB revised its position towards the city of Rotterdam, now seeing its formerly extensive co-operation with the city of Rotterdam as a zero sum game for the region. By stressing its regional function, the REB set in course a process of alienation which culminated in 1993 when the eight existing RGOs were brought under the exclusive responsibility of the REB. The Social Services no longer felt committed to an active labour-market policy and redefined their mission as an 'active welfare policy'. Here there is some evidence that the perception of their respective core business by both actors legitimised a process of alienation.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter we have compared patterns of co-operation between the Social Services and the Employment Service in three cities: Rotterdam, The Hague and Leyden. These cities are characterised by similar socioeconomic problems, especially in terms of the presence of large numbers of the long-term unemployed. Since the late 1980s, an 'active labour-market policy' has been introduced in the Netherlands, on both the national and the local level. This policy aims to reintegrate the long-term unemployed into the labour market through individual guidance and employment schemes on a local level.

The Employment Service Act of 1991 provided for new incentives for local co-operation between the Employment Service and the Social Services. Further, the Act shifted a number of responsibilities to the regional level, while the Employment Service structure was partly privatised and a tripartite board was created for it. The Act was not invariably a key to successful co-operation, however; co-operation between Social Services and Employment Services was affected differently in each of the three cities. In Leyden the organisational set-up for referral and guidance for the long-term unemployed was embedded in the organisation of the Social Services. In contrast with Leyden, this task was eventually integrated into the organisational hierarchy of the Employment Service in Rotterdam. Rotterdam and Leyden may be seen as extreme cases on a continuum; the case of The Hague can be positioned in between. Here, a distinct joint organisation was created by both actors, although it is the Social Services that bear the responsibility for it. In the cases of Leyden and The Hague, the Act strengthened a trend which had already set in before 1991; in Rotterdam the government's Act was counter-productive. In this case the regionalisation of the Employment Service actually exploded cooperative arrangements which had previously existed.

We have characterised the different patterns as co-ordination (Leyden), integration (The Hague) and alienation (Rotterdam). In the cases of The Hague and Leyden, co-operation was perceived as a positive sum game by both Employment Service and Social Services. In Rotterdam, the Employment Service considered the co-operative arrangement to militate against the organisation's regional goals.

Our research shows clearly that collective action on the local level is affected by local, contextual factors. The main local factor we focused upon here was the core businesses of each different agency involved, upon which government instructions impinged. The concept of 'core business' provided us with empirical access to institutions' self-perceptions, and we related these core businesses to patterns of co-operation which we discovered in the respective cities concerned. The perceived core businesses of the three Social Services, as well as the three Employment Services, proved to be (slightly) different in each. However, organisational structures, which reflect the different core businesses, came to differ more widely as a consequence of interaction between centralised planning and the situation in the local context.

The organisations we have interrogated appear to exhibit a mutual relationship between perceived core business and the patterns of cooperation which arise between them. Changes in patterns of co-operation seem to have effects on core businesses, as well as

the other way around; and dominant conventions relating to organisational goals seem to play a substantial role in realising and preserving co-operative arrangements.

## NOTE

1 The job scheme for long-term unemployed people over 28 is the 'Banenpool' and the scheme to combat youth unemployment is termed 'Jevgd Werk Garantie Wet'.

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# 8

# Problems of collective action for associations of the unemployed in France and in Ireland

*Frédéric Royall*

## INTRODUCTION

West European countries are confronted today by the many societal problems caused or highlighted by unemployment; France and Ireland are two cases in point. By the early 1990s both countries had levels of unemployment reaching post-war records, with few prospects of decrease; in terms of electoral politics, unemployment became a politically salient issue. In France, high unemployment rates contributed to the defeat of the Socialistled government in the 1993 legislative elections and to that of the Socialist candidate in the 1995 presidential elections. In Ireland, from the early 1990s rising rates of unemployment led to a decrease in voters' satisfaction with the majority political parties. Thus in both countries two developments became apparent: (a) the belief declined that the state can, on its own, resolve the problems posed by unemployment; this led to (b) active responses to unemployment and its effects from the ranks of community and voluntary sectors. As a result, a vast network of actors emerged in both countries, attempting to address a core societal problem, unemployment, and associated problems such as homelessness, mental illness, alcoholism and poverty.

In analysing problems posed by unemployment in France and Ireland, this chapter will focus on context and setting. It will concentrate on one branch of the community and voluntary sector, associations of the unemployed, and highlight ways in which public authorities and trades unions have responded to collective action undertaken by associations of the unemployed. I shall argue that despite the existence of many such associations, carrying out broadly similar functions in both countries, collective action by associations of the unemployed has presented far greater problems in France than in Ireland. An important explanation for such discrepant outcomes focuses on the effects of the political contexts provided by the two countries. Despite the emergence of collective action by the unemployed and superficial similarities of goals in each country, differences in contextual factors, that is in political setting, account for the differences. The chapter will show how political contexts decisively contribute to the ways in which collective actors attempt to respond to the problems with which they are faced.

Considering events in both countries, the question arises whether the unemployed in France and in Ireland have overcome difficulties in organising themselves and become coherent and effective pressure groups. Has the appeal 'Chômeurs de France et d'Irlande: unissez-vous' found a response? It is true that the unemployed in both countries have become increasingly disillusioned with what they perceive as a lack of concrete public

response to rising unemployment levels; but concerted support for any such call has been hard to achieve. Such is the situation in contemporary France in particular, despite indications that some structured ground-level responses to worsening employment prospects are emerging. The problem is that the many collective actions undertaken by a plurality of groups have lacked focus and unity and thus have been widely dismissed as ineffectual. The unemployed in France have found focus and unity difficult to master. In Ireland, by contrast, the situation is vastly different.

The first section of this chapter reviews the political situation in both countries with respect to rising levels of unemployment; the second approaches the historical development of associations of the unemployed in both countries. I shall then outline some contextually based issues which complicate the possibility of effective collective action by associations of the unemployed in both countries. As the contributors to this collection argue (cf. Edmondson 1994), problems which might appear superficially similar if we concentrate on formal descriptions do not seem similar when their settings are taken into account. This applies strongly to situating the role played by associations of the unemployed, as we shall see below.

## BACKGROUND

In the case of France, the debacle of the Left in the legislative elections of March 1993 typified dissatisfaction amongst the French electorate in general, and amongst the traditional electorate of the Socialist Party (PS) in particular. Primary among the many reasons for the Left's electoral defeat was increasing disapproval of the authorities' management of the economic situation, including unemployment (Colombani 1993). From October 1992 to March 1993, in the lead-up to the legislative elections and from March to May in 1995 prior to the presidential elections, opinion polls stressed that the single most important issue of concern to the electorate was the rise in unemployment and the consequent working public's fear of becoming unemployed. As the campaigns unfolded, aside from a few digressions in *la politique politicienne,* the campaigns were fought on problems posed by and potential solutions to unemployment.

For the Left in general, and the PS in particular, the 1993 electoral rout and the 1995 defeat underlined a paradox which had been observed for some time. Despite indications of a relatively buoyant French economy defined in terms of a strong franc, a positive balance of trade or low inflation rate, it was on the issue of employment/unemployment that the political decisions of the PS were most strongly resented. From 1981 unemployment figures increased from 1.5 million to slightly above 3 million by 1995. By the second quarter of 1995, unemployment rates reached just over 11 per cent of the labour force (EIU 1995; CEC 1995). This situation persists, despite changes in 1982 in official methods of measuring unemployment (Marchand 1991) and despite short-term employment programmes such as the Travaux d'utilité collective, Stages d'insertion a la vie professionnelle, Contrat insertion emploi or Contrat emploi solidarité which have served to mask rises in unemployment, particularly among the youth.

It is also true that on the political and social fronts the 1993 and 1995 elections in France brought to a head changes in traditional political divisions which had been

developing for some years (Kesselman 1989; Parodi 1989). Some commentators argue that political and social characteristics, divisions and allegiances no longer fully mirror the traditional divisions of French society along a Left-Right continuum (Rémond 1993; Hollifield 1991). Instead, new forms of frequently cross-class social and political behaviours and allegiances have emerged, including the French public's wariness of traditional political entities such as parties or even ideologically inspired social movements (see de Brie 1995). Rémond (1993, pp. 55–87) observes that this caution has bolstered the potential of marginal political or social groups to fill the void, feeding on the public's apparent dissatisfaction. The position taken by the main political parties of the Left and Right on rising levels of unemployment is a case in point. Starting from the infamous Socialist 'economic turn-around' in 1983, analysts note that the socialist-led governments of 1981–6 and 1988–3 and the RPR/UDF government of 1986–8 implemented broadly similar economic policies, including those affecting employment and unemployment (Cassen 1993, p. 14; Clerc 1992). Neither series of governments succeeded in reducing unemployment. Perhaps inevitably, a political backlash affected all the main political parties. One manifestation of this was a massive drop in party allegiance and a high incidence of cross-class voting. Minor political parties and non-mainstream political and social groupings gained, at least temporarily, from the trend. Throughout this period the issue of unemployment was mooted, all sides observing its ineluctable rise but none sure how to contain it. From this ineffectiveness grew the seeds of disillusionment and discontent.

In the case of Ireland, the political situation was rather different. As in France, unemployment was a salient political issue throughout the 1980s and the early 1990s. In electoral terms, by the late 1980s unemployment became the main issue on which elections were contested, although opposing political parties did not propose strikingly divergent policy programmes to deal with it. What distinguishes the Irish case is that the similarity between parties' policy programmes reflects political divisions in Irish society, as Whyte (1974) observes. According to Whyte, the traditional Irish structure of political cleavages is not founded on social and economic conflict, but instead relates to political divisions at the time of Independence; hence Ireland is a deviant case in West European terms: an example of *politics without social bases*.

In recent years, research methods unavailable at the time of Whyte's article indicate that changes to the structure of political cleavages are in train. For example, Sinnott presents data indicating limited differences in the voting behaviour of the various occupational classes, but claims that it would be hazardous to try to refute the 'politics without social bases' thesis (Sinnott 1987, p. 73). Laver too adopts a cautious approach, but does show that social and economic cleavages are now becoming visible in partisanship and in voting patterns (Laver 1986, 1987, 1992). Furthermore, McAllister and O'Connell give unqualified support to the view that Irish parties do have identifiable social bases (McAllister and O'Connell 1984). Despite these objections, Whyte's argument hints at some reasons for the delayed emergence of class-based issues in Ireland, for the prevalence of cross-class consensus building, and thus for the similarities of party programmes (including policies relating to unemployment). Whyte's analysis also provides key elements to explain the stability of voter behaviour during the 1980s and early 1990s, despite rising unemployment.

Aside from the implications of some emerging changes in party politics in contemporary France and Ireland, rising unemployment rates have had visible negative effects on both societies' social fabric in terms of poverty, crime, drug use, urban decay and forms of social exclusion or at least fears of such changes (Belmessous 1993; Mariera 1990). Perret and Roustang (1993), for example, argue that class conflict may be being eclipsed as the principal threat to social cohesion—to be replaced by dual failures in professional and social integration stretching across entire segments of society (Perret and Roustang 1993, p. 91).

In view of this situation, the unemployed themselves have embarked on public awareness campaigns directed at those fortunate enough to remain in employment, and at the political élites. They have striven to make the public aware of the rigours, constraints and hardships of unemployment (Couderc 1985; Dautin, 1993; Dethyre and Zédire-Corniou 1992; McGinn and Allen 1991; Narbonne-Fontanieu 1993; OVAL 1991; Poitou 1988; Prolongeau 1993; Ratouie 1987). While such efforts reveal the personal, human side of the issue, it is not proven that these many poignant accounts of life under unemployment actually influence policy or, as Perret and Roustang put it, change how Western society functions. Moreover, the organised, collective response of the unemployed is also fraught with problems. It is to this point that we now turn.

## COLLECTIVE RESPONSES

Although a multitude of unemployed action groups existed during the 1980s and 1990s in France and in Ireland, these were above all ephemeral, organised spatially and temporally in the defence of some particular issue: for example, to oppose proposed redundancies in a company. Once the issue was resolved in one way or another, the group simply withered away. Associations, however, tended to have wider demands beyond the immediate defence of jobs, and thus created or attempted to create organised structures. French law establishes specific criteria for recognising individuals congregating to pursue a common goal, such as clear statutes stipulating goals and composition, plus clear regulation of administration and resources. Ephemeral action groups, in contrast, are not officially recognised by the state.

Here, associations of the unemployed are composed in the main of unemployed persons; those *formed to aid* the unemployed are of many types and comprise benevolent groups such as the Secours catholique in France or the Little Bray Resource Centre in Ireland, as well as public or semi-public agencies such as the French Coordination des associations d'aide aux chômeurs par l'emploi (COORACE). Often, unemployed individuals do not participate in an official capacity in the latter groups.

Of the two categories, associations of the unemployed are greatly in the minority both in France and in Ireland. The Comité Chrétien de Solidarité avec les Chômeurs (CCSC 1994) identified approximately 6,000 French associations active on the issue of unemployment by the end of 1994, of which 56 were strictly of the unemployed (national networks, regional delegations, local branches, or local associations). After 1975, and especially after 1987, the number of both types of association increased rapidly (Conseil national de la vie associative 1992), which indicates that in the past thirty years the

French have come more easily to embrace participation in the everyday activities of associations of all sorts, breaking with their historical tendencies (Wilson 1987). Why, then, are there so few associations of the unemployed, especially since the French show a greater propensity to create associations once they feel that their rights are being attacked?

In Ireland, group participation in activities outside religion and political parties has also increased (Regan and Wilson 1986). In comparative terms and in spite of institutional differences, Ireland with a population approximately one sixth that of France has twice the number of associations of the unemployed, albeit for a higher rate of unemployment.

In their present configuration, groups of the unemployed in France date from the early 1980s. From the outset, one man came to be identified in the eyes of the public as the moral force of campaigning for the unemployed: Maurice Pagat. In an open letter to *Le Monde Dimanche* in October 1981, Pagat appealed to the unemployed in France to combine their individual efforts in order to create a viable national structure or, as Pagat called it provocatively, *un syndicat des chômeurs*. Public response was reasonably favourable. Pagat's subsequent appearance on Michel Polac's popular television chat show, *Droit de Réponse,* in November 1984 served effectively as the catalyst to launch a national organisation of the unemployed. Originally known as the Syndicat des Chômeurs, the organisation was organised and staffed solely by unemployed volunteers. By 1984, it succeeded in establishing twenty Maisons de Chômeurs (roughly equivalent to the British or Irish Centres for the Unemployed) throughout France (Lentini 1985). The Syndicat des Chômeurs also set up an alternative economic experimental farm at the Château de Bais (Mayenne), staffed exclusively by unemployed members.

Once established, the Syndicat des Chômeurs articulated its actions along two lines: campaigning activities and service-oriented activities. Campaigning was done through public relations exercises such as marches or press communiques, demanding minimum unemployment benefits equal to two thirds of the minimum salary (SMIC); reductions in the official working week in order to increase employment through jobsharing; alternative employment centred on the so-called new 'social demand'; and representation of the unemployed on public bodies. Since July 1983 the Syndicat des Chômeurs has also continuously published a monthly news-paper, *Partage*. The second area of activity aimed to provide more practically-based services implemented by the affiliated Maisons de Chômeurs. Services, including job-placement services, counselling, food kitchens, lodging and medical services (see *Allô…Chômeurs,* September 1993 p. 2).

From mid–1985, the cohesion of this organisation was seriously tested. Conflicts of personality, disputes concerning policy approaches and clashes over the funding of activities led to numerous resignations, schisms and regroupings. The Syndicat des Chômeurs collapsed in autumn 1985: one faction, a majority of the Maisons de Chômeurs, formed the Fédération Nationale des Chômeurs (FNC) and a minority, led by Pagat, became the Mouvement National des Chômeurs et Précaires (MNCP). In 1988 the FNC disbanded but the MNCP consolidated its structures and expanded. Since March 1988 it has organised the biennial Etats généraux du chômage et de l'emploi, a national forum for discussion in which decision-makers are invited to participate alongside representatives of local community and voluntary groups. Ministers, ministerial secretaries, academics, business people and community workers have in fact often been

present (Bois 1994).

Despite a relatively good profile and some successful campaigns, the MNCP also had its share of difficulties. Internal rivalries and political disputes remained frequent; by 1992 a further split occurred. A group including some of the founding members of the Syndicats des Chômeurs severed its links with Pagat but continued to operate under the name MNCP. The MNCP has since reorganised and has at present 20 affiliated associations in eight of the 22 French regions. Despite severe financial constraints, the MNCP has carried out a number of campaigning activities, such as opposing the government's proposed five-year plan for employment. The service-oriented activities have practically disappeared.

Pagat now leads the Réseau Partage, which is essentially campaign—and information-focused and largely dependent on the monthly *Partage* to publicise its message. Other recently formed national organisations include the Mouvement Démocratique pour le Partage du Travail (MDPT) in Toulouse, the Association pour l'emploi, l'information et la Solidarité des Chômeurs (APEIS), REFORM in Brittany and Agir Contre le Chômage, in the suburbs of Paris. Moreover, a number of initiatives were launched in an attempt to link the various organisations. For example, in late 1993 and throughout 1994 renewed efforts to organise the unemployed were initiated, culminating in a national conference organised in Saint Nazaire in July 1994 (Daurou 1994, p. 14). Few initiatives ensued, for reasons explained below.

In the case of the Irish associations of the unemployed, a serious attempt to link the various associations was initiated in late 1983-early 1984 by several north Dublin groups, less to create a viable umbrella organisation than to pressure the government on specific issues. Its main goal was to 'establish a publicly-funded job scheme, or a drive to improve social welfare payments' (Kearns 1987, p. 11). One trades union commentator has pointed out that, in a sense, the initiative was the first attempt since 1957 to organise the unemployed (interview, 4/3/1993). From the initial meeting, several action groups were set up in the north Dublin inner-city area under the aegis of a coordinating body, eventually called the Dublin Unemployed Alliance (UA) (Flynn 1987, pp. 14–16; Darndale 1986, p. 7). A serious rift occurred from June to August 1985 and one founding member, Noel Hodgins, resigned. Paradoxically, in October 1986, his group was notified that a project it had submitted to the European Commission under the Combat Poverty 2 Programme had been successful (Darndale 1986, pp. 20–21). Its early months were difficult for the UA. During 1985, dissension within the executive and among locally affiliated individuals led to personal tensions and to expulsions. Furthermore, the practical, day-to-day problems of the UA were not different from those experienced by the membership. Constant difficulties arose from lack of funding, inadequate premises and the limited managerial skills of the volunteers. Despite these many problems, the UA did continue to operate and even extended its membership throughout the Republic and into Northern Ireland. So, despite the many practical short-comings of the UA, and even despite its lack of a clear purpose in initial stages, at least it represented a novel attempt to amalgamate the many Dublin-based associations so as to provide a common framework for collective action.

Notwithstanding the self-generated efforts of associations of the unemployed, as in the establishment of the UA, other groups also tried to enhance the organisational strength of

the voluntary and community groups. Associations of the unemployed received substantial support from the trade union movement as well as from a variety of other organisations. Some were national or international trusts, such as the Ireland Funds. Others included both the Co-operative Network and religious and charitable organisations, such as the Catholic Social Services Funds, the Jesuit Solidarity Fund or the Society of St Vincent de Paul.

Consequently, a number of initiatives were set in train throughout the mid to late 1980s—undertaken, at times, by associations of the unemployed and, at times, in collaboration with the trade union movement. A building process had therefore taken place. A unique attempt had been made to establish a focal organisation for the unemployed and, on the other hand, the trade union movement and a variety of charitable and international organisations were initiating projects aiming to address the issue of unemployment while improving the conditions of the unemployed. Equally important was the spirit of co-operation and collective identity which resulted. It was as a consequence of this spirit that further efforts were made to expand the UA's activities as a truly unified and viable organisation of the unemployed.

To this end, in July 1985, at the invitation of the UA and the Dublin Council of Trade Unions (DCTU), an unemployment seminar was convened at Liberty Hall, Dublin, aiming 'to bring together unemployed people and unemployed groups from various areas of the country so that a common approach could be worked out and a common approach agreed upon' (UA 1985, p. 2). Delegates felt it necessary to move beyond the limited, uncoordinated efforts of previous unemployed associations, and a strategy for the national focal organisation was outlined. The organisation was called upon to organise national campaigning activities such as public relation and media work (interview, 29/10/1992), highlighting unemployment issues at a national level, while the locally affiliated membership would continue to provide services and to build up expertise and local contacts in their chosen field.

In February 1987 the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOU) was formally established and by October 1987 its constitution was in place. It soon became a focal national organisation, centralising campaigning and influencing pressure-group activities by its affiliated associations. Prior to the INOU and despite the initiatives of the UA there was no national, focal association to represent the unemployed and no association whose brief included canvassing national public officials and speaking authoritatively on national labour-market issues. The many small associations had been tied to local issues, with limited financial and human resources, and were much hit by emigration: therefore largely unable to make an impact on the national scene (interview, General Secretary of the INOU, 21/10/1992).

Between 1987 and 1993 the INOU developed in two phases. During the first, it sought to affirm its status as a viable entity, to establish its credibility *vis-à-vis* both the network of associations of the unemployed and the wider public and the authorities (*INOU Bulletin,* January 1993). Leaders were clearly determined not to repeat the various organisational mistakes of past associations; the INOU endeavoured to become a well-established part of the social fabric of Irish society. During the second phase, the INOU attempted to consolidate its position as an influential organisation, to become a key actor of the unemployment policy community. By the end of 1994, over one hundred action

groups and centres were affiliated to the INOU in Northern Ireland and in the Irish Republic (O'Neill 1994).

Once its financial viability and its status as a focal organisation had been consolidated, the INOU broadened its strategy by enlarging its membership, extending its target audience and attempting to force certain issues upon the more prominent actors in the policy community. This strategy required a well-researched criticism of the management of the national economy and its effects on employment and unemployment. The INOU sought, therefore, to present itself both as part of the enlarged voluntary sector and as an authoritative organisation on the issue of unemployment; thus as an important insider member of the unemployment policy community

During its first phase the INOU encountered many financial problems, though its employed members rose from one in 1988 to ten in 1990 (INOU 1991, p. 1; 1993a). Aside from membership dues, its funding came from a variety of sources, both state and private. Essential finance was provided on a year-by-year basis which could lead to serious shortfalls in funds (interview, General Secretary of the INOU, 21/10/1992). Consequently, in the initial phase, the level of activities was somewhat curtailed and concentrated on campaigning, limited service provision and public representation issues. To extend this level, the INOU has continuously sought adequate and ongoing private and public resourcing. For example, though mindful of the dangers of incorporation or of resource dependency, the INOU has lobbied actively to secure a global statutory funding commitment from the state (INOU 1993b).

## DIFFICULTIES

Although organisations of the unemployed were established in both France and Ireland, in the case of France a revival in the piecemeal and individual approach to unemployment emerged after 1993. In Ireland, most initiatives of unemployed organisations were supported if not initiated by the INOU, thus limiting the possibility of a piecemeal approach. In France, initiatives centred on the provision of services *to* the unemployed, such as job clubs or referral services (*Le Monde Initiative,* 15 September 1993), and included the launching of four separate newspapers with the unemployed as the target group: *Rebondir, Vive l'Emploi, Boulot* and *Tribune Libre*. None the less, although the economic difficulties of the early 1990s engendered a phenomenal number of initiatives and projects targeting the unemployed, the structured, organised response of the unemployed themselves was, at best, uncommon.

There were some interesting ground-level initiatives in France, such as the launching of *Macadam Journal* and *Réverbère,* both newspapers helping to support the homeless, the latter written exclusively by homeless contributors. Rodolphe Clauteaux, a middle-level manager made redundant in early 1993, also made valiant efforts. Like Pagat in 1981, Clauteaux launched a national appeal in *L'Autre Journal* entitled 'lettre ouverte aux chômeurs de France' (numbers 4 and 5, 1993), appealing to the unemployed to unite and built a forceful unit on the strength of their numbers. However noble these efforts were, a ground-level structured approach combining the various groups and building on the force of the unemployed as a group has never truly come about in France and is still

clearly lacking. In this vein, Michel-Louis Levy (1993, p. 2) asks how it can come about that French society is apparently able to accommodate itself to the presence of three million unemployed.

There are many factors which may explain differences in collective action in Ireland and in France (Bertrand 1994). The following analysis is limited to only one: the circumstances which condemn associations of the unemployed, and through them the unemployed themselves, to remain marginal social actors. This situation exists in both countries, despite the high level of activities and the cohesion of the Irish organisations in contrast to the French. Why are associations of the unemployed condemned to remain external to what political scientists call the unemployment policy community (Jordan 1990; Rhodes and Marsh 1992)? This marginal situation is conditioned by three elements: the apathy of the unemployed; the tenuous relationship which such organisations hold with the trade union movement; and, a point which is more prominent in the case of France, the ideological differences of group leaders with respect to ongoing relations with the state. In each case, cognitive, power-related and contextual elements interact markedly.

We have already alluded to some aspects of the first point. Enormous internal difficulties have arisen continuously within the major national organisations mentioned. For example, in France various anti-democratic practices are often cited by the dissenting members of the organisations as reasons for dissatisfaction. This explanation is, however, only partially sufficient. Extremely difficult for associations of the unemployed is the issue of their own legitimacy in representing the unemployed and encouraging them to become active members. Referring to France, Lecerf (1992, p. 8) expresses the point admirably: 'Le chômage n'est pas synonyme d'une mobilisation du collectif, mais plutôt d'un trouble, d'une angoisse de l'individu.' In Ireland, a commentator from the Irish Unemployed Workers' Movement described the tenuous situation of the unemployed more than sixty years ago (*Irish Workers' Voice,* 19 November 1932):

> Every other interest in the country, ranchers, brewers, trade unionists and political factions have powerful organisations to fight for their needs and represent their interests. The unemployed workers are alone without an organisation linked up throughout the land to ensure that they will secure the Right of work or maintenance for themselves and their families.

Unemployment is perceived by the unemployed in both countries as a social stigma; hence many unemployed people tend to shy away from collective action. Moreover, the unemployed often perceive their situation as temporary, so long-term participation in organisations of the unemployed is not seen as essential, especially when short-term gains from participation are not always clear (Olson 1965).

Moreover, the unemployed do not form a homogeneous group. They are of different sexes, ages, social and professional backgrounds, with diverse social security provisions, from various regions, have become unemployed for varying periods and so on (Bertrand *et al.* 1995). These are unmistakable obstacles to efforts at unification. For example, since 1991 a number of associations *formed to aid* the unemployed have been established in France to cater specifically for the social and professional needs of *cadres* (managers).

There are obvious problems for associations of the unemployed in presenting a common front, especially since they have a difficult enough task including members of white-collar professions in their ranks.

Undoubtedly France and Ireland, like most other West European countries, are experiencing profound changes in types and forms of work. In recent years the trade union movement has been shaken to its very core. Year by year, trade union membership has decreased. French trade unions have become slowly marginalised and retain bastions of relative strength mainly within the public sector and some of the major companies. Trade unionism in France has all but disappeared in small and medium-sized companies and has not secured a foothold in the new, high growth industrial and service sectors. Inevitably the trade union movement has entered into a defensive mode, or phase of self-preservation. Even with respect to the ongoing national debate on jobsharing as a remedy for high unemployment, the trade union movement is sharply divided: trade unions of Christian affiliation more or less accept such provisions and the Socialist-oriented ones refuse (Freyssinet 1993). The case in Ireland is not quite the same. Although trade unions in Ireland are certainly on the defensive, the movement has been very much at the forefront of developments formed to aid the unemployed, perhaps as a means by which to contain the influence of other emerging social groups. For example, the Irish Council of Trade Unions (ICTU) operated and structured twenty-seven Centres for the Unemployed by 1995.

Then again, as far as associations of the unemployed are concerned, the greatest problems arise with respect to representation and legitimacy as viewed by the state. In spite of the decline in importance of the union movement in France, the major unions continue to receive substantial state subsidies (Hall 1993, pp. 161–2). Moreover, trade unions in both France and Ireland still maintain their position as social partners and participate formally with the political authorities in the many discussions, committees and commissions on employment and unemployment issues. In a sense, trade unions are still very much insiders in the policy community, as they continue to retain dense networks of organised interests with deeply entrenched viewpoints. Unions benefit from the network, especially when they are able to counter policy decisions. The trade union movement's potential to disrupt policy is still a force with which governments must reckon.

Compared with such an omnipresent group, the position of associations of the unemployed in France and Ireland is weak indeed, all the more so as gaining legitimacy to speak, act or negotiate on behalf of the unemployed has always been a major problem for associations of the unemployed. Addressing the Etats généraux du chômage et de l'emploi in 1990, the French Prime Minister, Michel Rocard, made clear that the trades unions are seen as representing not only themselves but the unemployed also. 'Je sais qu'on peut en discuter; mais tel est l'état de droit et de la réglementation aujourd'hui' (*Partage,* May 1992, p. 3). But in recent times, no less a person than the former Socialist Minister of Labour, Martine Aubry, has publicly recommended extending state consultative procedures to associations of the unemployed—thus incurring the wrath of the trade union movement (*Partage,* February 1994, p. 4).

The origins of the present situation in France can be traced to the end of last century, when some French trade unions took limited measures to aid members who had lost employment, thereby securing some form of legitimacy in the eyes of the unemployed

(Lecerf 1992, pp. 60–67). In present times, trade unions in France and Ireland both openly claim legitimately to represent the unemployed (ICTU 1993, p. 3). Associations of the unemployed, perhaps unsurprisingly, are quite hostile to the union movement, to the extent that trade unions are seen as being part of the problem. Unions are viewed with suspicion, seen as organised to defend their own interests and not those of the unemployed.

The final point refers to the diversity of the ideological and personal aspects within and between associations, and to relationships with the state and its agencies. There appears to be some correlation between the ideological bent of an association and the nature of its relationship with the authorities. A number of schisms in the various national organisations have taken place concerning links with public authorities and their consequent effects on associations' policy choices and independence.

For example, in France the MNCP is regarded as having established close contacts with the Mauroy and Fabius governments during the early 1980s. In fact these contacts were often only informal personal relationships between MNCP officials and senior civil servants, as for many organised interests in contemporary France (Hall 1993, pp. 161–4). Nevertheless, such contacts provoked severe divisions; dissenting members felt that the organisation risked toeing the line of the PS. In the context of 1983–6 and the end of the *état de grâce des socialistes* this concern is understandable. The situation was similar for the FNC under the Chirac government of 1986–8, when the more outspoken campaigning strategies and activities were rapidly modulated; FNC officials multiplied informal contacts with government bodies and even secured funding for a number of service-oriented activities. Reflecting on this unholy alliance, an anonymous author observed that the FNC 'par le désir d'institutionalisation a tout prix…a été gobée politiquement et a ainsi perdu son indépendance'.

In Ireland, during the early 1990s, the INOU received an overall commitment of approximately £100,000 from various sources as well as an agreement for partial funding of an information worker (interview, General Secretary of the INOU, 21/10/1992). Later, the organisation widened its links with similar associations in the European Community, affiliating to the European Network of the Unemployed (ENU) in 1989 and to the European Anti-Poverty Network in 1991 (*INOU Bulletin,* December, 1989, January, 1993). It strengthened a wide array of informal links with other voluntary organisations such as the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) and the National Association of Tenants' Organisations (NATO), and with its own membership. As for formal links with state bodies, from June 1992 until the fall of the coalition government in November 1992, the INOU was formally included on the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Employment Subcommittee for strategies for the unemployed (*INOU Bulletin,* June 1992). In 1993, the INOU was again invited onto an official committee, the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF), whose terms of reference are job creation, the long-term unemployed, social exclusion, social justice and equality. In a sense, the INOU has extended its range of network contacts on the issue of unemployment.

Given this situation, what clearly differentiates the present position of the Irish associations of the unemployed from past experiences are the activities which they now perform, the facilities at their disposal and the extent of their formal and informal links with public authority agencies. Unemployed associations of the 1970s and early 1980s

were often single-issue groups, concerned with immediate problems and providing only a limited range of activities; this is no longer the case (McGinn and Allen 1991, pp. 6–10). Also, whereas unemployed associations of the 1970s and early 1980s tended to retain a certain autonomy from the state, current developments point to their greater desire and predisposition to enter into partnership arrangements. Of course this is true of the voluntary sector as a whole in Ireland and in the European Community, often across policy sectors and despite consequent risks of incorporation (Chanan 1992, pp. 135–7). In the wider context of community development, Kelleher and Whelan (1992, p. 11) note that despite their previously autonomous stance towards the state, many activists of the 1970s are now working within state partnerships. Since the late 1980s, a tighter network of relationships between the INOU and the central authorities has come about; similar developments have taken place between local associations of the unemployed and the locally based agencies of the public authorities. Within both spheres, specific forms of power relationships have developed.

Many associations in France and Ireland have trodden a fine line between co-operating with public authorities and being co-opted. Others have adopted a more moderate approach to contacts with authorities. Still others have preferred to refuse to participate with any public programme or project, disdainfully referred to in France as *une politique de traitement social du chômage*. The view of the latter groups is that public authorities are not serious in attacking the root problem of unemployment but rather respond to its consequences via a plurality of social projects. This view appears to be that of the APEIS in France, though to a lesser extent of its local branches in their interactions with municipal authorities.

The present position of associations is in fact inherently difficult. Their financial limitations make the activities they undertake fragile. Apart from membership dues, French associations receive occasional funding from charities or local authorities, very rarely indeed from national sources. An element of the trade union movement and, in particular, the CFDT-ANPE has multiplied links with some national associations and offered, at times, non-financial contributions. But the French trade union movement as a whole in no way supports the Maisons de Chômeurs or other associations to the same extent as the British or Irish trade union movement (McGinn and Allen 1991; Moon and Richardson 1985). Inevitably, this unfavourable financial situation causes continual debate, and the activities of many French associations are considerably curtailed by their lack of financial independence (Bastide 1992).

On the political front, the major political parties both in France and in Ireland have kept the associations at arm's length. Even among the smaller political parties in France (the Communist Party, National Front or *ligue ouvrière*), links with associations are largely non-existent, small parties contacting individuals or groups of their own persuasions only. The reason for these limited links with political movements is twofold. First, associations are small, marginalised actors, not only on the fringes of the unemployment policy community but also precariously recognised by the unemployed themselves. Consequently, they do not possess the capacity for mass mobilisation. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, French associations are rife with disillusioned

ground-level activists, distrustful of external bodies, highly suspicious and fearful of manipulation even from within their own ranks. Anxious about their own preserve, associations do not take kindly to sharing power with anyone else.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has emphasised the necessity of taking account of political contexts when investigating what appear to be broadly similar problems in diverse settings. It has also reviewed and suggested explanations for several cases in which bottom-up collective initiatives have presented problems. So perhaps a final pessimistic remark is appropriate. Solutions to the problem of unemployment are not easy to come by. Associations of the unemployed in France and Ireland, like other social actors, have put forward suggestions such as a reduction in the working week, alternative economic programmes, small-scale development or the promotion of local initiatives. But the effective implementation of such proposals has been frustrated by the apathy of the unemployed and the objections of vested interests. Unemployment has become big business, particularly in contemporary France, and many vested interests staunchly defend the status they have acquired. Since associations of the unemployed are continually confronted with organisational and financial problems, they stand little chance of competing on equal terms with these organised, entrenched bodies. Moreover, associations are rent by internal power struggles, some of a partially ideological nature but many not as noble. As some former activists have put it, the autocratic tendencies of leaderships have often undermined associations' effectiveness.

To return to the questions posed at the beginning of the paper, have the unemployed organised themselves and become coherent 'pressure groups'? Some elements within the vast ranks of the unemployed have indeed organised, at least through some form of representation in associations. None the less, many problems militate against the formation of coherent pressure groups. The associations' power base is too dispersed, their goals unclear, their class solidarity non-existent and the personal, self-promoting interests of leaders too discrepant. To this extent, associations of the unemployed in France and Ireland share broadly similar organisational problems. However, the role and functions of associations of the unemployed in the two contexts and their interactions with public authorities are vastly different, leading to widely diverse approaches to problems. What at first sight seem similar difficulties in France and in Ireland are transformed when their particular political contexts are taken into account.

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# 9

# Neighbourhoods in the city: contexts for participation in politics?

*Dominique Joye*

## INTRODUCTION

Today a neighbourhood represents a fascinating political space. At a time when adherence to traditional politics is unravelling, the local level presents itself as a particularly important space for action (Mabileau *et al.* 1987; Abélès 1991). Models dealing with the transition to 'post-materialist values' (Inglehart 1990) predict more attention to issues affected by the environments of everyday life (D'Arcy and Prats 1985). Hence neighbourhoods within cities are emerging as a significant context for political action, particularly as far as new social movements are concerned (Auer and Levy 1987; on suburban areas, see de Rudder 1991, Dubet 1985).

Moreover, the analysis of neighbourhoods exhibits a 'laboratory' aspect: to the extent that the spaces concerned are relatively small, they make it possible to engage in fine-scale observations, but also to make real comparisons between strategies, close to genuine experiments. This article, largely based on results of a much wider research project focusing on Swiss neighbourhoods (Joye *et al.* 1995), is precisely intended to explore the diversity between localities which enables us to test a number of contextual dimensions in explaining political behaviour and approaches to local problem-solving.

This chapter is based upon two different perspectives. Initially, we shall examine the significance of the neighbourhood as such. This approach implies considering the overall significance of a small context within a changing surrounding arena, as well as taking into account the dimensions which define the contemporary political context in Switzerland: questions of political institutions and autonomy, social differentiation and segregation, of political culture and so on. Secondly, we shall change the level of analysis and switch to an individual point of view. This dual approach, aggregated as well as individual, is important if we are to understand the social and political challenges of contemporary life in European cities.

## NEIGHBOURHOOD AND CONTEXTS

In what terms can a town's neighbourhood constitute a context for political action? The answers here are multiple and refer largely to scales in human geography. First, there is the question of social composition. Social position has meaning only within a given social structure. For example, the status of a teacher is not the same in a town as it is in a

village. It is therefore the *region* that constitutes the initial determining context (Poche 1985). But the social status of the neighbourhood itself, its image, also influences the attributes ascribed to its inhabitants (Benoit-Guilbot 1986). In this sense, it is often relevant to know if a citizen lives in a rich or poor neighbourhood, a homogeneous or a heterogeneous one. The neighbourhood itself becomes a context for action.

The second consideration modulates the first. When mobility increases in the area under study, in what sense is the notion of neighbourhood still pertinent (Levy 1989, 1990)? According to the 1990 census, more than half the active population in Switzerland now works in another commune than that of residence. Does this allow us to consider that the neighbourhood still constitutes a pertinent context? The answer is found by referring to the *environment of daily living,* or what I shall call the *lived environment*—even though the spaces concerned may effectively extend to the whole town, to its surrounding region or even beyond (Préteceille 1991). This extension of living spaces is referred to as 'metropolisation' by Leresche *et al.* (1995) and as 'metapolisation' by Ascher (1995). For certain categories of the population, however, the defence of one's 'lived environment' is expressed mainly in reference to the standard of the neighbourhood. In such a case, the neighbourhood is highly important for certain categories of the population (one issue in the study of local participation is to determine precisely *who* are the actors in neighbourhoods treated in this way: cf. Klandermans and Tarrow 1988; Sorenson 1988). It becomes a context for action and its characteristics, social composition, demography, degree of homogeneity and system of interacting interests together form an influential setting for participation in public life and for local political action (Tievant 1983; Micoud 1989).

The notion of context is, thirdly, relevant in that when a neighbourhood belongs to a town, this forms a context for the context—either in terms of spaces within which participants can act or stakes which they hold, or in terms of specific rules for behaviour as far as local problems are concerned. Let us now return to the first aspect.

## NEIGHBOURHOODS AND SWISS TOWNS

Ask inhabitants where they live and they will tell you first about their neighbourhoods. Simply by comparing answers the researcher will notice that the neighbourhood's perceived boundaries are extremely variable (Noschis 1984). Even in terms of official delimitations, there is relatively low coincidence between neighbourhoods which are relevant for the post office, the educational system, the police or the parish—especially in the French-speaking towns of Switzerland. Hence the study from which this work is taken began simply by treating a 'neighbourhood' as an administrative urban subdivision, counting between 5,000 and 20,000 inhabitants.

We restricted this study to six towns, by varying a number of criteria such as culture (French Swiss or German Swiss), size (over or under 100,000 inhabitants), economic structure (secondary and tertiary) and institutions, in terms of the significance of local structures. In Switzerland, local power is always important but there is some variation between cantons, such that neighbourhoods are more important if local autonomy is greater: some cantons have more 'localised' political systems. Thus we obtained optimal

conditions for a research project contrasting local situations.

Much work has been done on the social and demographic segregation of towns, and it is impossible systematically to recapitulate this here. It is important, however, to mention that the differentiating dimensions referred to above are present in all Swiss towns and that they show regularities which have been generally observed. None the less, in certain cases, social segregation is the most important; this is the case in Geneva. Elsewhere, demographic segregation is dominant. We can assume that a model of homogeneous city management that is similar across neighbourhoods fits more easily where social segregation is not so strong.

Inside a town, the configuration of the neighbourhood itself is also highly variable. What are, then, the important facets of a neighbourhood? The interests of this research concern participation on the one hand and public space on the other. Hence there are three fundamental dimensions:

1 The social characteristics of the neighbourhood: who lives there, what life cycles are pursued, what salaries earned, what businesses engaged in?
2 The morphological criteria of the built environment: what are its building periods and habitat types, and what functions dominate the neighbourhood?
3 The political aspects of the neighbourhood, its degrees of public involvement and its variety of political tendencies.

*Table 3* The towns in the study

| | large | | small | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Institutionalisation | French-speaking | German-speaking | French-speaking | German-speaking |
| Strong | | Berne | | Winterthur(I) |
| Medium | Geneva | | Neuchâtel | |
| Weak | Lausanne | | La Chaux-de-Fonds [(I)] | |

(I) indicates an industrial city

On the basis of these three criteria, we have opted for examining a diversity of neighbourhoods while at the same time retaining the possibility of comparison. The eighteen possible combinations which arise from these three criteria have not all been systematically explored, but a selection of 'couples' has been pursued whenever regional conditions permitted. By neighbourhood 'couples', we might mean, for example, two neighbourhoods comparable in terms of morphology and social composition but differentiated by their situation in different towns. Another way to insert variation between couples is to choose between two neighbourhoods which are more or less identical in other respects but where the degree of institutionalisation strongly varies. In this way, fourteen neighbourhoods were retained for more detailed analysis.

This is therefore an approach which allows the variation of elements from the context which reflect a neighbourhood's own surroundings as well as its social composition in respect of political participation. Furthermore, analysis can be applied both to characteristics of towns and neighbourhoods and to their interrelations. This makes the totality of possible combinations too large for one systematic analysis, but a certain number of elements can be distinguished. For this, we need to examine another element of the context: commune rights, and rules of local democracy in Switzerland.

*Table 4* Fourteen neighbourhoods

| *Period of construction* | *Social characteristics* | *Activity: politically active* | *Mixed* | *Low activity* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Old | higher | Breitenrain (BE)* | | *Eaux—Vives* (GE)* |
| | | | | L'Industrie (LCF) |
| | lower | | Serrières (NE) | |
| | | | Tössfeld (WI) * | |
| Intermediate | | | | Alpes (NE) |
| | higher | | Champel (GE) | |
| | | | Murifeld (BE) | |
| | | | **Le Mont** (LS) | |
| Recent | lower | *Bümpliz* (BE) | | Seen (WI) |
| | | **Aïre-Le Lignon** (GE) | | La Blécherette (LS) |
| | | | | Les Forges (LCF) |

An asterisk is used to indicate pressure on the built environment for the transformation of housing into administrative units and office building; an italicised name indicates a commune which has joined the central city some years ago and a name in bold type indicates a commune at present independent

## THE POLITICAL CONTEXT IN SWISS TOWNS

In relation to political context and political participation, two aspects must be analysed. First, we must examine the formal rules supplying the frame-work of semi-direct democracy in Switzerland. Secondly, we need to see whether different models can be distinguished in terms of the everyday functioning of political life.

### Communal rights in Swiss towns

The Swiss political system is particularly interesting insofar as local democracy is the vehicle for various aspects of political participation. In fact, in addition to elections, the forms of semi-direct democracy are available to communes as well as cantons. Referenda offer groups of citizens the opportunity to propose laws for approval to all citizens of a commune; 'initiatives' offer the opportunity to put a new subject onto the political agenda. Practice, however, is different in each town. In number and in modality (that is, whether propositions are counted as initiatives for debate or as referenda passed into law on a majority vote), there are contrasting forms of direct democracy, especially as between German-speaking and French-speaking Switzerland.

There is also considerable contrast among the subjects of public debate. In Geneva or Lausanne, town planning constitutes a local stake *par excellence*. In Berne or Winterthur, more everyday activities such as town maintenance have been the subject of discussion. Social policies have also been highly contested in these two towns.

In one sense, we can discriminate between systems in German-speaking and French-speaking regions: Geneva, Lausanne, Neuchâtel, La Chaux-de-Fonds. The number of subjects submitted for referendum, their contents and the respective results form many aspects in which there is variation between political systems.

The sources of these differences undoubtedly lie in historical processes which have forged the various systems of citizenship. Apart from this, we notice that the most populous regions are also those which make use of processes of semi-direct democracy the most frequently. Can we deduce from this characteristic that the *bigger* towns are, the more they involve commune consultations, and in consequence that they offer a wider range of influence for citizens?

In our opinion, nothing of the kind is the case, and interviews with expert observers of local life confirm this conclusion. For example, at La Chaux-de-Fonds, elected representatives emphasise the advantages of ease of communication in a relatively *small* town. But examination of participation rates and results within and between towns casts further light on the ways in which citizens organise their demands through voting. In Berne or Winterthur, voting on a number of subjects often results in extreme positions taken by the neighbourhoods directly concerned, with strong differences between neighbourhood votes and town votes. In such a setting, participation and results depend largely on the extent to which traditional organisations are established locally and on inhabitants' membership of these networks.

*Table 5* Subject of urban voting between 1980 and 1990

| Content | Berne | Geneva | La Chaux-de-Fonds | Lausanne | Neuchâtel | Winter-thur |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Referenda* | | | | | | |
| Obligatory | 41 (37) | | | | | 16 (12) |
| Financial | 62 (56) | — | — | — | — | 52 (36) |
| Budgetary | 10 (10) | — | — | — | — | — |
| Extraordinary | — | — | — | 1 | — | — |
| Facilitative | 4 (2) | 9 (4) | 3 (1) | 6 (1) | 2 | 7 (3) |
| Oppositional | 2 (2) | — | — | — | — | 6 (3) |
| Total without initiatives | 119 (107) | 9 (4) | 3 (1) | 7 (1) | 2 | 81 (54) |
| Initiatives | 11 (4) | 3 (2) | — | — | 4 (1) | 11 (2) |
| Total | 130 (111) | 12 (6) | 3 (1) | 7 (1) | 6 (1) | 92 (56) |

Successes are indicated by parentheses

## Political culture and the functioning of localities

In order to generalise about the systems within which inhabitants can function, we shall now examine procedures in two Swiss towns. So that we should not be distracted by local particularities, we shall call them respectively model 'A' and model 'B'. In each case, we shall try to follow the interacting forms of differentiations and connect them with associated systems, before demonstrating consequences for local life in terms of local problem-solving.

### Model 'A'

We are dealing here with an urban area which is clearly structured in territorial terms. The communes are large, with high levels of autonomy granted by cantonal law. Proportionally speaking, the same applies for neighbourhoods within cities.

'A' is an example of a urban region in which political process are, in a sense, 'spatialised'. Projects and problems have become assigned to exact spaces, and conflicts which arise here are reduced, as far as possible, to the proportions of their respective territories. Hence a political consensus has been evolved, one which attempts to integrate 'all involved actors' by proposing a model that is representative of the municipal council on the basis of voting proportions for the local political parties. Wherever traditional neighbourhood organisations, representing district affairs, are unable to carry out local

demands, neighbourhood commissions have been established (with the same proportions of party allegiances as the councils) to resolve local questions. *De facto,* these commissions have not been established in neighbourhoods in which exacerbated left-right conflict would make this difficult.

*Table 6* Voting between 1980 and 1990, by subject

|  | *Berne* | *Geneva* | *La Chaux-de-Fonds* | *Lausanne* | *Neuchâtel* | *Winterthur* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Planning and urbanisation | 31 (23) | 5 (3) | 1 (1) | 6 (1) | 2 (1) | 9 (3) |
| Construction | 11 (9) | 2 (1) | — | — | 2 | 18 (9) |
| Routine maintenance | 48 (45) | 2 | 1 | — | — | 27 (18) |
| Law and budget | 14 (12) | 2 (1) | 1 | — | — | 10 (7) |
| Budget | 10 (10) | — | — | — | — | — |
| Sociocultural | 3 (2) | — | — | — | — | 10 (7) |
| Transport | 8 (6) | — | — | — | 1 | 7 (6) |
| Other | 5 (4) | — | — | 1 | 1 | 11 (6) |
| Total | 130 (111) | 12 (6) | 3 (1) | 7 (1) | 6 (1) | 92 (56) |

Successes are in parentheses. Initiatives are included in this table; in this sense, it cannot be interpreted as summarising authorities' policies only

The A' model has undoubtedly been fruitful in managing the lived environment. Transport affairs seem well organised; there has been satisfactory integration of the population in working out a number of practical points. The 'spatialised' orientation of 'A''s politics, has, on the other hand, two major disadvantages. First, the region's vision for the future, its plans for developing global projects for an urban region, has remained embryonic, and it is by no means certain that the citizens of the canton at large are putting serious pressure on the capital to hasten developments in this direction. Secondly, the emphasis put on local management tends to make the solution of social problems difficult, for instance in relation to integrating marginalised sections of the population. Recurrent examples concern ways in which drug questions are approached, indicating that some problems are difficult to approach on a strictly spatial model.

Explicating the genesis of this system cannot, of course, disregard a long political tradition, but it must also be understood in terms of the way in which the social structure of neighbourhood functions. For instance, there is a system of housing assistance based on the individual applicant and not on the construction of large, grant-aided buildings. By such means, associations with comparable functions have been able to develop within

each neighbourhood and these have allowed for contacts between a good number of inhabitants and the authorities. The development of this situation was facilitated by the fact that the neighbourhood contains a small proportion of foreigners and is characterised by relatively low mobility. Such conditions are, however, rare in large Swiss towns.

From a sociocultural point of view, model 'A' strengthens the public input of citizens who are best and longest established on a local level. Economically independent individuals with low mobility experience—artisans, small business people, merchants—have most access to powerful networks; those categorisable as intellectuals, who have high mobility, have difficulty in extending the range of their own action outside the bounds of 'official' cultures. Those who fall into the marginalised category can very easily find themselves in conflict with authority, since they lack their own space for solving problems,

### Model 'B'

Model 'B' offers a picture which differs at various points from that presented by 'A'. For instance, the autonomy of communes within the canton in 'A' is very different from the omnipresent cantonal administration in 'B'. Over a long period it was precisely the latter institutional characteristic which permitted the development of this urban region's international role, based on its airport and other special services, and which also protected its agricultural zone. This overall political approach is now being put in question by the extension of the urban region beyond its cantonal borders, even beyond national ones, which demands new ways of co-ordination.

For a long period, the politics of the 'B' model has been characterised by attentiveness to different sociopolitical currents manifested within its borders (Cordey *et al.* 1985; Gros 1986). These may include marginal sources relatively far from 'establishment' interests: the 'alternative' culture, including squatters (to mention the most visible example), has been granted the right to bring issues onto the public political agenda. In this model there is a lack of neighbourhood activity which can be noted in all neighbourhoods, even the richest and poorest. Few problems are confined to the neighbourhood scale, but a large audience for public debate is frequent. In the political process, the accent is seldom or never restricted to the immediate spatial locality, but much more often emphasises the actors who are prepared to participate and the alliances that can be formed. New movements therefore have more weight here than traditional associations.

The advantages and disadvantages of such a system resemble a mirror-image of what occurs in the 'A' model: social problems are on the whole well resolved, whereas the lived environment is less cherished than else-where. Traffic problems have become extremely critical and the problems of air pollution have reached alarming rates—in a town without heavy industry. Moreover, flagrant discrepancies in quality of life have developed between neighbourhoods, tied to important dimensions of social segregation. If the latter problem is to a certain extent regulated by strong mobility within the region, it still contains the seeds of potentially powerful manifestations of dissatisfaction. In such a context, the exclusion of foreigners from political movements could become serious in the short or medium term.

### Initial conclusions: the weight of the context

At least three conclusions should be drawn from these examples, all showing the necessity of engaging inhabitants in local life, and, consequently, in the management of the city. One of the paradoxes of local politics is that research such as this reveals the existence of towns which are technically excellently managed and which offer services of remarkable quality, and at the same time have increasing difficulty in rallying their inhabitants to support the proposals which are offered.

First of all, the question of local participation cannot be separated from that of political context. The locally established political culture will have been developed over decades. Local participation must stem from citizens' willingness to take part, but at the same time it cannot ignore the systems already in place. Taking this into account has implications far beyond listing merely formal competences, which can be modified at the stroke of a pen.

Secondly, local participation involves a system in which the actors are already in place. The formal submissions which neighbourhoods make to place items on the public agenda result from contests between the various actors who want their points of view recognised. Depending on the decision taken, it will be the position of one or the other which is reinforced. In this case, local participation depends on an important political context and cannot be conceptually dissociated from the possibilities for expression and action which different groups possess. In other words, the *social* context is at stake here.

Thirdly, local participation presents a scale problem. Can the agendas of the different neighbourhoods effectively be resolved inside those neighbourhoods, or do they have direct or indirect consequences for the whole town, or even for the region? Altering traffic flow is one of the classic examples of interpenetration of levels. The development of a street can be discussed inside a neighbourhood, but this should not be done without referring to a traffic map on a larger scale. This consideration returns us to the problem of the pertinent context and the actions of inhabitants. In other words, is social participation the most important or is the context itself the determinant of political action?

## POLITICAL PARTICIPATIONS: THE INHABITANTS' VIEWS

Another way of showing the problem of the importance of the context is to use individual data. To this end, one thousand questionnaires were distributed through the mailboxes of each neighbourhood, making a total of 14,000. Between 10 and 20 per cent were returned. These figures show an interest in such a questionnaire but do not, however, constitute a valid sample. The responses do probably form a good sample of those inhabitants sufficiently interested in local problems to take the time to participate in such an inquiry.

### Three indicators of belonging to a context

In analysing the impact of the context, we have considered three dimensions which one way or another reflect what belonging to a context can be taken to mean:

1 Social position, measured in terms of some particular social category (such as, for example, economic status or ethnic grouping). This has been termed the social category of the family (using a new classification proposed by the author to the Swiss statistical office: Joye and Schuler 1995).
2 Belonging to a neighbourhood, which is indicated by the place where one lives.
3 Attachment to the neighbourhood, local investment and involvement in a local network. This variable stems from a complex typology underlining the difference between simply belonging to a setting, and social participation within it. (This is a 'logical' typology also related to a cluster analysis of the data.)

Two aspects play in important role in relation to the last point: one's link with the place where one lives, and one's level of significant participation in local social processes. Even if the participation concerned is simple enough to be measured in terms of belonging to local associations (Kellerhals 1989), spatial belonging is more complex. There are distinctions to be made between (a) localisation, which means the fact of having always lived in a place, being acquainted with one's fellow inhabitants; (b) 'relocalisation', the sentiment that follows from having shifted focus to symbolic places and elements of the urban appearance *(Stadtbild);* and (c) 'delocalisation', which indicates disintegration in subjective local belonging (Amphoux *et al.* 1988; Lamarche 1986).

It must be noted too that spatial belonging and participation are not totally independent; localisation often implies a certain form or degree of social participation. It must also be noted that levels of participation vary, in particular between those of the town as a whole and those of the neighbourhood, especially in a situation of 'relocalisation'.

Table 7 very succinctly summarises the combination that results; more significant levels of engagement can be expected from type 1, 'actors engaged in the neighbourhood', and type 3, the 'metropolitans'.

## Political participation

Contemporary political participation is multiple in nature; we shall consider some examples here, from the most conventional behaviour to more occasional actions. Some hypotheses can be proposed as to the relation between social position, context and participation.

1 The most institutionalised means, such as the vote, are used differentially from one town to another; conventional participation will be higher in German-speaking than in French-speaking Switzerland.
2 The main explanation of difference in participation resides in social position; the higher the social position, the stronger the level of participation.
3 The impact of the recent history of the neighbourhood will make itself felt in more frequent uses of less conventional means in comparison with more classical forms of participation.

*Table 7* Logical construction of the typology

| Relation to place (anchorage) | Participation | Type of localisation | Number of type and denomination |
|---|---|---|---|
| Localised (high) | high level of participation | localised | 1. actors engaged in the neighbourhood |
| (High) | weak level of participation | traditionally localised | 6. nostalgic residents of the neighbourhood |
| Relocalised (relatively high) | high level of participation in the town | relocalised on the level of the town | 3. metropolitans |
| (Relatively high) | relatively weak neighbourhood participation | relocalised on the level of the neighbourhood | 5. spectators |
| Delocalised (low) | relatively weak participation | delocalised | 4. the uninterested |
| (Low) | very low participation | anomie | 2. the anomic |

The relevant survey question was formulated in terms such as, 'Have you ever…?' and the answers included items like 'yes, often', 'yes, sometimes' and 'no'. They have been dichotomised in table 8.

Signing a petition is clearly a 'standard' type of political action and the citizen is very rare who ignores this kind of political behaviour altogether. Figures show a big difference between administrative regions, but one element shows up in particular: the proportion of people who have never used this method is higher in German-speaking Switzerland than in French-speaking Switzerland.

In participation in national or cantonal elections, a systematic bias towards unrealistically high reporting must be noted: in general, 70 per cent of the sample say they often vote, whereas the actual rate of participation is much lower. There is usually a difference of some 15 per cent between the real and the declared rates (Joye and Knuessel 1987). However, social position remains an excellent indicator of electoral participation, even in this case, where those who responded to the survey were interested primarily in local problems.

In the case of demonstrations and the organisation of referenda, we should mention a particular effect of recent history here: industrial neighbourhoods have a higher participation in this kind of political behaviour than do others. For example, uproar was created recently in a fight against local factory pollution.

*Table 8* Conventional participation and social position

| Social position | Petitions (yes, regularly) | Vote (yes, regularly) | Demonstration (yes, sometimes or regularly) | Referendum (yes, sometimes or regularly) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dominant classes and 'liberal professions' | 22.4 | 80.2 | 37.6 | 18.1 |
| Independents | 27 | 67.8 | 29.8 | 17.3 |
| Intellectuals and management | 26.9 | 77 | 35.6 | 85.7 |
| Intermediates | 24.8 | 73.1 | 32.9 | 15.0 |
| Employees | 18.9 | 65.1 | 22.6 | 11.9 |
| Qualified workers | 19.4 | 50 | 30.3 | 6.2 |
| Non-qualified | 15.1 | 45.1 | 35.3 | 14.0 |
| Not employed | 22.2 | 70.7 | 23.3 | 16.1 |
| V de Cramer | 0.08 | 0.18 | 0.1 | 0.08 |

*Table 9* Conventional participation and typology

| Typology | Petitions (yes, regularly) | Vote (yes, regularly) | Demonstration (yes, sometimes or regularly) | Referendum (yes, sometimes or regularly) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Neighbourhood actors | 25.9 | 82.9 | 33.7 | 13.7 |
| Anomic | 18.2 | 31.8 | 17.5 | 4.9 |
| Metropolitans | 26 | 80.6 | 39.4 | 23.0 |
| Uninterested | 13.4 | 69.2 | 11.9 | 6.5 |
| Spectators | 14.7 | 0 | 27.6 | 7.0 |
| Nostalgic inhabitants | 3.3 | 45.6 | 10.2 | 3.7 |
| V de Cramer | 0.47 | 0.61 | 0.19 | 0.16 |

*Table 10* Conventional participation and neighbourhood

|  | Petitions (yes, regularly) | Vote (yes, regularly) | Demonstration (yes, sometimes or regularly) | Referendum (yes, sometimes or regularly) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bümpliz | 16.0 | 76.6 | 14.5 | 34.8 |
| Breitenrain | 28.8 | 83.3 | 33.3 | 36.7 |
| Murifeld | 10.3 | 74.6 | 31.6 | 27.8 |
| L'Industrie | 47 | 70.3 | 61.9 | 27.7 |
| Les Forges | 30.8 | 67.3 | 31.2 | 7.6 |
| Le Lignon | 22.3 | 70.6 | 36.1 | 6.2 |
| Eaux-Vives | 15.1 | 75.2 | 27.8 | 10.4 |
| Champel | 27 | 70 | 34.3 | 8.7 |
| Le Mont | 21.2 | 58 | 23.8 | 5.5 |
| La Blécherette | 9.8 | 66.1 | 21.4 | 8.2 |
| Serrières | 26.3 | 70.6 | 23.6 | 6.6 |
| Les Alpes | 17.1 | 66.7 | 22.8 | 7.6 |
| Seen | 12 | 75 | 13.0 | 32.0 |
| Tössfeld | 20 | 68 | 20.0 | 34.6 |
| V de Cramer | 0.17 | 0.12 | 0.19 | 0.24 |

Comparison between the explicit power of each of the three indicators is interesting. The typology given above, and its fit with the built environment, is an extremely important factor in relation to the most classical political behaviour: petitioning and voting. In other terms, social integration and local belonging strongly motivate the participation which shows through these measures.

Comparison between the impact of social position and the nature of the neighbourhood is very interesting. Numbers of those with professional occupations generally yield a better indicator of votes than do characteristics of the neighbourhood itself. In other words, as regards conventional political action, social position is the dominant predictor. But for action of a more occasional nature such as demonstrations, or requesting a referendum, the local context becomes more important as an explanatory feature.

## PARTICIPATION AND LOCAL THEMES

The survey also dealt with participation in once-off actions linked specifically to neighbourhood life. The relevant question was formulated in the following terms: 'For what reasons, or against what, are you prepared to participate in the following types of action?' Here we have grouped responses in the cases of those who were *not* prepared to engage in action, whether it was signing a petition, joining a demonstration or organising some form of public action. For cases where we find that one person out of two is prepared to undertake an action about a question relating to traffic or building, this proportion will be much lower than it would be for protesting against refugee centres. Here again, some general tendencies are revealed. Members of dominant groups such as the liberal and free professions use direct action less frequently and can, no doubt, accommodate themselves more easily to traditional systems of political conduct. Lastly, it is in questions of building and town planning, classical subjects for urban action, that social position is the strongest explanatory factor.

The typology describing local participation has a definitely lower explanatory power. Only those categorised as 'anomic' show a tendency to action which is higher than our hypotheses would expect, but popular reactions outside the framework of institutionalised behaviour are not rare in these neighbourhoods. It is most probable that the difference with regard to expected participation is greater concerning refugee centres. The fact that local participation is indissociable from belonging to the neighbourhoods in question is undoubtedly one of the factors explaining these weak coefficients.

The neighbourhoods where a low probability of 'non-action' is mentioned in relation to traffic questions are precisely those where important traffic streams lead. But this tendency fails to apply to neighbourhoods where figures indicate that a full potential of participation is reached and where the population is more dispersed—for example Seen in Wintherthur or the Mont near Lausanne.

Generally speaking, statistical explanation here is rather poor. The above typology, as expected, possesses explanatory power for political behaviour concerning building matters. It is also the case that for this topic, social position is a bigger determinant; there is genuine activism from social categories such as the intellectual professions, intermediates or qualified staff.

The district itself is also an explanatory element, often to the same degree as social position. But we must underline the fact that this is not a reflection of the neighbourhood's social composition as such, but is, rather, a consequence of recent historical developments. Hence the probability of action is not simply greater in neighbourhoods with the largest number of residents in high social categories. In this sense, there is a contextual effect which superimposes *sociological* variables capable of explaining participation.

*Table 11* Non-participation and social position

| | Traffic flow | Building | Parking | Neighbourhood centre | Refugee centres | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dominant classes and liberal professions | 49.4 | 51.7 | 50.6 | 62.1 | 82.8 | 87 |
| Independents | 44.4 | 48.9 | 58.9 | 57.8 | 71.1 | 90 |
| Intellectuals and management | 38.7 | 37.7 | 58.1 | 53.9 | 78.5 | 191 |
| Intermediates | 32.7 | 38.5 | 45.9 | 46.8 | 65.1 | 327 |
| Employees | 38 | 37.6 | 46.9 | 46.2 | 55.1 | 303 |
| Qualified workers | 26.3 | 34.2 | 42.1 | 42.1 | 50 | 76 |
| Non-qualified | 40.7 | 40.7 | 51.9 | 48.1 | 61.1 | 54 |
| Not employed | 41.3 | 53.6 | 66.3 | 64.5 | 72.5 | 276 |
| V de Cramer | 0.08 | 0.19 | 0.11 | 0.11 | 0.13 | 1404 |

*Table 12* Non-participation and typology

| Typology | Traffic | Building | Parking | Neighbourhood centre | Refugee centres | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Neighbourhood actors | 38.7 | 43.2 | 50 | 52.6 | 68.1 | 310 |
| 'Anomic' | 36.5 | 37.4 | 35.7 | 55.7 | 57.4 | 115 |
| metropolitans | 33.2 | 33.6 | 55.3 | 45.5 | 69.4 | 530 |
| Uninterested | 41.6 | 50.3 | 49 | 60.7 | 61 | 308 |
| Spectators | 34.2 | 51.3 | 52.6 | 47.4 | 69.7 | 76 |
| Nostalgic inhabitants | 61.9 | 76.2 | 69 | 73.8 | 81 | 84 |
| V de Cramer | 0.09 | 0.13 | 0.09 | 0.1 | 0.07 | 1423 |

Two particular facts deserve comment. The subjective need for neighbourhood centres is strongly dependent on their local existence, in the sense that it is in the neighbourhoods where no centre exists that the demand is stronger. In this case, there is correspondence with social position, as these centres exist less frequently in working-class neighbourhoods, and working-class citizens precisely form the social group most ready to participate in action aimed at acquiring such an item.

These findings can be summarised in terms of two factors, one representing the local aspects of action and the other, conventional participation. The correlations (Eta coefficient) between the factors and the explanatory variables shows that our typology is the best indicator of political participation, but that the social conditions of the neighbourhood are as important as social position itself.

*Table 13* Non-participation and neighbourhood

| | Traffic | Building | Parking | Neighbourhood centre | Refugee centres | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bümpliz | 41.6 | 37.6 | 62.4 | 48.5 | 71.3 | 101 |
| Breitenrain | 29.8 | 40.4 | 61.4 | 54.4 | 86 | 57 |
| Murifeld | 32.2 | 42.4 | 57.6 | 55.9 | 72.9 | 59 |
| L'Industrie | 42.9 | 41 | 64.8 | 48.6 | 76.2 | 105 |
| Les Forges | 38.6 | 49.5 | 53.5 | 58.4 | 56.4 | 101 |
| Le Lignon | 49.5 | 36.9 | 43.7 | 62.1 | 77.7 | 103 |
| Eaux-Vives | 44.5 | 47.3 | 51.8 | 62.7 | 63.6 | 110 |
| Champel | 45.7 | 44 | 57.8 | 51.7 | 65.5 | 116 |
| Le Mont | 41.4 | 42.8 | 46.2 | 43.4 | 64.1 | 145 |
| La Blécherette | 39.5 | 55.2 | 43 | 62.2 | 64 | 172 |
| Serrières | 34 | 44.5 | 52.6 | 54.5 | 66.5 | 209 |
| Les Alpes | 30.4 | 36 | 43.5 | 54.7 | 57.8 | 161 |
| Seen | 35 | 49 | 66 | 46 | 70 | 110 |
| Tössfeld | 40 | 53.3 | 70 | 60 | 63.3 | 30 |
| V de Cramer | 0.11 | 0.12 | 0.11 | 0.11 | 0.11 | 1579 |

## CONCLUSION

Comparing urban policies, it is interesting to note that the functioning of different towns clearly shows two models. From an 'ideal-typical' point of view, model 'A' is a case in which a maximum of problems have been discussed in the neighbourhood. In consequence, questions relevant to local arrangements are resolved, but it is more difficult to bring to a conclusion a project which affects the whole of the town, especially if it has few links with territorial development.

Conversely, model 'B' functions through a more politicised network, which operates over the whole town and shows effectiveness for social questions but is less effective for defending a local cause. These differences in organisation also correspond to differences in access. In the first system, long years of residence seem necessary to qualify

inhabitants to intervene, but this does not apply in the second case.

Seen in this way, local context plays a very important role in approaching problems in political life, even it is not possible to differentiate here between the effects of linguistic tradition, political culture and social segregation. What we are doing is discussing *local systems*. On the other hand, on the individual level, the result is much more shaded. In the matter of electoral participation, social position is a discriminatory indicator, but for other forms of action, urban context takes on importance. Finally, participation in demonstrations depends strongly on local context. This last factor takes on even more significance as soon as direct democratic action relevant to the neighbourhood itself is concerned.

Lastly, this selection of results shows a very strong influence exercised by urban contexts. Political participation in the towns cannot, in fact, be understood without referring to the local situation. Here the context has to be conceptualised on two levels. First, the urban political situation fixes some rules, linked both to the site of the town and to the social structure or membership of a cultural space. Secondly, a local system, a function of the neighbourhood's history, its network of associations and its social composition, also plays a large role in affecting participation.

It is only after these contextual elements that social belonging and social position make an impact, even if an important one. From a theoretical point of view, this last point is very significant. In fact, local spaces seem to have dual functions today. For local authorities, neighbourhoods seem to be spaces well adapted to planning local services. But they are also ideal spaces in which to promote some forms of local political participation, on condition that all populations living in the neighbourhood are able to express their demands, without exclusion. With this condition, it is possible to envisage these management aspects of local administrative units as a basis for a new citizenship (Gaudin 1989).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# Part III
# Collective action: knowledge, power and democracy

# 10
# Participatory expertise and the politics of local knowledge: a post-positivist perspective

*Frank Fischer*

## DEMOCRACY AND COLLECTIVE DECISIONS IN A POST-INDUSTRIAL AGE

One of the classical questions of political theory concerns the relation of politics to expert knowledge. In highly complex technological societies this issue has now taken centre stage. As the post-industrial information society emerges, the codification and use of knowledge becomes one of the fundamental organisational principles of the social order (Fischer 1990). The reproduction of 'information value' rather than 'material value' is, to an increasing extent, the driving force of the post-industrial system. The burgeoning 'information industries' are widely recognised as transforming the very economic and social fabric of these societies. Such developments are seen to portend an increasingly technocratic society.

While many celebrate the economic potential of this information society, others perceive extremely worrying political problems. Nothing is more troublesome to the critics of an information society than its implications for democratic governance (Fischer 1990). At the level of both the national state and global enterprise, the technological and organisational commitments of such a society generate goals and problems (economic priorities, technical uncertainties, and political requirements) that frequently result in the curtailment of both political choices and policy options. Governance increasingly devolves to an apparently apolitical consideration of what is 'feasible' given the normative constraints of the existing institutional system. The process opens the door to increasingly sophisticated forms of technocratic politics that leave little room for meaningful normative deliberation in the public sphere.

What happens to the prospect of a democratic government in the course of such a technocratic transformation? For many of post-industrialism's proponents, the question is essentially non-problematic. In a highly technological society, they argue, the pivotal roles of public opinion and citizen participation are artefacts of an earlier time. Even though it is still fashionable to pay lip-service to democracy, democratic government, for these writers, must inevitably wither under contemporary circumstances, a process now well under way. Democracy is taken to be an inappropriate and inferior decision-making system for the emerging post-industrial society.

On the other side of the issue are the partisans of democracy. For them, the challenge posed by technological realities is seen as one of the major political concerns facing contemporary society. Since it portends an increasingly centralised technological

economy supported by large-scale bureaucratic networks of power, these critics fear that post-industrialism may leave little room for traditional concepts of democracy, particularly the concepts of local autonomy and individual participation.

The outcome of the struggle between these political orientations is difficult to predict. There can be little doubt, however, that conflict between experts and lay persons will be one of the primary manifestations of the post-industrial information society. Indeed, some see this as the characteristic form of conflict in the new era. Nowhere has this been more evident than in the politics of the environmental movement, reflected in particular in its ongoing confrontation with science and technology. Such confrontations, however, have not been without positive consequences. The purpose here is to show how these struggles have led to promising new ways of restructuring the relationships between citizens and experts. Emphasising collaborative forms of inquiry, these relationships offer innovative approaches for ameliorating some of the more problematic impediments to democratic decision-making posed by expert knowledge and practices. Of particular importance has been the practice of participatory research. Emerging directly from clashes between citizens and experts, participatory research opens up new possibilities of revitalising normative discourse in a post-industrial public sphere. Not only does it offer a useful tool for confronting post-industrial technocracy, it challenges the epistemological foundations upon which technocratic politics is based. As such, it speaks directly to the contemporary post-positivist critiques of science and expertise.

## THE POLITICISATION OF EXPERTISE

Clashes between experts and citizens, especially in environmental politics, have led to harsh criticisms of professional expertise (Larson 1984). Proponents of social and environmental movements in particular have criticised experts for having distorted the public sphere into a division between experts and non-experts, 'rational' and 'irrational' discourses. They point to the ways in which people who lack access to the technical details of complex technologies—nuclear power, toxic waste incinerators, genetic engineering, and so on—have been regularly blocked or hindered from speaking on such issues, even when they involved their own backyards (Beck 1988). The result has been extensive discussion of the élitist, ideological and manipulatory tendencies exhibited by professional experts.

The dominant alternative to the standard model of professional expertise has been 'advocacy research'. Developed and promoted by progressive planners and policy analysts, advocacy research developed as an effort directly to confront the mainstream biases of scientific policy expertise (Brown 1985). The result has been a much more politicised form of 'counterexpertise' (Beck 1988). Essentially, this represents an attempt to transcend the purportedly 'value-neutral' ideology of expertise by explicitly anchoring research to the interests of particular groups and the processes of political and policy argumentation in society generally. In doing so, it seeks to offset the expert's allegiances to the dominant political and economic élites, especially as they are manifested in a mediating role between élite requirements and mass demands.

Advocacy research has been an important step towards both demystifying scientific

expertise and raising the concerns of the under-represented. It has, none the less, failed to fulfil the promise of a genuinely participatory methodology (Kraushaar 1988). In the course of their struggles, numerous activists have come to recognise that advocacy is a useful approach for representing views not otherwise heard in the political process, but is not well designed for the fundamental requirement of participatory democracy, namely helping the poor speak for themselves. Too often, advocacy researchers have failed to determine whether they were fighting for the issues that really bothered their clients. While most have genuinely tried to assist communities with their problems, they have tended to do so on their own terms, using *their* methods, *their* time frame, and in some cases *their* issues.

In large part, the problem with advocacy research is lodged in its failure to deal with the hierarchial character of the expert-client relationship. This has led other social scientists to seek forms of collaborative research based on a more equalitarian or democratic relationship between experts and citizens. One of the most interesting examples has been that of 'popular epidemiology'.

## POPULAR EPIDEMIOLOGY AS DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE

Popular epidemiology, emerging from the practical experiences gained in environmental and occupational health and safety struggles, is fundamentally a form of participatory research. As such, it has methodological roots in practices that mainly developed in the Third World (India, Latin America and Africa in particular) before spreading to North America. Inherent to the method is an effort to understand the individual and his or her problems within the 'logic of the situation' (Fernandes and Tandon 1981; Park 1993). In contrast to the formal (abstract) knowledge advanced by professional inquiry, emphasis is placed on the actor's own 'common sense' or 'ordinary' contextual knowledge, often organised in narrative form and told as stories. Although participatory researchers can disagree on the relative epistemological status of these two types of knowledge, they are understood as geared to different problems and purposes. How to bring them together in a mutually beneficial, problem-oriented deliberation constitutes the basic goal (Fischer 1990; 1993b).

Research is participatory, according to Eldon, 'when those directly affected by it influence each of…four decisions and help to carry them out' (1981, p. 260). These decisions embrace problem-definition, choices of methods, data interpretation and the uses of findings. In contrast to other researchers, the participatory researcher is clearly 'more dependent on those from whom the data has come, has less control over the research process, and has more pressure to work from other people's definitions of the situation' (1981, p. 260). While the method will strike some as outrageously unscientific—at least as science is conventionally understood—it consists in many ways only of the scientific method made more time-consuming (and thus perhaps more expensive, at least in the short run). Moreover, such collaboration is primarily designed for problem-solving that involves a mix of technical and social factors.

Such collaboration places unique demands on experts, whose roles range from that of theoretician to that of colleague and co-producer of knowledge. The basic determinant of

the expert's role choices must be his or her usefulness in facilitating the development of a democratic learning process, which, once set in motion, can proceed on its own. Essential to this facilitation is the creation of institutional, intellectual and ethical conditions that empower people to pose questions in their own ordinary (or everyday) languages and to decide the issues important to themselves. Basic to this process is what participatory researchers call 'problematisation' (Freire 1973).

Problematisation, or problem-posing, is the direct antithesis of technocratic problem-solving. In the technocratic approach the expert establishes some distance from reality, analyses the problem into component parts, devises means for resolving difficulties in the most efficient ways, and then dictates the strategy or policy (Fischer 1995, pp. 10–17). Such 'problem-solving' distorts the totality of human experience by reducing it to those dimensions that are amenable to treatment in the form of a mere difficulty to be solved. To 'problematise', on the other hand, is to help people codify into symbols an integrated picture or story of reality, which, in the course of its development, can generate a critical consciousness capable of empowering them to alter their relations to both the physical and the social world (Freire 1973). While such an approach will strike some as utopian, the question of citizen participation in complex technical matters is no longer an issue for speculation. Today we can count numerous successful efforts at participatory inquiry, one of which is 'popular epidemiology'.

Popular or lay epidemiology has largely emerged from community struggles centred around issues concerned with toxic environmental risks, in particular toxic waste dumps and the siting of hazardous incinerators. Around such struggles, a form of participatory research designed to bring local residents more directly into the investigatory process has begun to take shape. Almost invariably, from the beginning of such conflicts there is present a citizen expert of some kind who assists the community in answering its own questions on its own terms. Such experts have emerged to help communities grasp the significance of evolving developments, think through strategies, and even directly confront a community's opponents (Edelstein 1988).

Popular epidemiology can in part be understood in conventional epidemiological terms. Epidemiology is generally the first step in a health-related environmental risk assessment. It is defined as the 'study of the distribution of a disease or a physiological condition in human populations and of the factors that influence their distribution' (Lillienfeld 1980, p. 4). The study is typically used to explain the aetiology of the condition in question and to provide preventive public health and clinical practices to deal with it. Popular epidemiology, as Brown explains, deals with these questions, but extends its concerns 'to lay persons who gather statistics and other information and also directs and marshals knowledge and resources of experts in order to understand the epidemiology' (1990, p. 78). But participatory epidemiology is more than merely a matter of public participation in standard epidemiological research. It also includes attention to the basic structural features—social and communicative—of both the community and the larger society of which it is a part. It is, too, explicitly political and activist in nature. In Brown's words, it is a 'highly politicized form of action' which 'is also a form of risk communication by lay persons to professional audiences, and as such demonstrates that risk communication is indeed an exercise of political power' (1990, p. 84).

Popular epidemiology is an attempt at both a critique of and an intervention in epidemiological and public health discourse. Rather than being an academic endeavour, popular epidemiology has emerged in the context of specific community struggles against toxic waste risks. As a form of 'people's science', popular epidemiology helps to redress losses of public accountability resulting from technocratic uses of dominant forms of scientific and technical discourse. It takes as its starting point the fact that traditional epidemiology frequently obscures the interrelationships between physiological and sociological factors in its examination of the incidence of health disorders. Because traditional epidemiology tends to limit itself to the broad and generalisable trends related to the incidence of health disorders, it remains ignorant of the disparate concentrations of health problems in particular localities. As such, it neglects disproportionate risks in occupation and workplace exposures assumed, for example, by low-income and working-class persons of colour, particularly women (Nelson 1990).

Popular epidemiology thus challenges the decontextualised individualism of traditional epidemiology by focusing attention on the connections between specific localities—workplaces and communities—where the health of people is endangered. It does this by combining traditional sociodemographic and historical research with community studies that pinpoint health impacts of community-based industrial and environmental hazards. 'The basic strategy of popular epidemiology, in this respect, has been the use and development of the "community health survey" ' (Gibbs 1986). The community health survey is essentially a method designed to help citizens document for themselves environmental problems in their own neighbourhoods. Such surveys are citizen-led studies of the patterns and concentrations of health disorders suspected to be linked with community environmental and workplace hazards. One of the most significant aspects of such community health surveys is their ability to construct the environmental health hazards facing communities in terms that are comprehensible to the residents themselves (Collette and Gibbs 1985). Equally important, however, is their empirical impact on the understanding of an epidemiological problem. Such research has the ability to bring to the fore environmental data and circumstances—the facts of the situation—that traditional studies cannot or will not reach. That is, it directly contributes to the empirical study of the problem itself.

Because of its closeness to the community, especially to politically activated communities, popular epidemiology's ability to draw connections between environmental, occupational and residential health disorders has made it an effective strategy for political mobilisation. Drawing public attention to concentrations or 'clusters' of public health disorders, such research can be used to pressure government officials, public health professionals and private industry to respond to the health concerns of residents. Even more important than conventional pressure tactics, however, is the transformative and empowering impact which popular epidemiology can have upon community members. By connecting diffuse community grievances with immediate problems in surroundings familiar to workers, families and friends, community health surveys, undertaken in conjunction with community-based political organising efforts, can lead to a deeper understanding of the destructive roles that both business and government frequently play in environmental degradation. It can lead to the recognition, as biologist Richard Levin (1990) has put it, that identifying health issues is not resolved

by scientific method but in struggle. Popular epidemiology, practised in this way, is also an empowerment for participatory democracy.

But is it science? asks the conventional epidemiologist. This question can be answered in two ways—one conventional, one radical. Conventional critics of popular epidemiology invariably ask about the quality of the participation: Can ordinary citizens grapple with the complex methodological issues involved in public health research? Here the answer can be surprisingly affirmative. Consider, for example, the case of Woburn, Massachusetts, one of the most impressive cases of participatory epidemiology.

In response to the discovery of the presence of toxic waste dumps, coupled with an inordinately high degree of childhood leukemia, community members in Woburn mobilised themselves to investigate the problem. After repeatedly failing to convince state and local officials of the significance of the data they were able to assemble, the community action group managed to attract the attention of two biostatisticians at the Harvard School of Public Health. Convinced that community members had indeed uncovered potentially significant statistical patterns, the biostatisticians decided to team up officially with the local group in what was to become a major epidemological study. Local community activists co-ordinated some 300 volunteers to administer a community survey designed to reach 70 per cent of the city population. The Harvard scientists, in turn, supplied the volunteers with training on how to conduct the health survey, in particular how to avoid bias in asking questions and recording answers. In the view of Brown and Mikkelsen (1990), the project became a prototype for a popular epidemological alliance between citizens and scientists.

Altogether, the scientists and citizens assembled research data that include detailed information on twenty cases of childhood leukemia, a careful examination of the department of Environmental Quality Engineering's data on the regional distribution of water from the wells, and the results of the community health survey. The biostatisticians, moreover, conducted a variety of analyses to detect bias in the data. At the end of the process, the team concluded that leukemia was in fact significantly associated with exposure to the water from the well.

The public distribution of the Harvard/FACE report immediately encountered harsh criticisms from the Center for Disease Control, the Environmental Protection Agency and the American Cancer Society. Many of the criticisms, to be sure, were based on legitimate scientific concerns. Most of these involved the categorical groups that the researchers had employed. For example, the biostatisticians were criticised for grouping diverse birth defects under the broad heading of 'environmentally associated disease'. The researchers, however, engaged such criticisms on their own terms. For one thing, they pointed out that in such a study there could never be sufficient numbers of each of the numerous defects to classify each separately. What is more, they showed that their groupings were appropriately based on the chemical literature concerning birth defects. Finally, they argued that if the groupings had in fact been incorrect, it is highly unlikely that the research would have uncovered positive statistical correlations.

The harshest criticism was directed at the very idea of public participation in science. Because of its 'unorthodox methods', the study was said to be biased and thus invalid. The main complaint was that it relied on a health survey conducted by non-scientific citizen volunteers, who in turn were motivated by community interests. Whereas science

is said to be impartial, the research was founded on political goals. For present purposes, however, it is exactly these characteristics that make it interesting. All things considered, the affected families had confirmed through their own efforts the existence of a leukemia cluster, and demonstrated that it was traceable to industrial-waste carcinogens that leached into the drinking water supply. They were able to initiate a series of actions that resulted in a civil lawsuit against a major corporation, which ultimately agreed to an out-of-court settlement with the community plaintiffs. The case clearly shows that popular epidemiology need not be the ploy of second-class amateurs.

Clearly, then, citizens can participate. What is more, there is evidence that such democratic participation can play an important role in dealing with specific categories of 'wicked' public policy problems. A growing number of cases such as that of Woburn suggest that local participation may in fact be necessary in order to deal with intractable environmental policy problems, especially those associated with the 'Nimby' phenomenon (Fischer 1993a; 1993b). But such arguments still leave unanswered the second and more radical variant of the questions: Is it science? Both the next and the final section show the ways in which participatory research converges on the post-positivist/post-modern critique of conventional science.

## PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH IN POST-POSITIVE PERSPECTIVE

If participatory expertise is to have a serious and enduring impact in the struggle to democratise the public sphere, it must become something more than a marginal activity Although participatory inquiry is first and foremost a product of an active citizenry, the practice would ultimately have to be integrated in the very professions it emerges to counter. Such a future in the professional disciplines will necessarily depend on the efforts of scientists, both social and natural, to take up the challenge (Fischer 1990). Most fundamental to such a methodological politics is the question: What is scientific knowledge? If participatory research is to be taken as a serious methodological endeavour in the professions, its advocates must explain both its status as a form of knowledge and its role in professional practice. We turn to this issue in this final section of the paper.

For most professionals, the idea that ordinary citizens should participate in the production of knowledge borders on the absurd. Such activity, it is argued, not only transcends the technical capacities of the average citizen, it contradicts the goals of science itself. Even if the lay person might be able to supply information about local situations, the fundamental goal of science is the pursuit of universal knowledge that can be generalised across social and historical contexts. Universal knowledge structured in this way is said to be value-free. It is the possibility—if not the availability—of such knowledge that provides the basis for making validity or truth claims, the raison d'être of the scientific enterprise. The absence of such knowledge undercuts the professional's claim to authority, based on the application of such knowledge. To combine the citizen's local knowledge with the professional's theoretical knowledge serves not only to demean science, but also to relegate science and its applied professions to a hopeless relativism. It replaces solid empirical analysis with value-laden talk of a dubious status.

Seen in terms of the fact-value problem, the goals of a conventional and a participatory

social science could scarcely be more divergent. But recent post-positivist and post-modern inquiries permit us to recast the question. From these perspectives, the question is not whether there are two different types of knowledge—empirical and normative—but rather how *all* knowledge is constituted as an inseparable fusion of both elements. Thanks to post-modernism, the question has already been the subject of a vigorous challenge to the conventional social sciences (Lyotard 1984; Edmondson 1984; Rosenau 1992). While traditional neopositivist canons of science still dominate the professional disciplines—in terms of lip-service if not always of practice—the post-positivist/post-modern epistemological critique has managed to establish a foothold inside the disciplines themselves. Although seldom spelled out in these terms, participatory research reflects these concerns.

Both the methodological vantage-point of participatory research and the type of knowledge it produces are post-positivist in character. Consider first the epistemological status of the kinds of local knowledge that participatory research seeks to facilitate. In direct challenge to the positivist conception of science, participatory research is always grounded in local circumstances. For post-positivists, knowledge can never be wholly separated from local, experiential contexts. All social knowledge, as such, is inherently 'situational knowledge'. For this reason, the search for a context-free universal knowledge is seen to be a misbegotten enterprise. The very concept lies at the root of science's failure to supply its much-promised predictive payoffs, not to mention its ambiguous contribution to the 'good life'.

For the post-positivist, the pursuit of Truth as such is replaced with processes of interpretation and meaning. In place of truth-seeking, post-positivism pursues meaning and clarification grounded in the discursive practices of particular situational contexts. Insofar as the objects of the social world are socially constructed by the human participants themselves, such objects have no intrinsic meaning capable of reaching across social contexts or transcending history. Because those with power have the ability to ascribe meaning to social objects, the objects of study in the social sciences are always contestable categories. Stated pointedly, the traditional positivist concept of empirical science is built on soft foundations. Whereas science takes its categories to be natural and hard, they are in fact social inventions always subject to redefinition (Hawkesworth 1988). Not only is its mode of research fundamentally grounded in the social context of particular actors, there is nothing value-free about it.

Contrary to claims by mainstream theorists, post-positivism's abandonment of a guiding orientation to universal truth does not leave it without valid content. Emphasising interpretation, the post-positivist researcher's goal is to examine the ways in which each community constructs its own views of truth and how these can be interpreted and communicated across communities, including 'knowledge communities'. What is considered 'true' in one community, as the interpreter seeks to show, may have no special status or necessary weight in other communities. Rather than deciding which community has reproduced the most 'appropriate meaning', the interpreter's role is that of 'translator of statements made within one communicatively-based tradition, so that they can be understood within the system of knowledge based on another tradition' (Rosenau 1992). In such a project, there may be no final interpretations. Opposed to discursive closures, the post-positivist/participatory researcher focuses on the ways problems are defined, the

explication of arguments, the revealing of paradoxes, myths and enigmas. As such, the research is interpretive, experiential, participatory and dialogic.

But does not this emphasis on local knowledge and political empowerment lead only to a hopeless relativism? Does it not leave us with no criteria for judging among competing claims? These questions are outmoded relics of positivist epistemology. The strategy is simply to turn the question around and to accuse the positivist of destroying the very social contexts that make meaningful judgements possible. The first step is to show how a preoccupation with 'universal knowledge' necessarily depends on the systematic narrowing and obscuring of social categories. In the name of an abstract language, positivist epistemology eliminates or subjugates contextualised, local knowledges. The second step is to illustrate the ways in which such local knowledges are subordinated to the categories of élites who shape the 'official meanings' of the dominant social groups. The positivist critique thus falls into its own trap; 'universal knowledge' is itself an ideology built upon relative ideas, the ideas of those on top.

Haraway (1991) argues compellingly that the issue of relativism can best be redefined as a question of *location* rather than *criteria*. The key practice that grounds all knowledge is 'position', or the question where to see from. A way of seeing, or 'vision' to use her term, involves 'a politics of positioning'. Rejecting the possibility of a universal vantage point, Haraway argues that only the dominators at the top of the social structure can see themselves as 'self-identical, unmarked, disembodied, unmediated [or] transcendent…' (1991, p. 124). At the bottom of the social hierarchy, the political struggles of the oppressed are invariably grounded in a politics of positioning: they emphasise the capacity to see from the peripheries. To be sure, such political struggles have too often romanticised the vision of the less powerful, failing to see that such positions can themselves never be exempt from critical examination. Because of their partiality, subjugated vantage-points can remain as vigilantly hostile to the various forms of relativism as the most explicitly totalising claims to scientific authority. Thus, the alternative to the single-visioned élitism of universal theory is the partial, locatable, critical knowledge capable of sustaining the kinds of connections that we call solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology. Knowledge claims that are 'unlocatable' cannot be called directly into account; thus they are irresponsible.

If struggles over what constitutes the rational, objective account are always struggles over how to see, participatory research is just such a shift in the way of seeing. Professional experts were criticised, it will be recalled, for their accommodation to the ruling élites. Because of their middle-level position in the social structure, they have accepted the basic premises of corporate-bureaucratic domination. The professional client hierarchy has thus been denounced as serving—both wittingly and unwittingly—to impose systems imperatives on the intermediate and local levels of the social system. Emerging as a part of this critique, participatory research can most fundamentally be conceptualised as a shift in the professional's position within the social structure. The participatory professional operates from the local context on its own terms, rather than prescribing premises from above. It works to facilitate the development of an alternative understanding based on the experiences of those in the situational context. As such, participatory research is an exercise in the politics of positioning.

As an interpretive mediator, the participatory researcher's analytical position can be

understood as operating between available analytical frameworks of social science and competing local perspectives. A set of criteria are consensually derived from the confrontation of perspectives. Such criteria are employed to organise a dialectical exchange that can be likened to a 'conversation in which the horizons of both the social scientists and the local citizens are extended through confrontation with one another' (Dryzek 1982, p. 322).

## CONCLUSION

Participatory research speaks to one of the most pressing problems of democratic life, the relation of the citizen to the expert in the public sphere. As Fals-Borda (1991, p. 32) has put it, it represents an important method 'to give civil society another opportunity again—a chance to recharge and exercise its diffuse strength'. To this end, it is seen to shift not only the power relationships among professionals and their client groups, but to deal as well with very practical questions of policy inquiry. Even more important, it offers a way of rethinking scientific expertise itself.

Participatory research, moreover, has been shown to be more than a utopian possibility—people already practise it. But its chances for success as a viable practice in contemporary American society are far from secure. Emerging through social movements to challenge the experts of the corporate-bureaucratic state, participatory research is based on a commitment to a participatory democratic culture. Conventional and participatory research are thus designed to serve two very different and antagonistic conceptions of state and society. Indeed, participatory research has developed as a direct challenge to the institutional methodologies of the corporate state bureaucratic system. It must thus be recognised as a project confronting formidable political struggles ahead.

Beyond the political struggle, participatory research raises especially pressing intellectual questions. How, for example, do we learn to create the institutional conditions required to facilitate the collective learning process in participatory research? What kinds of public institutional structures do we need to support both the availability and practice of participatory research? How do we keep the practice from being co-opted to serve as a manipulative, top-down managerial methodology for 'knowledge transfer' to the local level? Such questions offer a formidable but interesting agenda for future research. Our ability to answer these questions will not only have a significant impact on policy decision-making; it will also contribute to the critical task of revitalising civil society and the public sphere.

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# 11

# Integrating contexts: are there general rules for contextualising political decision-making?

*Rainer Schmalz-Bruns*

## INTRODUCTION: THE ANALYTICAL AND NORMATIVE USE OF 'CONTEXT'

There is no good reason for denying the impact of context on solutions to problems of collective (i.e. political) action. On the contrary, in recent years a massive amount of evidence has been produced to show that context really matters in the process of policy-formation, implementation and evaluation, and also that it possesses a constitutive function in a strong sense. The perception, definition and selection of what counts as a relevant problem for a specific 'policy-community' in the first place, the selection of acceptable means and ends as well as the cogency of modes of thinking and courses of action—all these are strongly dependent on the shared understandings of these communities, on norms from cultural backgrounds which inform their perceptions and, last but not least, on the daily experiences that shape and structure the content of solutions that people may seek in responding to their collective action problems. Or as Frank Fischer and John Forester state in the opening pages of their *Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning:*

> So, too, following Deborah Stone's recent *Policy Paradox and Political Reason,* we can see that policy-making is a constant discursive struggle over the criteria of social classification, the boundaries of problem categories, the intersubjective interpretation of common experience, the conceptual framing of problems, and the definitions of ideas that guide the ways people create the shared meanings which motivate them to act. These discursive struggles involve far more than manipulative rhetoric. The institutionally disciplined rhetorics of policy and planning influence problem selection as well as problem analysis, organized identity as well as administrative strategy, and public access as well as public understanding.
>
> <div align="right">(1993, p. 1)</div>

Now the consequences drawn from these observations by Fischer and Forester as well as by the authors presented in this volume relate first of all to refining the analytical tool-box of policy analysis and political science (see also Héritier 1993). To this extent, the evolving concept of 'context' carries a primarily descriptive, analytical and empirical intent. The methods of a formerly unduly statist, overly instrumentalist approach to policy analysis are to be enhanced by a number of contributions: the 'linguistic turn' in

policy analysis, which mirrors and permits the detection of the vital role of argumentative strategies; an emphasis on rhetoric and persuasion (Majone 1989; Edmondson 1984, Nullmeier 1993), which reflects among other things the fact that policies usually engage a lay public which cannot be addressed in terms of a narrowly conceived scientistic and rationalistic form of reason alone; the development of network analysis and the designation of policy communities as well as the analysis and design of processes of the 'spatialisation' of policies (Knoepfel and Kissling-Näf, 1993; Joye in this volume), which try to elucidate the role of specific constellations of actors and of local institutional and organisational patterns. All these can be integrated into a concept of 'context' which encompasses their methodological contributions and may acquire a certain distinctiveness in that it overcomes the isolated use of particular analytical tools. It thus requires political scientists to take seriously the interaction of diverse parts and layers of a social and political reality and its appropriate analytical representation.

Given this background we may, as a first approximation, conceive of 'context' as a relational category which reminds us of the inherent complexity of public policies and keeps present to our minds the various dimensions and levels of interaction that constitute what we summarily term a policy.

> The framing of a policy issue always takes place in a nested context. Policy issues tend to arise in connection with governmental programs, which exist in some policy environment, which is part of some broader political and economic setting, which is located, in turn, within a historical era.
>
> (Rein and Schön 1993, p. 154)

It is clear, then, that a shift in context within any policy domain must bring about alterations in process and outcome which extend far beyond the immediate boundaries of that domain itself. In order to come to grips with this rather discouraging level of complexity, and to specify the direction which a concrete process of policy formation might take, Rein and Schön propose distinguishing between a policy programme which serves as its own *internal context* and which changes over time via the replacement of its personnel, its sponsors or its clients; a *proximate context* designating a policy environment made up of other policy programmes and structured by varying levels of interdependency; a *macro context* which includes institutional changes and economic fluctuations; and a *global context,* including changes in the historical eras within which the reframing of policy issues may occur (1993 p. 154).

These are as yet mainly programmatic formulae and tentative definitions but they stand, it seems to me, for a promising reorientation in policy analysis and political science. However, these developments have a distinct and somewhat controversial set of normative implications. Taking seriously the above-mentioned analytical and methodological devices for enhancing policy analysis would, in turn, imply taking to heart Laswell's (1951) description of this branch of political science: it is the policy science of democracy.

This formula is anchored not only in the intellectual history of the United States in particular (visible in, for example, the Progressive Era, the New Deal and the War on Poverty; see Dryzek 1993), but also in the influential republican and pragmatist[1]

traditions of American political science. These now resonate especially strongly in the work of authors aligned under the heading of post-positivist policy analysis, of participatory research (Fischer 1990) and discursive democracy (Dryzek 1990). The policy science of democracy' succinctly captures the practical implications of the methodological adjustments to which I have just referred. If there is in fact growing evidence that contextual variables really do play a significant role in the design of effective and democratically legitimate processes of policy-planning and implementation, then it follows that we have urgent grounds to give this insight its due expression on the level of procedural norms, of organisational and institutional patterns.

But there soon arise a whole host of reasons why 'contexts' should pose a serious problem to the normatively adequate and effective structure of democratic decision-making. An unmitigated search for the explicit contextualisation of political action might result in severe tension with other fundamental democratic principles, such as equality and individual liberty; or it might conflict with norms guiding the process of democratic decision-making, such as reflexivity and argumentative (deliberative) rationality; last but not least, it might become trapped in the webs of a generalised relativism[2] and a counter-productive fragmentation of politics.

This does not mean that attention to 'context' is likely in itself to subvert the normative idea of discursive democracy; it means only that we must carefully consider under what conditions contextualisation might have a healthy impact on democratic politics in general and effective forms of solving public policy problems in particular. In short, the institutional norms that guide us here must fulfil a number of stringent conditions which are not self-evidently easy to combine. They must assure a satisfactory level of reflexivity in contextualised decision-making; they must guarantee the desirable independence and autonomy of these processes; *at the same time* they must assure their necessary interdependence as well as incorporating unavoidable levels of dependence on more centralised forms of will-formation, as represented in the liberal state. What I want to do in the following is to offer a perspective for an appropriate institutional transformation of the overall process of democratic decision-making which, considering the extreme complexity of the problem, can be only a first step in what I hope is the right direction. Before this, some preliminary reflection seems necessary in order to highlight once again what is at stake in the reflexive self-transformation of modern policies and politics.

## INTEGRATING CONTEXT: THE POLITICS OF DISCURSIVE DEMOCRACY

As I hope to have indicated, the politics of contextualising policy-planning stand for a decisive reorientation in the logic of institutional differentiation. The aims of this logic would, in outline, include two major sets of criteria. Procedurally, it should be able to mirror the autonomy as well as the interdependency of various arenas of policy formation; and it must, at the same time, qualify these procedures so as to increase the likelihood that they would lead to good and rationally defensible outcomes. That is, the procedures in question should encourage and enhance the reflexive capacities of actors, enabling them constantly to validate their own preferences and opinions from time-

regarding, other-regarding and fact-regarding perspectives (cf. Offe 1989, p. 758). The specification of these ideas is not yet well developed, so here I must confine myself to some indications in which directions it might be worked out and institutionally enshrined.

It is a familiar fact that the mechanisms of functional, statistical and territorial representation are relatively insensitive to minorities, who have difficulties in making their voices heard even if their interests are seriously affected by policies planned and implemented by authorities. This phenomenon has become acute not only in the context of different sets of environmental politics and policies, but also with reference to the growing cultural and ethnic heterogeneity and indeed the overall fragmentation of the modern nation-state. Considering these problems it might become necessary to introduce special representation rights which follow the principle that

> a democratic public should provide mechanisms for the effective representation and recognition of the distinct voices of those of its constituent groups that are oppressed or disadvantaged within it.
>
> (Young 1989, p. 261)

This would mean ensuring that the voices of those especially concerned must be given some form of special weight in decision-making and parliamentary legislation. This would involve some interesting consequences. It would be crucial for the public to be continuously enabled to decide such questions as 'Who can apply for the status of a group in this sense?' or 'In which cases would they need special representation?' or 'How can these special claims be balanced against the other principles of representation and the rights of the majority?' In other words, what is at stake here is the case-specific constitution of groups, the foundation of specific claims and the determination of appropriate institutional mechanisms. Dealing with these issues presupposes the possibility of differentiated structures of democratic will-formation which can operate upon one another reflexively. Seen in this light, the public sphere and an open public dialogue become pivotal to the continual adjustment and readjustment of institutional arrangements (cf. Young 1989, pp. 266f.).

This line of argument can, further, be applied to contexts of substantive policies dealing with issues presupposing highly informed judgement and depending on special knowledge and expertise. It has therefore often been observed that the expanding direct responsibility of government for ever more aspects of social life (from welfare to environment and technology), together with the concomitant extension of state activity, confronts politics with the problem of relating democratic legitimacy to the idea of rational (in the sense of truth-dependent) decision-making. While an indissoluble tension remains here, we can explore two complementary ways by which it can at least be mitigated.

One possibility is to democratise expertise from inside the conditions of the production and allocation of knowledge itself—this I shall refer to below. The other way is to rationalise the interplay between democratic will-formation and expertise by means of a 'metapolicy', a 'policy on how to make a policy' (DeSario and Langton 1987, p. 210). The starting-point is to acknowledge that, even in the case of policies strongly dependent on expertise, we are normally confronted with questions of a social and normative, a

technical as well as an instrumental nature, amalgamated into each single issue. The task is to separate them carefully so as to mark the points where open and public dialogue can and must be included in the process. Here questions of different kinds should be treated differently, i.e. the decision rules should be adapted to the different ways in which we normally treat issues of a more theoretical, a more practical or a more pragmatic nature. Obviously, if we proceed this way and disaggregate the decision-making process into a sequence of distinct but interrelated decision-making procedures, we are soon confronted with debates and struggles about the nature of the issues at hand. Now this is precisely the point of interest here: not only is the *public* the privileged locus of such debates and struggles, but again it emerges that under such conditions we have to go back to the idea of the sovereignty of the people, now a permanent part of the design of decision-making procedures and related institutional arrangements.

This idea can be traced back to the reflexive relation of constitutional rules to parliamentary legislation, and it may even hold if we turn to the problem of the contextualisation and decentralisation of legislation itself. As has been noticed, the prerogative of a democratically legitimised state authority tends in fact to be diffused into the sub-politics of science and economy (Beck 1986, ch.8), that is, into the decentralised production of legal norms which primarily function as a means to the self-reproduction of autonomous subsystems such as the economy, science, technology, military and so on (cf. Teubner 1989). Now, while this process may take place in relative isolation from politics, it can hardly be reversed. Instead, it may be taken as a starting-point from which to explore possibilities for democratising a decentralised legislation. The obvious advantages of such a procedure would consist in its greater context-sensitivity, in opening up lawmaking to the participation of those concerned, and in its orientation to solving concrete problems of action. But this in turn should *not* lead to a compartmentalisation of law which would undermine its dual capacity, first, to balance special interests against the general interests of a wider public and, secondly, to regulate the consequences which decentralised decision-making might have on those who are affected by such decisions without being directly involved in the decision-making process. In other words, what is at stake is a means of securing the generality or universality of law. A first step in the right direction might be taken if, as Ingeborg Maus suggests, we confer the reflexive relation between the constitution of government and parliamentary legislation on what she calls 'the division of labour within legislation itself' (Maus 1991, p. 149). Legislation would then consist of two parts, one in which parliamentary decisions were taken about which matters should be dealt with on a central level and which could be decentralised; the other would be the democratisation of decentralised lawmaking itself.

These ideas should indicate both the necessity and the possibility of a more 'reflexive state' which can be traced back to reflexive potentials already built into the institutional structures of modern democracies. Moreover, they suggest that if we take seriously the task of reshaping the polity in order to adjust it to the increasing complexity of policies and politics, it is again the *public* and the conditions of *unrestricted public dialogue* which are at the centre of interest of modern democratic theory.

Admittedly, this notion of a public sphere as a democratic public continually reinventing its political form is one signifying a highly demanding system of social interaction. Such a democratic public must, though dispersed in its multi-faceted forms,

achieve a recognition of itself as formed from conjoint activity aiming at goods appreciated by all affected. Moreover, on the part of the individual, this type of public presupposes the virtues of fraternity and solidarity, combined with the capacity and the willingness actively to engage in and acquire adequate knowledge about issues at hand. This may seem not only demanding but excessively demanding, perhaps even bizarre in comparison with the individualist creeds of modern liberal societies (cf. Bellah *et al.* 1985 and 1991); but it may be useful to remind ourselves of the reasons for adhering to normative concepts of the public and of public opinion which John Dewey gave more than sixty years ago.

In this work Dewey was primarily concerned with the question how the republican tradition of grassroots and communal democracy could come to grips with the effects of progressive industrialisation on contemporary society and its political forms. He was convinced (as are his modern communitarian followers—cf. Bellah *et al.* 1991) that what he termed the transformation of the 'Great Society' into the 'Great Community' (1984, p. 325) was the only remedy to the liberal and individualist depletion of the meaning of democracy. To show how this was possible, his argument proceeded in four major steps. He started with an action-theoretical reformulation of the concept of the state, which was intended to purge the notion of 'state' of its teleological and metaphysical connotations and to show how it comes into existence as the result of the joint activity of the members of a society. The core of this argument, from which the whole discussion departs, is Dewey's claim that

> human acts have consequences upon others, that some of these consequences are perceived, and that their perception leads to subsequent effort to control action so as to secure some consequences and avoid others.
>
> (p. 243)

This claim itself has two consequences. One is Dewey's conclusion that a public comes into existence when consciously directing its attention to the consequences of actions which also affect 'others beyond those immediately concerned' (p. 243) and when 'instituting measures and means of caring for these consequences' (p. 249). The other is that this becomes ever more urgent as the level of social complexity rises through the spread of 'impersonal' and 'mechanical' modes of behaviour and the progressive individualisation of society. From here Dewey was able to re-conceive the relations between public, state and government, such that the state appears as a 'secondary form of association' (p. 279) which allows the public to act upon itself as a whole by means of government. Thirdly, he wondered why it is precisely the 'invasion of community by the new and relatively impersonal and mechanical modes of combined human behavior' (i.e. the machine-age, which he judges to be the 'outstanding fact of modern life' (p. 296)), that is reflected in a philosophy of individualism. He discovered the answer to this question in the release of human potential, which might lead to an inventive and creative human praxis when combined with the idea of a democratic public. This suggestion, finally, led him to indicate obstacles inhibiting the democratic public from its full realisation; these he identifies in the technocratic and scientistic alienation of politics (p. 312).

The discussion in the preceding sections of this chapter may be counted as an outline of the first two of Dewey's arguments; I want now, bypassing his third point, to take up the last, and briefly to indicate how it bears on the present debate. Dewey opens his discussion of the split between experts and lay people, which he thinks to be the most pressing problem for the democratic state, with a rhetorical assertion. Important governmental affairs, he states,

> are also technically complicated matters to be conducted properly by experts. And if at present people are not educated to the recognition of the importance of finding experts and of entrusting administration to them, it may plausibly be asserted that the prime obstruction lies in the superstitious belief that there is a public concerned to determine the formation and execution of general social policies.
>
> (p.312)

But he instantly repudiates such a claim by showing that it rests on an assumption that cannot be met as long as the split in question marks the prevailing pattern of politics—the assumption that the policies of experts are wise and benevolent. The reason for this is that there is an in-built depreciation of expert knowledge, which cuts itself off from knowledge of the needs which it is supposed to serve (p. 364). Moreover it can be argued that the articulation of needs plays an important role within the formation of knowledge itself, just because there can be no adequate definition of what should count as 'knowledge' without reference to the problems it is expected to solve. It is this pragmatic argument which leads Dewey to conclude that both scientific experts and the public are firmly intertwined in the formation and distribution of knowledge: that its 'application in life would signify that science was absorbed' (p. 344) in public communication and experimental action directed to solving problems of common concern. This finally amounts to the charge

> that policies and proposals for social action be treated as working hypotheses, not as programs to be rigidly adhered to and executed. They will be experimental in the sense that they will be entertained subject to constant and well equipped observation of the consequences they entail when acted upon.
>
> (p. 362)

In this light, what is essential to the improvement of policies is the 'improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion' which '*is the* problem of the public' (emphasis in original; p. 365).

Most salient for the purposes of my argument is Dewey's attempt to circumvent the trap of a disjunction of 'politics' on the one hand and 'truth' on the other. To achieve this end, he proceeds in three steps. He conceptualises politics as closely connected with practical problem-solving; he subverts the objectivist misrepresentation of (scientific) knowledge by insisting on its practical meaning; and thus he reconstructs policy and science as mutually adaptive social practices.

This line of reasoning takes us a good distance along on our path to what Dryzek has called 'discursive democracy'. We still require a link between the discursive

reinterpretation of contextualised policies as means to communal and local problem-solving and their integration into the broader and overarching frame of democratic will formation. Or, to state it differently, what is missing is a plan for (re)contextualising contexts.

## 'REFLEXIVE DEMOCRACY'

A first indication how this problem might be solved can be found in Robert Dahl's (1989) attempt to specify the conditions of what he terms a 'third democratic transformation', which leads him to a radicalisation of the (liberal) principle of institutional reflexivity. His argument can, for our purposes, be summed up as follows. Dahl outlines the development of democratic forms of organisation in a reconstructive stage-model in three main evolutionary steps. The initial application of democratic self-determination to governing the larger unit of the emerging territorial state demanded the substitution of a differentiated system of polyarchical institutions for the earlier forms of an associative democracy; this made up 'polyarchy I'. But at this stage the most important political decisions could still be reached in direct interplay between citizens and political representatives, without the intervention of a specialised administrative apparatus. This constellation changed dramatically as more political complexity developed, mainly through the spreading internationalisation of politics, the growing number of issues which had to be dealt with politically and the concomitant increase in internal complexity of policy issues. In this situation, according to Dahl, it became necessary to tap additional resources of rationality from which the decision-making process could be fuelled; this function was delegated to an expanding bureaucracy. While this bureaucratic model, 'polyarchy II', on the whole operated satisfactorily, it necessarily led to far-reaching effects on the relative roles not only of citizens themselves but of their political representatives. 'Polyarchy III' resulted from the attempt to close this widening gap between (bureaucratic and scientific) experts and the democratic lay public, by building institutions which, on the one hand, can guarantee a normatively satisfactory level of participation, and on the other can provide sufficient incentives for adequate skills and competencies on the part of citizens.

This briefly summarised evolutionary process highlights what is at stake in the 'third democratic transformation' of modern politics. This is not a mere modification of the institutional system of liberal and representative democracy, but *the unfolding of the conditions of deliberative social practice*. The structural reforms of the overall decision-making process which Dahl has in mind are directed to this end. These reforms must simultaneously be adapted to the principles of individual autonomy, of collective self-determination and of political equality, so that they can be regarded as standing in the equal interest of all. From this it follows (a) that the inclusion and effective participation of all concerned must be guaranteed:

> Throughout the process of making decisions, citizens ought to have the opportunity, and an equal opportunity, for expressing their preferences as to the final outcome. They must have adequate and equal opportunities for placing

questions on the agenda and for expressing reasons for endorsing one outcome rather than another.

(p. 109)

But insofar as structures open for participation regularly display a certain selectivity, just because they tend to reproduce the social allocation of interests and skills which is already unequal, political equality can only be protected when

> at the decisive stage of collective decisions, each citizen (is) ensured an equal opportunity to express a choice that will be counted as equal in weight to the choice expressed by any other citizen. In determining outcomes at the decisive stage, these choices, and only these choices, must be taken into account.

(p. 109)

Now such a demand, and this is decisive, can only be met if, (b), the political process at each stage can be kept open for forms of reflexive self-constitution. It needs to be guaranteed that at each stage the *demos* has the opportunity to decide upon the relevant size of the population in question, to judge the relative weight of individual or group interests at earlier stages of the process, and, finally, to decide on the appropriate decision rules themselves (p. 110).

In addition to this, democratic procedures should (c) provide mechanisms which allow for and encourage the development of an enlightened understanding of the issues at hand and the interests involved (p. 112) so that (d) the prerogative of agenda-setting can legitimately be claimed.

> The demos must have the exclusive opportunity to decide how matters are to be placed upon the agenda of matters that are to be decided by the means of the democratic process.

(p. 113)

These four principles, which reshape the idea of the sovereignty of the people, are undoubtedly very demanding and exposed to severe restrictions which generally result from the exploitation of otherwise scarce resources on the part of the *demos* (be they moral resources, cognitive skills, interest or time). The answer to this problem may be found in the provision stipulated in the fourth principle. Borrowing a formula from Claus Offe, it may be restated as the demand that the *demos* should in general enact itself, with the 'auto-paternalistic' reservation that it must not decide on *each* issue, on *each* occasion, and in *all* settings. What is required, then, is not general competence in all subject matters, but the reflexive competence to make autonomous judgements upon its own limits:

> Thus the criterion of final control does not presuppose a judgment that the demos is qualified to decide every question requiring a binding decision. It does presuppose a judgment that the demos is qualified to decide (1) which matters do or do not require binding decisions, (2) of those that do, which matters the

demos is qualified to decide for itself, and (3) the terms on which the demos delegates authority.

<div align="right">(p. 114)</div>

These reflections are intended to show why the rules or principles of strategies for contextualising political action exhibit one main feature: the demand that the overall reflexive character of the institutional order of modern democracies should be strengthened. But this cannot be achieved only by modifying the internal structures of a more or less centralised form of will-formation and decision-making. We need instead a thoroughgoing reform taking its starting point in the idea not of hierarchy but of horizontal self-coordination. This may be captured in a tentative stage-model of an institutional reform comprising three main elements.

As a first step, it seems necessary that the internal structures of existing institutions (ranging from parliaments to parties and interest organisations) should be democratised. Crucial for such a democratisation would be its self-reflexive character; that is, it must be guided by the prospect of a self-limited radicalisation (Cohen and Arato 1992) of the idea of participatory democracy. It must balance participatory rights and competence norms in a manner enhancing the structural conditions for adequate opinion-formation and for reflexive preference-learning; more-over, it would have to ensure that this democratised will-formation really made a difference, even in the domain of administrative politics (March and Olsen 1989, pp. 118, 133).

But this, of course, is a focus which proves too narrow when compared with the larger purpose of socialising democracy. To achieve this end it is indispensable to develop the resources of will-formation of larger but institutionally weak (Fraser 1992) publics—in the cases of social and alternative movements, for example—and effectively channel them into a more institutionalised form of decision-making. One step towards this end might consist in establishing processes of deliberative will-formation which ran parallel to existing representative institutions; for example, deliberative opinion polls (Fishkin 1991), national citizen and/or expert councils, mediation procedures on the policy level (Susskind and Cruikshank 1987). All such possibilities would be intended to develop forms of what Cohen and Rogers (1992) call an associative democracy.

Such a revised pattern of institutional differentiation, finally, raises problems at the 'interfaces' between the different policy domains and levels of will-formation which must regularly be acted upon. Interactive processes of this kind can hardly be institutionalised into fixed organisational patterns, just because the solution of interactive problems like this are contingent on changing subject-matters, participatory demands, and other situational characteristics. It nonetheless seems necessary to bring them under the rule of orderly procedures—forums of constitutional reflexion for continuously balancing and adjusting issues, forms of participation and rules of decision. This task might be taken on, *inter alia,* by focal structures developing in the third sector, and

wherever social groups and organisations already co-operate with state actors in evolving joint solutions to problems of common concern (Bellah *et al.* 1991); or else by a kind of permanent constitutional council with a certain autonomy in the domain of the politics of rule-definition.

All this amounts to the idea of a reflexive democracy, one in which the 'logic of appropriateness' (March and Olsen 1989) of political decision-making is embedded in a thoroughgoing reform of the institutional structures of a democratic society. This originates in the idea of a metapolitical radicalisation of participatory democracy and combines four main elements. First, while the idea of democracy has already become dispersed among various forms of organisation, these need not be regarded as mutually exclusive; instead this can be taken as a starting point for a more effective and democratically controlled allocation of organisational forms to different contexts. Secondly, the idea of a reflexive democracy is directed simultaneously at enhancing the legitimacy and heightening the efficiency of democratic politics; that is, it is not intended only to lead to more direct participation as such, but also to improve the quality and reasonableness of outcomes. Thirdly, the ideal is not one of a hierarchical relationship between state and society; it aims at the modular (re)building of a horizontally integrated political society. Fourthly, however, this can only come about if the institutional means by which a society can act upon itself in its entirety are also transformed into a direct object of democratic will-formation.

## NOTES

1 The most prominent pragmatist thinker in this respect is undoubtedly John Dewey whose work on *The Public and Its Problems* (1927) still provides a major source of inspiration for those seeking to adjust the idea of democracy to the rising demands of an inherently complex, modern society. I shall return to his ideas below in the text.

2 This is the primary concern of John Dryzek who wishes to avoid the institutionalisation of some form of post-modern relativism under the heading of 'context' by radicalising the argumentative turn of policy analysis and planning in the light of procedural norms and institutional provisions which are meant to improve the very conditions of an reflexively integrated consensus formation. See Dryzek (1993, pp. 227ff.).

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# 12
# Knowledge, rhetoric and political action in context

*Ricca Edmondson and Frank Nullmeier*

## POLITICS AND KNOWLEDGE: THE NEED FOR A NEW MODEL

This chapter interrogates the role of knowledge in contemporary understandings of political action, offering a dynamic model of knowledge as it is activated in political contexts. Dissatisfaction with microeconomic or rational-choice statements in political science has in recent years led to greater emphasis on historical case studies and on the 'contexts' of political decisions and policy development (e.g. Ashford 1992). But evidence like that offered in this volume makes clear that settings are not adequately dealt with either by a mere accumulation of contextual detail or by resorting to schematic matrices giving semi-formalised accounts of settings. Studies of contextual influences emphasise that settings do not simply supply extra sets of discrete variables whose effects can be calculated when political action occurs. On the contrary, contexts interact with collective action in highly variable ways; and their variability is partly a function of the active *knowledge* possessed by those taking part in the action. Hence in this chapter we prefer to develop contextualism in political science by systematising cultural, cognitive and idea-related constituents of political action. This is intended to contribute to a non-relativistic approach to analysing collective action, providing instruments which can trace lines of power as they enhance or mar democratic forms of public participation.

Our approach draws on a threefold set of sources: aspects of the sociology of knowledge, studies in the tradition of ethnographic and 'interpretative' research, and a rhetorical tradition in analysing political communication which—frequently misunderstood—has been successively developed, forgotten and developed again during the last two millenia. This tradition was initiated in the context of understanding democratic discussion in the classical period, and is still relevant to that task. Democracy involves implementing opinion through a variety of forms of collective and individual action, but opinion itself does not evolve in an immune sphere, unaffected by political interaction. Hence it is vital to understand how publicly accepted, politically relevant knowledge evolves, how it is changed, and what the optimum conditions for activating it in political participation may be.

If we consign contexts to a negligible background position in this debate, we ignore palpably significant aspects of political behaviour: in particular, the

action-guiding knowledge which influences actors' perspectives and the ways in which they form their views. Political analysis performed on a contextual basis thus requires us to reconstruct public political processes in a form which accommodates not only the views and interpretations of the participants but also the non-intentional influences and effects bound up in them (cf. Nullmeier and Rüb 1993; Edmondson 1984). The following reflections are intended to recommend a distinctive framework for doing this. The cognitive structures of actors' action-related plans, their objectives, values and interests, are moved to the centre of analysis under the generic terms 'knowledge' and 'argument'. We emphasise that these phenomena are effective components of political action which need to be accounted for like any others. Hence we try to build on work like that exemplified in this volume to provide instruments with which research can proceed constructively in the future.

It may initially appear that cognitive factors already figure largely in some approaches to political analysis; in order to clarify the distinctiveness of our own approach we shall therefore contrast it with a mode of treating contextual cognition which we wish to reject. Policy analyses in particular make frequent use of a schema for explaining political decision-processes known as the *Two-Filter Model*. The metaphor 'Two-Filter Process' dates back to an older model for explaining actions employed by Jon Elster; here, each action carried out is regarded as the result of two consecutive filtration processes. First, objective constraints are seen as reducing the number of abstract courses of action to a small subset of those which are concretely possible. Secondly, this implies the need for some mechanism explaining why one action from this concretely possible set is taken, and not any of the others (Elster 1981, p. 261). This, plausible as it may appear at first glance, exemplifies a form of analysing knowledge in action which we see as misleading.

Long before the Elster Two-Filter Model was explicitly employed to support this approach, policy analysis in Germany and elsewhere had already adopted a two-stage model of this general type, based on the interaction between constraining conditions of a structural, institutional and/or situational nature with interest-oriented, instrumental, rational decisions (Windhoff-Héritier 1991). Rational-choice analysts and others made comparisons between actors' preferences and interests, together with the resources at their disposal and the institutions, systems, structures and socioeconomic conditions, background data and external influences which were thought of as influencing decisions. Debate here was concerned chiefly with the relative weighting of basic conditions and objective, situational requirements on the one hand, and the significance of (rational) individual and collective decisions on the other. This problematic was varied by presenting the various basic conditions as constraints *or* as resources *or* as action-restraining and facilitating structures (Windhoff-Héritier 1991, p. 40).

In contrast to this approach, we emphasise that institutions, structures, situational and cultural factors, action resources, constraints and options are not discrete variables disposed separately around the political scene and capable of

intermittent action or interaction. They are themselves products of political action which is subject to change at different rates and in different ways, and these changes are affected by what specific groups of actors believe about them. It is not, for example, the simple availability of miners' wives' power resources in some unchanging sense that is decisive in their participation in political action (see Beckwith, above). Relative power distributions form part of an action-context just because different political groups routinely have different views about what is appropriate, possible and desirable in that context. When miners' wives enter the scene and attempt to adopt a political role, the views of these other groups form empirically detectable constraints on what the women can do; this constellation continues to develop, partly as a result of their own actions; actors' knowledge of what is appropriate, possible and desirable changes concomitantly The scope of attainable action alternatives cannot therefore be taken as given, as established once-and-for-all on an institutional, economic or sociostructural basis. It develops as part of the political process itself.

Hence our approach asserts a sphere of contingency *vis-à-vis* objectivist approaches. Underlying what are accepted as concrete possibilities in any given context are the opinions which actors in that context hold about action and its alternatives, the ways in which they take communication to function, and the inferences which they take to yield valid and reasonable links between steps towards visualising choices. This is, in fact, the stuff of politics, whether individual or collective action is concerned: politics inherently involves clashes and combinations between different views about what can be done. The politics and sociology of knowledge, therefore, are indispensable in analysing political action, and we shall examine some contributions they can make before going on to suggest an overall model of political action incorporating their approach. Such a model has a direct relevance to discussions about democracy. Assessing the democratic potential of any political situation requires an understanding of how opinions and alternatives for action develop within it, and how they are affected by the power constellations in the setting concerned.

## CATEGORIES OF THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE AND ARGUMENTATION

The term 'politics of knowledge and argument' denotes an attempt to develop a systematically interpretive approach on the part of political science. This approach shares common ground with Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, in that it is not, like a 'theory of ideology', preoccupied with unmasking deceptions, cover-ups, deliberate lies and faked interpretations (Mannheim 1936, p. 228). Quite apart from distortions of knowledge which occur under particular conditions, it is possible to explore the *social structuration of thought and knowledge* (Schütz 1962; Berger and Luckmann 1966)—which happens via detectable processes of social and political interaction. The continual sociostructural shaping of knowledge underlies political communication—and political processes in turn affect what is accepted

as knowledge. This means that the knowledge relevant to social and political action—the ways in which women are conceived of as political actors, for example, or the place allotted to technological developments within interacting power-structures—is itself part of the social and political world. 'Durkheimian' emphases on the strength of socially derived categories should not be taken to cancel out all political power on the parts of (collective) actors. The knowledge, the beliefs, the intentions of actors in a political situation are *anything but* 'mere matters of perception': they are strongly affected by political interaction and determine it strongly in return.

Our framework for approaching the politics of knowledge and argument works with a catholic concept of knowledge: it covers both normative and descriptive as well as implicit and explicit knowledge. In the tradition of the newer sociology of knowledge (Bonß and Hartmann 1985), it treats the political functions of knowledge in terms of interacting cognitive systems. (None the less, as is shown on pp. 224–28, it will be necessary to modify over-rationalised accepted notions of just what constitutes this cognitive sphere.) Considerable interest has been expressed in recent decades in actors' internal cognitive contexts. Reference has been made to their 'interpretation patterns', complete with 'cognitive maps' (Axelrod), 'cognitive schemas' (Abelson), 'ideological packages' (Gamson) and 'belief systems' (Converse, Putnam, Sabatier), or to 'frames'[1] as fundamental categories for political knowledge analysis. We prefer the terms 'knowledge' and 'argument'—the latter emphasising interactive dynamics among individuals' or groups' cognitive approaches. These terms, especially as opposed to expressions such as 'frame' or 'belief system', are intended to avoid the assumption that actors' cognitive approaches are necessarily complete or coherent. Our preference is to provide an analytical schema facilitating access to politically relevant *processes of interpretation,* to the *internal structures of knowledge systems,* and to *interaction between knowledge systems*. Systematic, empirical analysis must be used in each separate case to estimate the nature and degree of coherence it might involve, and the political valency of the effects of power-based interactions it contains.

## Competition between knowledge stocks

Central to the interaction between knowledge systems is *competition* for validity among different categories of knowledge. Following Karl Mannheim's celebrated lecture, The significance of competition in the intellectual field' (Mannheim [1928] 1982), we can identify *knowledge markets* when several interpretative patterns claiming legitimate validity compete with each other. Knowledge and interpretation markets can occur in all organisations, institutions and social movements in which local public audiences are formed, and these markets must be expected to affect the nature of 'democratic' decisions which are made. They exist among specialised publics in different occupationally related fields as well as in the mass media; in Aristotelian terms, the knowledge in question may be that of all, most, some or a few people, the

latter case including knowledge by experts (*Topica* 100b 21–23). *Knowledge stocks* may thus include:

- selected elements of 'common knowledge';
- scientific concepts (currently widely accorded high legitimacy, as Fischer has emphasised above);
- competing everyday, practical interpretations derived from particular expert cultures or subcultures (see Fischer also);
- ideological complexes of knowledge, ranging from philosophical systems to esotericism (or, for instance, to the sets of expectations applied by political scientists to 'new social movements' and tracked, above, by Foweraker).

Such forms of stock, contrasting in inner structure and perceived legitimacy, may be known as *knowledge types,* and put into use in political action in a variety of ways.

With its differentiation between monopoly, oligopoly and polypoly, the theory of market forms can be used for the structural analysis of knowledge markets. For example, the scientific monopoly achieved by reform-oriented governments in central political knowledge markets in the 1960s was broken down via intra- and interdisciplinary conflicts but also via the *scientific* questioning of science's domination in favour of internal pluralisation (cf. Wagner 1990; Wagner *et al.* 1991).

D*ebates* highlight and produce connections and interdependence between knowledge markets. Networks of similar interpretations and forms of argumentation develop, grouped loosely around a central topic or basic hypothesis. These are capable of producing alterations in several knowledge markets at the same time, but may also meet limiting factors in the *market power* of some actor. This power is based on legal and power positions in the political arena as well as on the possession of special *interpretational resources*. Such resources include, on the one hand, the material, personal and organisational means of knowledge-production, and on the other hand the cognitive ability to mobilise reasons which can be accepted as good ones in the context in question. (We would see Gorges' work, above, as analysing effects of interpretational resources in the sphere of technological development.) Depending on the respective extents of resources, a greater or lesser degree of interpretive action and argumentation-related capacity for conflict may be attained.

Beckwith and Hyvärinen have both provided analyses highlighting different groups' uses of resources for interpretation as they are offered and constrained by the setting in question. Beckwith shows that although miners' wives were limited in their choice of political action by being women, and regarded as carrying doubtful legitimacy as political actors, they had some freedom of political manoeuvre because they were not constrained by contracts with the Coal Board. This yielded an empirically demonstrable set of moulds within which political arguments could be formed and political action taken, moulds influencing how these interventions were interpreted from outside the immediate

setting. Hyvärinen shows that a context including a history of interactions between Finland and Russia, as well as the international students' movement, influenced what could be put forward as plausible arguments among student activists. Aarts' work on environmental activists or Joye's on direct democracy shows that different groups perceive their political situations differently according, among other things, to the composition of their membership and its interaction with its context. These results precisely could not have been schematised in advance using macro-scale criteria; they deal with political interaction occurring on the basis of developing stocks of knowledge available to specific individuals and groups.

### Interpretational resources and contemporary politics

Interpretational resources are therefore intensely important in political terms. (Collective) actors require time and outlay for their own orientation (as Fischer emphasises), especially where processes do not develop in a conventional sociocultural, scientific or ideological manner. Moreover, contemporary political conflicts increasingly highlight arguments about the truth of statements, the appropriateness of prognoses and risk-assessments, and the correctness of normative assumptions. (In relation to the sociopolitical processes involved in assessments of what, in a given case, is accepted as valid knowledge, see both Aarts and Fischer.)

Interpretative resources also affect the *type and internal structure of individual knowledge stocks*. Here, the *tense* of the knowledge concerned plays a primary role. Beyond situational knowledge relevant to present times and knowledge relevant to the past, knowledge of *the future* is highly significant, particularly in the wake of scientised politics. In prognoses as well as in analyses of probability and risk, discourse often focuses on the conquest of the future, for example in terms of its 'limitation' or 'closure'. An action-horizon in which many items are ruled out as no longer possible *de facto* eliminates a multitude of alternatives, long before any actual cost-benefit calculation. Political actors then orientate their actions towards self-selected, self-created contexts organised in terms of the future—which they regard as setting authoritative constraints. In classical rhetorical terms, this may be described in terms of *systems of 'presence':* electing to focus on a certain set of cognitive items automatically overshadows even the perception that alternatives exist.

This 'inner polemic' possessed by interpretation patterns makes use of modal forms—discourse about the possible, the necessary and the impossible—in particular in regard to the 'limitation' of the future. These *categories of modality* regulate the limits of acceptable political action, protecting the inner circles of political networks against 'marginal' actors and their interpretations, and against external opposition. Each knowledge stock carries, therefore, its own account of what is ruled out as impossible, its own version of the limits of possibility (Majone 1989, p. 69). This is how the political world is structured in practice, and analysis of political practice must take it into account. Thus, Foweraker

shows that the knowledge stock of Western political analysts includes a set of taken-for-granted assumptions about what sorts of actor citizens are and what they are likely to do. But far from assuming that each stock of knowledge is so internally complete that it forms a mini-world incommensurable with any other and thus immune from criticism, Foweraker precisely demonstrates that criticisms *must* be made if collective political action is to be understood. He shows that aspects of the knowledge stock used in Western-style theories are severely deficient as approaches to what is likely to happen in South American collective action, and offers suggestions for making it more adequate to its task.

We wish to emphasise, therefore, that political struggles involve social and intellectual techniques for reasoning about what should be done, and that uses of these techniques interact with the development of action. For instance, when claims about the *impossibility* of certain courses of action are made, the space thus delimited leaves available a realm in which alternative political options may be available. These are not usually laid down simply by ruling out what is perceived as impossible, but are evolved through acts of creative knowledge development. Within the area not ruled out, political interaction influences what is seen as most plausible (cf. Fischer, Aarts or Joye).

Constructions of *necessity,* however, signal the destruction of all options bar one. Their function is to facilitate omission of the political stage of selection and decision. When necessity is evoked, the world is regarded as having been determined to such an extent that there is no longer room for autonomous decision about intentional action. Political interaction in fact often involves attempts to influence other actors' views of the world so as to compel them to reach a foregone conclusion. Discerning freedom of manoeuvre for political action and deciding what is 'politically possible' has always been a focus for analysis in political science (Keman 1996). Further research perspectives open up in this field when we take into account how, in dialectical adaptation to their settings, (collective) actors use knowledge to create a horizon of the possible, the impossible and the necessary. The exchange of arguments and views about what is possible or necessary plays a central role in fields ranging from the building of global institutions through the politics of Europe to national political fields such as that of social policy. This applies both to practical political debate and to academic discourse. Precisely because of the politically contested nature of the 'possible', political analysis needs to research the controversial cognitions involved in the 'possible' and the conditions under which they are produced, stabilised and changed. This can only succeed, however, if cognitions are understood in the context of the communicative political processes within which they develop.

Environmentalists, for example, claim that we must act *now;* their opponents, that we have not reached a realm of necessity but still inhabit one containing room for manoeuvre. In such cases, we can trace sociopolitical attempts to throw weight behind one argument or to exploit another, and work such as Rootes' shows how effectively accepted knowledge fluctuates in identifiable collective settings as a result of political interaction, influence and compromise. Arguing

against the premature attribution of 'structure' to political settings, Rootes highlights aspects of contexts which have vast effects on interrelations between knowledge and power but which change much more quickly than is often assumed. The contingent effects of electoral systems, for instance, change frequently, affecting the political valencies of entire national settings within a few decades—as happened in Britain and in Germany in relation to environmentalism. The elements to be explored here are not intrinsically arcane—they include practical questions such as how easy it is for a given group at a given time to make its demands known without being arrested—and none of them implies that we cannot criticise the arguments used in political interaction. On the contrary, the fact that politics involving choices and decisions is possible is a testimony to the fact that we *can*.

## Identity-constitution for collective actors

The rational calculation of an action is preceded by the question of who one actually is: the actor's self-identification as the subject of action. In contemporary criticism of rational-choice theories, as well as of some versions of institutionalism, one point in particular needs to be emphasised: the fact that in these theories, identities and interests are attributed to actors as if they were stable patterns, and are counted as external, pre-formed items in the processes of decision and interaction under investigation. Current debate, which is being carried out especially intensively in the field of international relations (Neumann 1996; Jäger 1996), responds to this in a dual fashion. Attention to thematic questions concerning the identity of the actor, the development of self-images, collective concepts and preferences, is connected with a conceptual emphasis on the linguistic and cognitive level of political processes. The recourse to rhetorical analysis suggested here on pp. 223–33 is intended to add to the possibilities which have been adopted so far (cf. Schimmelfennig 1995).

The aim of further research should be an approach enhancing differentiation in terms of the formation of interests and the formation of identity. Political subjects are formed in part through the development of *collective identities* which, via legal resolution and the pooling of resources, can on occasion acquire a framework of permanent identity support: one is entitled to act in this or that setting because one has become entitled to think of oneself as a trades unionist, for instance. (As Royall has indicated above, part of the project of a movement of the unemployed is to assert the validity of a parallel identity for those who do not have jobs.) The scope of collective identities extends from small groups through to social categories ('youth', 'older people'), social strata and classes, and to social movements, organisations and institutions. It encompasses 'nation', 'race' and 'ethnicity' as well as categories such as 'employee' or 'taxpayer', and is based on social classification as well as on the political classification struggles regulating it.

I*nstitutional identities* in particular are concentrated around institutional names, often systematising interpretations of the way an institution sees itself.

(Van Leeuwen *et al.* in this volume show how this can work out in practice: accepted knowledge about what an organisation is for has a direct effect on what its members do.) The assertion of identities by institutions and organisations, as well as corresponding loyalties to political, sociostructural, clientelistic, ethnic or clan-type bonds on the parts of organisation members, is fundamentally important for the existence of the institution, for *practical* reasons. Collectively accepted identities and loyalties set out, in a fashion which can be learned easily by all the members, what is to count as reasonable and appropriate in the setting concerned. Aarts' work indicates that even political groups with ad hoc constitutions have identifiable approaches—collectivities become more or less prepared to accept aggressive arguments as reasonable, more or less prepared to count conciliatory tactics as appropriate; these approaches shape practicable courses of action for individuals within the settings in question.

Schneider and Ingram (1993) and Edmondson (1994, 1997) emphasise a specific form of attributing collective identity: the social construction of *'target populations'* by political élites and bureaucracies. The differential representation of people who will be potentially advantaged or disadvantaged by a political measure structures the calculation and evaluation of its results. 'Forming' the target population is the political issue, even prior to whatever image-attribution and evaluation is concerned. In the case of 'older people', for example, the role of sociopolitical construction is clear. Although it would in principle be possible (and in many respects preferable) to concentrate on conceptualising life-courses in their entirety, the policy-based dissection of life-stages *constitutes as groups* people who happen to find themselves at the same chronological stage—though they may have little else in common, even in terms of attributes generally emphasised by policy-makers, such as wealth, occupation or health needs (Edmondson 1994).

This group constitution has its own effects on knowledge stocks: the tendency among 'client groups' themselves may be to *relinquish* differences in their stock derived from individuals' disparate social worlds of origin. Indeed, if 'older people' or 'women' or 'the disabled' are defined as a 'client group', it is hard for them to respond politically unless they do play down some differences between them. The forms their collective action takes is thus to some extent forced on them by this form of identification. The dominant political discourse to which 'older people' are now being made subject implies that their collective action should take conventional form, exemplified, for instance, by committee structures legitimised in terms of the accountability of élites. The variety of life experiences offered by older people fades in the face of a powerful set of bureaucratic priorities. Submitting to being seen as a group at the receiving end of social policy undermines one of older people's major collective claims to significance in society—their variety of authoritative knowledge stocks. This in turn may undermine the specific interpretive resources which older people need in order to survive, and in order to choose defensive political manoeuvres.

Such processes show that the policy-related formation of social groups simultaneously values or devalues those groups' collective knowledge—

enhancing or reducing their relative social power. In the case of older people, these developments are accentuated by their treatment as, characteristically, *clients,* which is reflected in popular stereotypes and in much academic analysis. The opportunity costs involved in knowledge-production make it, relatively speaking, uneconomic to investigate the conditions of older people who are taken to *lack* problems. Journals dealing with older people—even those attempting to take their part—repeatedly emphasise difficulties such as dementia and institutionalisation which make older people appear miserable, and their knowledge stocks insignificant. The cognitive implications of policy creation may, therefore, have sharply structurating and ageist effects which can be demonstrated empirically and criticised in terms of limitations they impose on the democratic potential of those affected.

Van Leeuwen *et al.* (above) have similarly emphasised that specificities of context shape patterns of power and influence as far as collective identities are concerned, and affect local knowledge in the form of organisational self-perceptions. Stressing the need to explore the role of cognition in forming social bonds, they analyse organisations' self-definition in terms of their expressed goals and the patterns of co-operation between them; and they show that similar problems in similar settings will not automatically result in the same organisational behaviour: the knowledge and collective identity of the actors concerned must be taken into account.

### Structuring terrains of knowledge: coalitions and principles

*Coalitions* between collective actors constituted through political means involve the development of a new, common identity but, as a rule, come into being on the basis of some form of consensus in interests or values. Though this possibility is often overlooked, it may also be the case that coincidence in descriptive knowledge (interpretation of situations, interpretations of the past, causal assumptions), i.e. cognitive consensus, can itself establish a coalition.[2] Since knowledge stocks tend to be linked to interests and forms of life, however (see pp. 228–33 below), it will be rare that cognitive consensus is purely coincidental or disinterested. Aarts shows how groups can come to be formed on the basis of cognitive consensus about risks in their shared situation, but (like Joye) he indicates too that the fact that certain types of individual form part of a group influences other relevant aspects of its knowledge stock. Royall's work suggests that a *lack* of cognitive consensus among the unemployed is a powerful factor in disabling their possibilities for collective action, as long as external forms of sociopolitical support are lacking. Both these examples underline the fact that 'consensus' is not a simple category Gorges shows how the social, economic and political power of particular groups within a research community can lead to a cycle of increasing power, influencing the build-up of consensus on directions for research. Democratic paths of knowledge development are obstructed, her work indicates, by current forms of connection between politics and knowledge. We can, then, *trace* the ways in which a consensus evolves or

fails to do so and what effects this has, as a matter of identifiable political/cognitive interaction.

The nature of any consensus is affected by its setting (as Gorges' and Rootes' work also illustrates), and the identity and stability of a whole political field is embodied in *policy principles* which structure action within that field. Often described as 'evolved principles' of national policy, these form the ideological core, the paradigmatic basis of control structures within a political field.[3] Rootes discusses the effects of the political field in Great Britain on the treatment of environmental political opinion and how this opinion develops; Fischer discusses attempts to challenge dominant types of structuration and render them more democratic. These form a number of approaches to understanding collective political action in terms of knowledge-related aspects of setting. Now we wish to go further, in relation to what can be argued in detail within the political settings we have learned how to describe.

## ACTION MODELS AND CONTEXTUAL POLICY ANALYSIS

We have looked so far at general approaches to knowledge in settings where a number of forms of collective action are being attempted. Now we want to examine in more detail how political knowledge and argument are handled collectively, and shall briefly discuss a number of other approaches to this before introducing our own. It has been acknowledged elsewhere that dealing with knowledge can be supported by *political* considerations, for instance in discussion of 'discourse strategies' (Gerhards 1992). It is also possible to conceive of actors making a strategic *choice* of knowledge, under some circumstances. A significant difference between choice of action and choice of knowledge resides in the fact that in choice of knowledge, the costs-benefits estimate selects among what the chooser regards as legitimately valid interpretations (this is quite distinct from merely pretending to recognise knowledge as valid, for the purpose of misleading third parties). The scope for choosing knowledge widens via the possibility of controlling the knowledge stock (for instance via subsidisation, as Gorges shows, or via co-option, mentioned by Rootes and Fischer), or else producing knowledge by oneself. Options range from importing individual experience-based knowledge as a legitimate element of public debate through to establishing research institutes or think-tanks (see Gellner 1991).

The fields of health or the environment, for example, are replete with opportunities for choosing knowledge by government agencies or industrial bodies as well as various interest groups; the 1990s have produced many examples, such as the BSE case, or the 1994 dispute between England and Denmark over sea-borne particles washed towards Danish fishing grounds and interpreted divergently by scientists for each government. As a result, the relationship between public knowledge structured by élite bodies and the experience-based knowledge of the citizen becomes a central political issue (Fischer's concern in this volume). But it does not follow from this that there are

no reasonable criteria for assessing politically relevant knowledge. The criteria concerned may be contested, for traceable reasons related to settings in ways such as those examined above. The task of democratic politics is to organise settings in such a way as to make these contests amenable to reasoned debate (see Schmalz-Bruns above).

An overall action model is therefore needed with which to account for the ways in which knowledge is dealt with in the sociopolitical world. Here the conceptions of communicative and dramaturgical action have been proposed as major alternatives to the rational-choice approach. However, Jürgen Habermas's model of communicative action is disabled where empirical policy analysis is concerned by its dichotomisation into communication-orientated activity on the one hand and strategic, instrumental activity on the other. It thrusts strategic behaviour in the sphere of conflicting interpretations firmly into the direction of deception, cunning and the deliberate withholding of information (Habermas 1986, p. 363). Even if Habermas stops short of asserting that the politician's rhetorical conduct can be analysed as latent strategic behaviour (Habermas 1986, p. 401), his work provides no direct access to the internal interweaving of power and knowledge. This dialectic points to the dual structure of knowledge as an instrument of orientation and of combat (Engler 1992, p. 17), as well as to the simultaneity of strategic and discursive learning effects in the interpretive process (Beck and Bonß 1989, p. 10).

In the dramaturgical concept of action which, rightly or wrongly, sees itself as based on the works of Erving Goffman (Hettlage and Lenz 1991), the main connecting thread in social action is provided by the audience-oriented stylisation of one's own expression (Habermas 1981, vol. I, p. 128), the expressive portrayal, presentation and performance of one's self and the creation of impressions in general. The 'Goffmensch', as Hitzler (1992) has put it, inhabits a precarious world generating difficulties and uncertainty, in which 'staging' is an everyday aspect of the human condition. Its emphasis on manipulative 'impression management' thrusts this model too into the proximity of strategic action (Habermas 1981 vol. I, p. 141), whether in the direction of *'homo oeconomicus'* (Schimank 1992, p. 188), or in the direction of a politically or 'protopolitically' interpreted power-concept such as Weber's (Hitzler 1992, p. 455).

More productive for policy science would, in contrast, be an action model including argumentative power without condemning the requisite knowledge as necessarily deceptive. This is precisely the approach of the discipline of *rhetoric*.[4] Not all versions of rhetoric are suitable here; we are not referring to 'rhetoric' as manipulative or artistic theory. But rhetoric freed of these interpretations and focusing on argumentation (Perelman 1969; Edmondson 1984) can be put to good use for contextual policy analysis, leading to a model of action making knowledge comprehensible as a contextual quantity always inextricably linked to place, time, culture and situation.

This type of model can be achieved by deriving an analytical approach from Aristotle and his concept of a close relationship between dialectics and rhetoric.

Aristotle's *Rhetorica* sees rhetoric as a process of reasoning involving inferences on the basis of the likely as opposed to the certain. For him, rhetorical reasoning takes place when decisions must be taken in situations of (sometimes grossly) imperfect knowledge, situations which alter and transform as the decider deliberates; political situations meet these conditions *par excellence*. In such situations it is none the less necessary to grope for the most reasonable decision, and to attempt to convince others that it is so. The business of Aristotelian rhetoric is to derive a legitimate model for doing this, taking into account real-life forms of interactive deliberation. Rhetoric is not, then, a matter of second-class, manipulative thinking (Kopperschmidt 1989), nor a justification for relativism. Aristotelian rhetoric is perfectly capable of differentiating between the act of convincing and the manipulative employment of conclusions (Edmondson 1984; Göttert 1991). It concentrates on realistically analysing the ways in which those decisions are taken which seem to their authors and their audiences the best possible in the circumstances. The interactive, political nature of this process is underlined by an emphasis on ways in which arguments are presented to particular recipients in particular contexts, with the general purpose of overcoming blocks to reception and arriving at jointly acceptable conclusions. This implies that strategy in the sense of attempting to adapt communication to its recipient is not intrinsically reprehensible (cf. Dunne 1993). Nor does it form a specialised, narrow communicative field; just as political interaction is ubiquitous (Laver 1986), so is argumentative strategy.

## A RHETORICAL MODEL OF POLITICAL ARGUMENT

Until now we have concentrated mainly on macro- and meso-scale aspects of the politics of knowledge. Now, the originally Aristotelian approach to argumentative interaction can be used to describe how both collective and individual actors discriminate between knowledge stocks, and how, within those stocks, inferences are made and decisions legitimised. For an effective model of political action we need a mode of incorporating the original personal-speaker-to-personal-audience schema of Aristotelian rhetoric into the different macro, meso—and micro-levels of political action of mass societies.

It is our contention that this can be done, in terms of a model which recognises the different roles of both group and individual actors in the forms of communication, deliberation and action characteristic of politics, and which takes into account the variety of sociopolitical modes in which they are obliged to use fallible knowledge stocks within political situations which may change sharply over time. *Mutatis mutandis,* classical accounts of rhetorical interaction can be adapted to include contemporary, multi-level accounts of politics which put far more weight on the group and socioeconomic aspects of action than was customary two thousand years ago. The rhetorical model is intended to develop that field of recent political analysis which, as a result of deficiencies in institutionalist and rational-choice approaches, is addressing itself to 'ideas' (Hall 1989; Goldstein and Keohane 1993), 'epistemic

communities' (Haas 1992), 'learning' (Hall 1993; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993), or 'argumentation' (Fischer and Forester 1993). It offers categories, concepts and methods with which to trace the *dynamics* of ideas, arguments and cognitions in communicative processes.

As we emphasised in the last section, 'rhetoric', here, is not intended to indicate a specifically manipulative, elaborate, verbose or jargonistic form of communication (Edmondson 1984, p. 9). On the contrary, this tradition of rhetorical analysis has since its inception been concerned with the *activation* of bodies of knowledge, with the ways in which communicators attempt to make what they say mean something to each other, to *take effect* so that it is actively relevant to public decision. This need to make communication meaningful in a practical context is the opposite of illegitimate: it is a *sine qua non* of political communication itself, deliberation in a collective setting which can be analysed as such. Gadamer (1960, p. 18) stresses that rhetoric is connected with trying to make considerations *einleuchtend,* plausible in such a way as to illuminate a subject-matter *for the interlocutor*. According to Aristotle, 'it is…the hearer, that determines the speech's end and object' (*Rhetorica,* 1338b 1f.). Hence argumentation is itself collective action; it is framed with the hearer in mind, so heavily influenced by its recipient(s) that they effectively play a role in constituting the communicative act. Argumentation activates knowledge in a political context by discovering in a subject those aspects which aid interlocutors' grasp of it.

Throgmorton (1991) and others have emphasised that communication in politics, as elsewhere, conforms to an initial characterisation of rhetoric. It consists of arguments and evidence with persuasive potency in public debate, arguments which are rendered manipulative characteristically when they pretend to greater legitimacy or value-freedom than they possess (Edmondson 1984, pp. 44ff., 86ff; cf. Wörner 1990). This conclusion is implied too by Majone's (1989) critique of policy analysis and its self-portrayal as an impersonally logical-rationalistic undertaking. Majone's account, however, is restricted to the effects of policy analysis and the way it sees itself; it is not developed into a general conception of interpretational processes and the role of knowledge in politics. For this, we need to look more closely at the ways in which arguments are selected and situated in collective, political settings: where relevant argumentative spheres come from and what goes on within them.

## Ethos, pathos and logos as components of reasoning

It is characteristic of analyses of communication, regarded as the activation of knowledge, that they adopt a triadic format highlighting speakers, messages and hearers. This format parallels the triad of political actors, political action and the recipients of the action. The Aristotelian rhetorical approach, by conceptualising communication *as* action, marries these two in terms of speakers/actors, messages/action, and hearers/recipients; moreover, by underlining the extent to which each of these three is influenced by the others, it presents communicative

action as inherently sociopolitical, inherently collective. This produces a model for understanding communicative political action—for analysing how it works in practice, not for unmasking it as unfounded—using the threefold division of ethos, pathos and logos. (Specific argumentative figures can be elucidated by incorporating formal structures noted in the Roman tradition of rhetoric.)

Ethos, first, centres on the *propounder* of an argument and can be understood in terms of *self-presentation,* the establishment of a viable identity as an actor, as a necessary and legitimate component of sociopolitical interaction. We are here extending the analysis from individual speakers or writers to groups, institutions and other forms of collectivity which function as political actors. The primary function of ethos is to *situate* this political agent within an interactive structure. It is scarcely viable in real-life debate for any person or group to argue or to lay claim to knowledge by speaking as an abstract entity, coming from nowhere (Edmondson 1995b); the *subject* in this action model must enter it with a sociopolitically viable identification—even though this identification can seldom be entirely freely chosen, as Beckwith's work indicates. (Beckwith mentions too Hellman's work on the Italian women's movement: the argumentative terrain it entered affected the movement's possibilities for development.) Phenomena relating to ethos introduce the questions where actors come from, and how they are perceived; they emphasise rights accorded to some selected individuals or groups, rather than others, to count as acceptable providers of knowledge in particular settings. (This is, incidentally, a problematic taken up in Goffman's work on self-presentation, and in our view seems to have been regarded by himself, as by Aristotle, as a routine rather than a threatening aspect of interaction.)

Ethos, in this presentation, is connected with an actor's perceived right to authority in relation to argument and knowledge. For Aristotle, this right is optimally established by a speaker's excellence as demonstrated in the course of communication; contemporary thought, under the conditions of mass society, emphasises sociopolitical and economic means to establishing acceptability and credibility in a knowledge market. Actors' political standing or standing as 'experts' are only the most obvious attributes which, in the politics of interaction at a given place and time, incline members of particular settings to deem arguments from certain sources as on the whole trustworthy and others not. Argumentation on a macro-level, even between states, exhibits this feature, and so do micro-interactions which determine that a miner's wife, say, has more or less 'credibility' in a given setting than a journalist. This is not to say that the valencies of arguments as carrying conviction or otherwise are sociologically *determined*. It is to say that items in an exchange of knowledge do not subsist in unwavering form; they come equipped with information about their sociopolitical contexts which *contributes* to recipients' judgements. The preceding chapters in this collection can be read as shedding light on some of the many aspects which these processes take on.

The existence of such characteristics underlines the collective nature of arguing. It is rationally impossible to begin from scratch to form new

estimations of everything offered in the guise of legitimate knowledge or argument; the ethos, the ascribed reliability, of the propounder—whether a government agency or an environmental advocate—is inevitably taken as a reasonable guide to accepting or rejecting what is claimed. In elections, candidates compete to acquire ethos; voters are willing to ascribe ethos to candidates associated with certain collective identities rather than others. Perceptions of ethos prestructure fields of debate in a manner referred to above as the distribution of 'presence': they highlight some contributions in a positive sense, and by contrast consign the rest to relative obscurity. Thus, for example, contemporary advertising campaigns by pharmaceutical companies emphasise achievements in medicine and public hygiene, under-lining their significance to the everyday lives of millions of people—rather than dwelling on the pollution ascribed to the production processes involved, whose public discussion has placed the ethos of the industry in doubt. Ethos, as a characteristic ascribed to the propounder of an argument, cannot become functional until the recipient acknowledges it: political standing is thus affected by how both participants and observers mobilise their knowledge within a political context. The advertisements attempt to offer grounds for attributing ethos to the industry; they constitute contracted forms of an argument which recipients can either accept or reject. This argument needs to be analysed in terms of a genuinely *tripartite* model of action. Each of its elements—communicator, interlocutor and (see below) the stock of knowledge and argumentation concerned—has interacting parts to play which highlight the ways in which knowledge and politics interact.

The concept of 'pathos', in this model, emphasises the fact that communication will not function as such, let alone convince anyone in the context of viable politics, unless it can be couched in terms which are accessible from the interlocutor's position. The concept's chief Aristotelian use is to delineate operations used by communicators both to dismantle barriers in argumentative terrains which would otherwise deactivate recipients' responses, and to motivate them to *act;* pathos is used for *sensitising* arguments' recipients. Thus it is that communicators are obliged to select knowledge bases and argumentative forms from within a territory which can be traversed by those they are trying to address. As far as the pharmaceutical advertisements are concerned, this is done, for instance, by emphasising factors such as the saving of lives via medication, and by stressing the time period over which pharmaceuticals have been used. This associates the industry with central concerns in a long-standing European culture to which recipients are assumed to belong. This type of communication is intended to *activate* knowledge rather than simply present an abstract case; motivation to action is indispensable in the realm of politics. Political knowledge, insofar as it is meant to motivate, is intrinsically linked with pathos and sensitisation.

Aristotle was aware that it is possible, even tempting, to misuse adaptations to recipients' attitudes and capacities; but misuse can be identified as such, and does not characterise politics itself as a *type* of communication. The

pharmaceutical companies' advertisements express an argument attempting to redress a balance which they see as having turned against them for the wrong reasons; one may disagree with their position, but it does not follow that their argument is in itself illegitimate. The companies' decision to advertise in a number of different national settings underlines the fact that in the contemporary world, uses of ethos and pathos have advanced to the macro-scale; hearers have become sensitised to some arguments and desensitised to others on a global basis. Just as macro-sized agents such as the UN or Greenpeace can be perceived as possessing ethos, pathos can be used for addressing macro-sized collections of recipients: there are arguments which can and cannot successfully be addressed to supranational organisations or environmental social movements. Moreover, *means* to pathos may depend on macro-scale phenomena, for instance those activating national cultures or traditions; and—as Rootes shows—national cultures or traditions may limit opportunities for sensitising recipients to aspects of an argument.

This effective territory for arguing is the field in which the third element of argumentative reasoning, logos, is applied. The field of 'the argument itself' is one which completes the tripartite structure we have been describing. Argument consists of interacting combinations of self-presentation and sensitisation with relevant forms of reasoning; ethos and pathos are blended with logos in rhetorical deductions and inductions (see below), and reasoned knowledge is affected in practice by social, political and interactive elements (Edmondson 1994). Though described by Aristotle as the central part of an argument, logos is not 'cognitive' in the artificial sense which implies that knowledge ought to be 'uncontaminated' by social or emotional elements and that a public actor expressing such knowledge should be able, under all circumstances, to expect automatically to be comprehended (Edmondson 1995a). Even the most intellectual aspects of arguing are carried out in ways which are responsive to some interactive situation; they are affected by elements such as politics and time, and it is reasonable that they should be—or else they would be so decontextualised that they would be incapable of being understood. On this model, elements of knowledge are not isolated and inert; they form parts of fields or contexts of knowledge and action, and they come equipped with active *capacities*.

In the classical tradition, those who frame arguments *cast around* in the relevant field of knowledge for what Aristotle calls *topoi* and the Roman tradition terms 'commonplaces'. These common places have traditionally been seen as locations to which arguers resort when preparing arguments: if we want to argue in favour of the stability of mining jobs, or of democratic participation in decisions affecting the environment, where and how can we reasonably begin? In this reading (Edmondson 1994; Wörner 1997), commonplaces need to satisfy three conditions: (a) they should produce structures which do not distort the communicator's argument; (b) they should be accessible to interlocutor(s); and (c) they should allow the audience to understand plausible *connections* between items of knowledge which can legitimately inspire conviction. A

commonplace is in this sense part of a field of argument; its limits are defined by its capacity to be expressed as a major premise in argument. Commonplaces, moreover, consist of knowledge which has been collectively produced and legitimised; they do not merely generate single arguments but in some cases *underlie* whole *patterns* of argument accepted as reasonable in specific settings.

Thus, for example, the British Prime Minister's policy of apparent concessions towards Sinn Fein in March 1996 could be read in terms of an enthymeme, 'We have come so far towards peace, let us not waste our efforts.' The topos underlying this enthymeme (cf. Aristotle *Rhetorica* 1399b, 15ff.) spans a field of possible arguments; at the same time it structures argumentative moves and *makes them intelligible*. In this case, those who could not understand why Major seemed willing to fix a date for all-party talks were invited to locate his arguments in terms of reasoning about not changing track in a wasteful manner. To those who did so, the arguments 'made sense'; to those who did not, the debate could be continued by resorting to competing topoi.

The store of acceptable legitimations for arguing is not invariant between settings; different patterns are appropriate for different knowledge stocks (although they are not usually *so* disparate that no rational connection between them is possible). Settings are partially defined by the patterns of argument which they permit to be accepted as effective or for some other reason preferable. Certain patterns of arguing may thus be given by collective settings as people enter them (see Beckwith's work), and they may develop as settings develop (cf. Hyvärinen). Apart from the fact that topoi may often be regarded as too fundamental to put into words, this context-relatedness, this blending in to other aspects of setting, enhances the possibility that many argumentative forms subsist on strata below conscious, reportable attention. This compounds the difficulties of translating the views of people who may be accepted as highly reasonable actors in one political context into another setting, where they and their opinions have a different valency. The resulting difficulties are responsible for many political stalemates, which are in principle amenable to more rational exploration than they usually receive.

These observations throw light, too, on the expression 'logics of appropriateness'. Logics considered appropriate in particular contexts are those which use topoi regarded in those settings as cognate, mutually compatible or reinforcing. If they were exhumed for examination, the criteria for this compatibility could be examined and assessed: we could explore the networks of topoi which make some positions seem reasonable only to Sinn Féin and others only to the British government.

Patterns of argument are subject to political competition and interaction, but this competition may not take place on an argument's home ground, the form of life with which it was originally associated. Rhetorical analyses can track and evaluate the transformations which occur as arguments are transported from one setting to the next. As Joye remarks, a schoolteacher may enjoy respect as an authority in one social-geographical context but not in another; arguments about increasing taxes to protect the environment will make more sense—appear more

appropriate—to one collectivity than to another. Such clearly sociopolitical phenomena thus form part of argumentation in a way which is in principle familiar, though the extent of their influence is generally underestimated. Patterns of reasoning tend to be so intricately interwoven into forms of daily life that they *appear* immovable, objective: 'necessary', in short. In this way, locally dominant patterns of argument often appear the only ones possible to the inhabitants of the relevant domains; and the establishment of oneself as an actor using reasoning accepted as 'necessary' (see pp. 216–7 above) is a crucial political goal.

## Topoi: tracing the bases of arguments

Within the field of logos, a number of distinct knowledge-related phenomena and operations can be distinguished in order to investigate the structures of everyday reasoning accepted as reliable—to isolate and identify the starting-points which particular collectivities accept as bestowing reasonableness on arguments. Aristotle divides 'topoi', for example, into general and special topoi, and adds to them 'reputable opinions'.[5] According to his analysis, a general topos falls between a logical and a substantive rule. General topoi are thought-structures independent of any particular subject area and are of what at first appear to be heterogeneous kinds; they range from 'If a quality does not in fact exist where it is *more* likely to exist, it clearly does not exist where it is *less* likely' to, say, The things people approve of openly are not those which they approve of secretly' (Aristotle *Rhetorica* 1397b, 13ff. and 1399a, 30f). Such topoi have in common their argumentative or sense-making *capacity,* what they are able to *do* in the production of intelligible arguments. General topoi can operate over ranges of different contexts—even though in some contexts, intelligibility may be more readily ascribed to arguments based on selected general topoi rather than others.

'Special' topoi, by contrast, deal with particular subject areas, especially the basic values of a society's discourse: 'Whatever is x is good', 'admirable', or 'credible', for example. These two categories between them can shape considerable ranges of argument. Anthropologists and others entering new terrains of knowledge can render the inhabitants' behaviour intelligible from their own points of view by reconstructing the unstated special topoi which underlie their habits: 'Whatever is profitable is good,' perhaps, or 'Whatever shows personal loyalty is good.'

There seems to be at least one more category to be added to this account of special and general topoi (Edmondson 1995a). Interlinked arguments may also be formed using assumptions which, like topoi, underwrite connections between argumentative steps, as well as indicating regions where argumentative relevance ends. These are more content-related than general topoi, but less concerned to underline straightforward evaluations than Aristotle's special topoi. For example, the underlying assumption, 'Whatever shows respect for other people's opinions is humane,' indicates a field of arguments which it

designates as reasonable and acceptable, and correspondingly demarcates others which it rules out.

In multi-ethnic societies, generalisations of this type can be found at the root of opposing world views, for instance in ongoing debate in relation to religious education. Policies in contemporary Britain can be differentiated according to whether they are trying to take everyone's opinion into account, or whether they are trying to pursue some set of values respected by a certain group. For each side in the debate, reasonableness resides in arguments congruent with the relevant assumption espoused; for each side, corresponding arguments are marked as 'appropriate'. For opponents they may not *appear* intelligible at all, and one aim of political negotiation is to render them so. This type of generalisation, which might be termed a *local postulate,* possesses the dual functions of the topos; hence it differs from what Aristotle terms a 'reputable opinion'. The latter is simply a statement of what many people, or experts, believe to be the case; part of an accepted knowledge stock. (Cf. Bacon's (1620) distinctions between universally accepted beliefs and others more locally current.) Local postulates separate styles of interpretation; like special and general topoi, they legitimate argumentative chains and show their users what sorts of content to seek for insertion into these chains. Unless assent can be given to these basic patterning assumptions, the ensuing components of arguments and conversations will appear random and cannot be perceived as making sense; much political activity is thus aimed at trying to ensure that the actor's own argumentation is accessible to other participants.

Components of logos thus account for a range of aspects of argument. The ways in which they do so shows that 'thought' does not comprise only strictly cognitively defined items, and that, contrary to Weber's view, the 'cognitive' lacks any exclusive affinity to items such as mathematical formulae. The example above concerning religious education illustrates that *attitudes* are made up in large part of preferences for arguments based on particular conformations of special and general topoi and local postulates. Any hard-and-fast line between the cognitive and the emotional thus begins to appear artificial; rather than making the cognitive appear more unreasonable, this is intended to show that emotions can be reasonable, and their appropriateness argued for. 'Cultures', similarly, encompass large-scale sequences treated by actors as cognate; within cultures, appropriate logics for action are justified in terms of designated fields of topoi (Edmondson 1994). In empirical terms, the contribution of shared attitudes to collective action may be inferred from consistent or recurrent underlying sequences, empirically identifiable as giving rise to the argumentation involved.

This model, therefore, supplies the groundwork for approaching knowledge exchange in political cultures, as well as for explicating occasions when it fails to be exchanged. Empirically detectable patterns of general and special topoi, reputable opinions, and local postulates are set within interconnected styles of pathos, and emanate from actors to whom particular types of ethos are attributed; they may or may not blend, in whole or in part, with the topical

structures of other communities of argument. Using these concepts offers to explicate the developing socio-political structure of argumentative interchange, and, in normative analysis, to trace those of its components to which assent should be given or withheld.

The notion of different levels of topoi also demonstrates how arguments in the real political world counter each other. The religious education case exemplifies the fact that conflicts are not centrally sustained by people who support topoi in absolute logical contradiction to each other. Muslim leaders in Britain and elsewhere do not believe it is important to ignore other people's opinions or to strive to be inhumane; they do not attempt to *disprove* the local postulate used by those who would prefer to teach about a multitude of faiths. Rather, they base their own views on *competing* postu lates, for instance those emphasising the virtues of loyal adherence to a particular path to truth and virtue. In such a competition, reasons can be adduced and adjudicated on once the underlying topoi have become clear. In the education debate, the proponents of multi-religious teaching might emphasise *causal* processes, claiming that unfamiliarity with others' views causes intolerance and thus social strife, which they wish to avoid. Their opponents point to *aims,* stressing the fact that their goals are moral integrity and responsible citizenship; this they do not see as leading to social strife, which they wish to avoid. The recipient can therefore judge which is most reasonable in the present setting; but he or she cannot reach such a judgement by assuming that the opponents are arguing from the same points of departure—otherwise one or both of them would appear much more deeply irrational than is in fact the case.

We propose applying these categories to elucidate the internal processes within collective action, so that patterns of thought shared within one context rather than another can be elucidated. Collectivities such as interest groups or organisations develop cognitive conventions which can be dissected in terms of topos-related assumptions, used in a given setting, about what is important and practicable. These generate particular arguments and rule out others, delineating criteria for assessing a plethora of further practicalities and priorities.

Once starting positions for argument have been chosen, arguing itself may proceed using rhetorical deductions (enthymemes: see Wörner 1982; Edmondson 1984) or rhetorical inductions—paradigms; or it may use figures such as metaphors. Again, each of these is tripartite, containing elements of ethos, pathos and logos. An enthymeme is an inference especially adapted to the fact that knowledge in the real world of action is usually imperfect; it infers from what happens in most cases to what seems likely to happen in the particular case under discussion. It consists of a deduction expressed so as to enhance its impact on its recipient; it is often presented incompletely, so that it demands active audience participation to be understood. Hence it incorporates ethos and pathos in order to function in practice (Edmondson 1984, p. 100). Arguments from paradigm, by contrast (Aristotle *Rhetorica* 1402b, 16–18), relate to persons, events or settings treated in such a way as to produce maximum insight in application to the case in question; thus they too incorporate

effects of ethos and pathos. Like enthymemes, they infer from many cases rather than using universal generalisations, and they use the inferences they reach in order to illuminate a particular case (Wörner 1997). The setting in Northern Ireland, for instance, is replete with inductive arguments about the trustworthiness of given political actors; since A is behaving like B…N, and B…N have proved to be unreliable, it is concluded that A ought not to be trusted either. (This is scarcely an infallible argumentative form, but neither is *it prima facie* unreasonable; actors need to weigh its appropriateness within the settings of each separate case in which it is used.)

Via uses of rhetorical deduction and induction, interacting chains of knowledge can be linked together to legitimise movement within and between knowledge stocks. This function may also be achieved by metaphorical argument. Metaphors are not entrenched in the merely manipulatory sphere of symbolic politics, speculating with the mobilisation of mass loyalties; they may form valid processes in interpreting the world (Brown 1977; Blumenberg 1979). Entire political fields may become argumentatively (not just symbolically) involved in 'metaphorical' discussions. This is illustrated by the debate on pension schemes in Germany and elsewhere, with its discourse about the 'pensions burden' and the 'generation war' (see Nullmeier and Rüb 1993; Fischer and Forester 1993). The term 'generational contract', which simultaneously implies an image as well as relating a myth, offers actors a presentation of the situation in terms of 'maintaining' or 'breaking' a contract. That which is required by the argument, namely the formulation of interests and programmes, is metaphorically pre-characterised, summarising a chain of arguments linked with certain types of legal expectation. If political analysts investigate the implications of such metaphors, the arguments they imply can be evaluated and their sociopolitical elements clarified.

Lastly, we can bring this model of communicative interaction into motion by introducing into it the element of *time* (see Edmondson 1995b). As time progresses, different arguments may gain in appropriateness and effectiveness; again, this applies on micro, meso- and macro-scales. Some arguments will only function at the beginning or at the end of an interactive sequence; others may need to wait decades or centuries for the settings in which interlocutors can reasonably accept them. In the end, therefore, it is always an interaction between communicator and interlocutor which defines which argument can effectively be made—a process of highly political and collective action.

These examples are intended to show that rhetorical processes describe not how reasoning is *made to appear* but how it actually functions. The political world is negotiated by knowing actors in ways which need to be elicited ethnographically, by exploring the ways in which arguments are anchored in ways of life; the addition of a political approach modifies this somewhat static account by introducing elements of competition, conflict and change between patterns of argument and knowledge as they lose or gain dominance in particular terrains. Ethnographic methods highlight different argumentative patterns in rural versus urban areas, national versus international ones, within ethnic

groups, classes and organisations, or as between managers and workers. Political analysis underlines the fact that while such patterns may have structured interaction in the past, and may be offered as potentialities for the future, it is an empirical question to what extent they will in fact be taken up. We do not expect either collective or individual actors ever to arrive at a situation where there are no social pressures or political power to affect what they decide; but these pressures themselves can be assessed and, if necessary, combated. Our aim is to understand more about how this happens so that we can decide what is compatible with democratic political participation and what is not.

In this model it is not, we emphasise, calculation and the rational weighing-up of interests which predominate in the political sphere; instead, practical reasoning proceeds in a different way. In framing plans, strategies, actions and interactions, actors compensate for the fragmentariness of their knowledge of past, present and future by binding themselves into their commonplaces— equipped with structures of reasoning, networks of metaphors, paradigms and examples with mythical force, constructions of what is necessary or impossible. In place of decision rules promising action alternatives which promise the greatest subjective benefit, actors orient themselves by persuasive—and none the less reasonable—means. These are not sets of tricks, but methods which have been found reliable from setting to setting for making sense of the world and coming to conclusions within and about it. In interpreting a setting, the action alternative selected is the one for which the greatest argumentative support can be mobilised—collectively—within the knowledge system of the actors concerned. When we can succeed in analysing rhetorical interaction in this way, the search for procedures leading to more constructive forms of collective action can begin.

This collection has examined aspects of collective action in context, particularly as they concern questions of knowledge, power and participation in contemporary democratic forms; it has produced relevant empirical and theoretical findings and it has opened up territories in which work must be done in the future. Relations between collective action and its contexts need much more systematic analysis before confident generalisations can be made; and much of this analysis needs to centre on connections between knowledge and political action. Detailed empirical questions need to be asked: what are the sources of actors' knowledge? How is it discussed and used? On what does this depend? How are some courses of action accepted as practical politics in one context and not another? How, in dynamic detail, are decisions, forms of identification, expectations and strategies shaped by their political settings? This collection has shown that collective processes taking place in the real political world are much more complex than pre-set forms of analysis would allow. This is especially significant since, in the future, highly contextualised collective disputes which not only involve knowledge but are *about* knowledge are likely to multiply The study of the connections between politics and knowledge thus becomes even more urgent. If our aim is to use findings such as those in this text to adapt democratic aims to the conditions of mass technological societies,

questions like these need to be further explored.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## NOTES

1 In the field of policy analysis the term 'frame' has recently been taken up by Rein and Schon (1991) in relation to the role of knowledge in the political process. This frame concept—understood in the sense of social patterns of interpretation which fundamentally organise the experience of a situation (Goffman 1974, p. 19)—attained some prominence in the 1980s, and 'frame' has been employed for several years in social movement research for studying mobilisation (Snow *et al.* 1986; Tarrow 1992; Gerhards 1993). But these uses of 'frame' risk being equated with 'topic' or 'issue' (Schmidke and Ruzza 1993) or with ideological analysis at a general level (Gerhards 1993). In a different analytical direction there are strong connections between the idea of framing and ideas under the heading of habits, discussed for example by Turner (1994).

2 Nullmeier and Rüb (1993) argue that cognitive consensus over threatening demographic pressures (a prognostic consensus) carried a significant part of the integration burden in creating a government/opposition coalition made up of the CDU/CSU, FDP and SPD in relation to their common adoption of the Pension Reform Act 1992—although manifest differences obtained in the fundamental normative convictions of these political actors. A rather different type of case is provided by EU attempts to *induce* consensus in Northern Ireland by encouraging co-operation among members of the two antipathetic political traditions. Despite cognitive differences involved, financial considerations appear somewhat effective in persuading actors to abandon aspects of their political stances (Tannam 1995).

3 These more micro—and meso-political categories can be referred back to the development of entire political fields by, for example, using the concept of the politically *autonomous cycle*. Nullmeier's and Rüb's analysis (1993) of federal pension policy postulated that an autonomous cycle comes into

being when the necessity modality dominates a political field, given that this necessity has been constructed from the objectives of the central political actor. Autocyclic closure takes place when the domestic institutional and organisational interests within a policy community become accepted as absolutely necessary—imposing a set of self-created constraints on further debate. The central political knowledge market has by then become dominated by stylised institutional demands in relation to 'absolutely essential' necessities which do not allow of alternative actions. Using such analyses, it is possible to distinguish between political sequences which are in a state of stagnation, reform-orientation or radical change.

4 Instances of attempts to develop applications deriving from this tradition include those in the sociology of science (Nelson *et al.* 1987), and anthropology (James Clifford 1988; also Berg and Fuchs (1993)); these approaches share a common point of reference in the form of the inevitable rhetorical structure of all writing and all texts (Hammersley 1993, whose conclusion supports that of Edmondson 1984).

5 We are here building on interpretations suggested in Wörner (1990, 1997) and Edmondson (1984); also by writers such as W.de Pater (1965) and O.Bird (1960). The work of J.L.Austin, Stephen Toulmin and Chaim Perelman has been crucial for this field. The accounts of topoi, rhetorical deduction, and rhetorical induction given here summarise new research on forms of everyday argumentation which is still developing.

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