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Networks as Interest Intermediation

The roots of the idea of a policy network lie, in part, in American pluralism and the literature on subgovernments. For example, Ripley and Franklin (1981, 8–9) define subgovernments as "clusters of individuals that effectively make most of the routine decisions in a given substantive area of policy." They are composed of "members of the House and/or Senate, members of Congressional staffs, a few bureaucrats and representatives of private groups and organizations interested in the policy area." The emphasis in this literature is on a few privileged groups with close relations with governments; the resultant subgovernment excludes other interests and makes policy. Some authors developed more rigid metaphors to characterize this relationship. Lowi (1964) stressed the *triangular* nature of the links, with the central government agency, the Congressional Committee, and the interest group enjoying an almost symbiotic interaction. This insight gave birth to the best-known label within the subgovernments literature, the "iron triangle" (see Freeman and Stevens 1987, 12–13 and citations).

The literature on policy networks develops this American concern with the oligopoly of the political marketplace. Governments confront a multitude of groups all keen to influence a piece of legislation or policy implementation. Some groups are outsiders. They are deemed extreme in behavior and unrealistic in their demands, so are kept at arm's length. Others are insiders, acceptable to government, responsible in their expectations, and willing to work with and through government. Government needs them to make sure it meets its policy objectives. The professions of the welfare state are the most obvious example. Over the years, such interests become institutionalized. They are consulted before documents are sent out for consultation. They don't lobby. They have lunch. These routine, standardized patterns of interaction between government and insider interests become policy networks.

There are many examples of the use of policy networks to describe government policy making.[1] Marsh and Rhodes (1992) define policy networks as a meso-level concept that links the micro level of analysis, dealing with the role of interests and government in particular policy decisions, and the macro level of analysis, which is concerned with broader questions about the distribution of power in modern society. Networks can vary along a continuum according to the closeness of the relationships in them. Policy communities are at one end of the continuum and involve close relationships; issue networks are at the other end and involve loose relationships (and on the influence of this approach see Börzel 1998; Dowding 1995; LeGalès and Thatcher 1995; Richardson 1999).

A policy community has the following characteristics: a limited number of participants with some groups consciously excluded; frequent and high-quality interaction between all members of the community on all matters related to the policy issues; consistency in values, membership, and policy outcomes which persist over

[1] On Australia see Considine 1994, Davis et al. 1993; on Canada see Coleman and Skogstad 1990, Lindquist 1996; on the UK see Rhodes 1988, Richardson and Jordan 1979; on continental Europe see LeGalès and Thatcher 1995, Marin and Mayntz 1991; on the USA see Mandell 2002, O'Toole 1997.

time; consensus, with the ideology, values, and broad policy preferences shared by all participants; and exchange relationships based on all members of the policy community controlling some resources. Thus, the basic interaction is one involving bargaining between members with resources. There is a balance of power, not necessarily one in which all members equally benefit but one in which all members see themselves as in a positive-sum game. The structures of the participating groups are hierarchical so leaders can guarantee compliant members. This model is an ideal type; no policy area is likely to conform exactly to it.

One can only fully understand the characteristics of a policy community if we compare it with an issue network. McFarland (1987, 146), following Heclo's (1978) use, defines an issue network as "a communications network of those interested in policy in some area, including government authorities, legislators, businessmen, lobbyists, and even academics and journalists . . . [that] . . . constantly communicates criticisms of policy and generates ideas for new policy initiatives." So, issue networks are characterized by: many participants; fluctuating interaction and access for the various members; the absence of consensus and the presence of conflict; interaction based on consultation rather than negotiation or bargaining; an unequal power relationship in which many participants may have few resources, little access, and no alternative. The study of interest groups understood variously as issue networks, policy subsystems, and advocacy coalitions is probably the largest American contribution to the study of policy networks. They are seen as an ever-present feature of American politics (and for surveys of the literature see Baumgarten and Leech 1998 and Berry 1997).

Obviously the implication of using a continuum is that any network can be located at some point along it. Networks can vary along several dimensions and any combination of these dimensions; for example, membership, integration, resources. Various authors have constructed continua, typologies, and lists of the characteristics of policy networks and policy communities (see for example Van Waarden 1992). This lepidopteran approach to policy networks—collecting and classifying the several species—has become deeply uninteresting.

Networks as Interorganizational Analysis

The European literature on networks focuses less on subgovernments and more on interorganizational analysis (see for example Rhodes 1999/1981). It emphasizes the structural relationship between political institutions as the crucial element in a policy network rather than the interpersonal relations between individuals in those institutions. At its simplest, interorganizational analysis suggests that a "focal organization attempts to manage its dependencies by employing one or more strategies, other organizations in the network are similarly engaged." A network is "complex and dynamic: there are multiple, over-lapping relationships, each one of which is to a greater or lesser degree dependent on the state of others" (Elkin 1975, 175–6).[2]

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[2] See also Benson 1975; Crozier and Thoenig 1976; Hanf and Scharpf 1979; Thompson 1967.

The most impressive attempt to apply this variant of network analysis to politics and policy making is the several collaborations of David Knoke, Edward Laumann, and Franz Pappi (see especially Knoke 1990; Knoke et al. 1996; Laumann and Knoke 1987). Their "organizational state" approach argues that "modern state–society relationships have increasingly become blurred, merging into a mélange of inter-organizational influences and power relations." These interorganizational networks "enable us to describe and analyze interactions among all significant policy actors, from legislative parties and government ministries to business associations, labor unions, professional societies, and public interest groups" (Knoke et al. 1996, 3). The key actors are formal organizations, not individuals. In their analysis of national labor policy in America, Germany, and Japan, Knoke et al. 1996 compiled the list of key actors by, for example, searching public documents such as the *Congressional Information Service* volumes for the number of times they testified before the relevant congressional or Senate committee, including only organizations with five or more appearances. The individuals in these organizations responsible for governmental policy affairs were then interviewed on such matters as the informant's perception of the most influential organization, the communication of policy information, and participation in the policy area. Knoke et al. then use the techniques of network analysis to map the links between organizations, employing classic network measures such as centrality and density (for an introduction to such techniques see Scott 1991, and for a compendium see Wasserman and Faust 1994).

Knoke et al. argue that their data not only describe the power structure of their chosen policy area but also explain the different policy outcomes. The value of this species of network analysis lies in its use of the structural properties of networks to explain behavior and outcomes. Unfortunately, little work in this idiom is explanatory. Instead, it describes power structures and network characteristics. Moreover, "it has not yet produced a great deal that is novel" (Dowding 2001, 89–90 and n. 2). It is hard to demur from this judgement when Knoke et al. (1996, 210, 213) conclude that "the state clearly constitutes the formal locus of collective decision making that affects the larger civil society within which it is embedded," or that "the more central an organization was in either the communication or the support network, the higher was its reputation for being influential" (see also Thatcher 1998, 398–404).

Networks as Governance

The roots of policy network analysis lie, finally, in the analysis of the sharing of power between public and private actors, most commonly between business, trade unions, and the government in economic policy making (Atkinson and Coleman 1989; Jordan 1981). Initially, the emphasis fell on corporatism, a topic worthy of an article in its own right (see Cawson 1986; Schmitter and Lehmbruch 1979). There was also the long-standing and distinctive Scandinavian analysis of "corporate pluralism" (Rokkan 1966; Heisler 1979), which continues under such labels as "the segmented state" (Olsen 1983, 118) and "the negotiated economy" (Nielsen and Pedersen 1988). Latterly, the main concern has been with governance by (and through) networks, on

trends in the relationship between state and civil society government rather than policy making in specific arenas. Thus, governance is a broader term than government with public resources and services provided by any permutation of government and the private and voluntary sectors (and on the different conceptions of governance see Kjær 2004; Pierre 2000).

There are several accounts of this trend for Britain, continental Europe, and the USA. Thus, for Britain, there has been a shift from government by a unitary state to governance by and through networks. In this period, the boundary between state and civil society changed. It can be understood as a shift from hierarchies, or the bureaucracies of the welfare state, through the marketization reforms of the Conservative governments of Thatcher and Major to networks and the emphasis on partnerships and joined-up government.[3]

There is also a large European literature on "guidance," "steering," and "indirect coordination" which predates both the British interest in network governance and the American interest in reinventing government. For example, Franz-Xavier Kaufmann's (1986) edited volume on guidance, steering, and control is truly Germanic in size, scope, and language. It focuses on the question of how a multiplicity of interdependent actors can be coordinated in the long chains of actions typical of complex societies (see also Bovens 1990; Luhmann 1982; van Gunsteren 1976).

For the USA, Osborne and Gaebler (1992, 20, 34) distinguish between policy decisions (steering) and service delivery (rowing), arguing bureaucracy is a bankrupt tool for rowing. In its place they propose entrepreneurial government, with its stress on working with the private sector and responsiveness to customers. This transformation of the public sector involves "less government" or less rowing but "more governance" or more steering. In his review of the American literature, Frederickson (1997, 84–5) concludes the word "governance is probably the best and most generally accepted metaphor for describing the patterns of interaction of multiple-organizational systems or networks" (see also Kettl 1993, 206–7; Salamon 2002). Peters (1996, ch. 1) argues the traditional hierarchic model of government is everywhere under challenge. He identifies four trends, or models of governance, challenging the hierarchic model—market, participative, flexible, and deregulated governance. Fragmentation, networks, flexibility, and responsiveness are characteristics of flexible governance. In sum, talk of the governance transformation abounds even if the scope, pace, direction, and reasons for that change are matters of dispute (for a survey see Pierre 2000).

2.2 Policy Networks as Theory

There is a large theoretical literature on policy networks in Britain (see Rhodes 1988, 1997a, 1999/1981), the rest of Europe (see Börzel 1998; Kickert, Klijn, and Koppenjan

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[3] See for example Ansell 2000; Bevir and Rhodes 2003; Rhodes 1997a, 2000; Stoker 2004; and for a review of the literature and citations, see Marinetto 2003.

1997), and the USA (see O'Toole 1997; Salamon 2002). There are two broad schools of thought, depending on how they seek to explain network behavior: power dependence or rational actor.[4]

Power Dependence

The power dependence approach treats policy networks as sets of resource-dependent organizations. Their relationships are characterized by power dependence; that is, "any organization is dependent on other organizations for resources," and "to achieve their goals, the organizations have to exchange resources." So, actors "employ strategies within known rules of the game to regulate the process of exchange." Relationships are a "game" in which organizations maneuver for advantage. Each deploys its resources, whether constitutional-legal, organizational, financial, political, or informational, to maximize influence over outcomes while trying to avoid becoming dependent on the other "players." So, behavior in policy networks is gamelike, rooted in trust and regulated by rules of the game negotiated and agreed by network participants. Variations in the distribution of resources and in the bargaining skills of participants explain both differences in outcomes in a network and variations between networks. Finally, the networks have a significant degree of autonomy from government (Rhodes 1997a, ch. 2; 1999/1981, ch. 5).[5]

Rational Choice

The rational choice school explains how policy networks work by combining rational choice and the new institutionalism to produce actor-centered institutionalism. The best example is the Max-Planck-Institut's notion of "actor-centered institutionalism." For Renate Mayntz, Fritz Scharpf, and their colleagues at the Max-Planck-Institut, policy networks represent a significant change in the structure of government. They are specific "structural arrangements" that deal typically with "policy problems." They are a "relatively stable set of mainly public and private corporate actors." The links between network actors serve as "communication channels and for the exchange of information, expertise, trust and other policy resources." Policy networks have their own "integrative logic" and the dominant decision rules stress bargaining and sounding out. So, as with the power dependence approach, the Max Planck school stresses functional differentiation, the linkages between organizations, and dependence on resources (Kenis and Schneider 1991, 41–3).

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[4] Bob Goodin pointed out correctly that theories of complexity are also relevant to the study of network (personal correspondence). See, for example, La Porte 1975; Luhmann 1982; Simon 1981/1969. Such ideas exercised some influence on the "governance club" research program at Erasmus University, Rotterdam (see for example Kickert, Klyn, and Koppenjan 1997). They have not been a major influence on the rest of the network literature.

[5] The analysis of "power dependence" is not limited to the study of networks. More generally see: Blau 1964; Emerson 1962; Keohane and Nye 1977, 1987; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978.

To explain how policy networks work, Scharpf (1997, chs. 2, 3) combines rational choice and the new institutionalism to produce actor-centered institutionalism. The basic argument is that institutions are systems of rules that structure the opportunities for actors (individual and corporate) to realize their preferences. So, "policy is the outcome of the interactions of resourceful and boundedly-rational actors whose capabilities, preferences, and perceptions are largely, but not completely, shaped by the institutionalised norms within which they interact" (Scharpf 1997, 195).

Networks are one institutional setting in which public and private actors interact. They are informal institutions; that is, informally organized, permanent, rule-governed relationships. The agreed rules build trust and foster communication while also reducing uncertainty; they are the basis of non-hierarchic coordination. Scharpf uses game theory to analyze and explain these rule-governed interactions.

In the UK, there have been vigorous exchanges between the two schools (see for example Dowding 1995, 2001 versus Marsh 1998, 12–13, 67–70; Marsh and Smith 2000). It is a case of "ne'er the twain shall meet." The two sides have irreconcilable differences of both theory and method. The disagreements are as basic as the deductive, positivistic, quantitative approach of economics versus the inductive, interpretative, qualitative approach of sociology. For insiders, harmony is not threatening to break out any time soon. To outsiders, the debate seems like a spat. The outsiders could well be right.

2.3 Policy Networks as Reform

The spread of networks and the recognition that they constrain government's ability to act has fueled research on how to manage networks. The goal is now "joined-up government" or a "whole-of-government" approach. Networks are no longer a metaphor or a site for arcane theoretical disputes but a live issue for reforming public sector management. Here I concentrate on the public sector literature.[6]

Kickert, Klijn, and Koppenjan (1997, 46) identify three approaches to network management in the public sector: the instrumental, interactive, and institutional. The instrumental approach focuses on how governments seek to exercise legitimate authority by altering dependency relationships. The key problem with the instrumental approach is the cost of steering. A central command operating code, no matter how well disguised, runs the ever-present risks of recalcitrance from key actors, a loss of flexibility in dealing with localized problems, and control deficits.

The interaction approach stresses management by negotiation instead of hierarchy. The trick is to sit where the other person is sitting to understand their objectives and to build and keep trust between actors. So, chief executive officers in the public sector must have "strong interpersonal, communication and listening

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⁶ On the private sector, see Child and Faulkner 1998, ch. 6; Ford et al. 2003; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978.

skills; an ability to persuade; a readiness to trade and to engage in reciprocal rather than manipulative behavior; an ability to construct long-term relationships" (Ferlie and Pettigrew 1996, 88–9). The key problem of the interactive approach is the costs of cooperation. Network management is time consuming, objectives can be blurred, and outcomes can be indefinite. Decision making is satisficing, not maximizing.

The institutional approach focuses on the institutional backcloth, the rules and structures against which the interactions take place. The aim is incremental changes in incentives, rules, and culture to promote joint problem solving. The institutional approach has one major, even insurmountable problem; incentives, rules, and culture are notoriously resistant to change because networks privilege a few actors, who equate their sectional interest with the public interest. They are well placed to protect their sectional interests.

The literature specifically on managing networks grows apace in both America and Europe. Salamon (2002) provides a comprehensive review of the tools available for America's new governance, covering the "classic" instruments such as grants, regulation, and bureaucracy but laying great emphasis on the collaborative nature of modern governing and the need to switch from hierarchy and control to enabling and the indirect management of networks.[7]

What do you do if you have to run a network? Painter, Rouse, and Isaac-Henry (1997, 238) provide specific advice on game management. They conclude that local authorities should: conduct an audit of other relevant agencies; draw a strategic map of key relationships; identify which of their resources will help them to influence these other agencies; and identify the constraints on that influence. As with all new trends, there is an upsurge of advice from both academics and consultants. So the ten commandments of networking include: be representative of your agency and network, take a share of the administrative burden, accommodate and adjust while maintaining purpose, be as creative as possible, be patient and use interpersonal skills, and emphasize incentives (Agranoff 2003, 29). It is certainly not "rocket science" (Perri 6 et al. 2002, 130) and this list of lessons gives credence to that claim. Wettenhall (2003, 80) reviews the literature on partnerships, joined-up government, and the new governance. He concludes these terms have "become the dominant slogan in the turn-of-the-century discourse about government" (see, for example, Cabinet Office 2000; Cm 4310 1999; MAC 2004). So any disapproving reader dismissing this literature should pause to note it is well on the way to becoming the new conventional wisdom in public sector reform. Those of more caustic disposition, having paused, might move on by noting that network management is an ephemeral mix of proverbs and injunctions.[8]

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[7] See Agranoff 2003; Kettl 2002; Kickert, Klyn, and Koppenjan 1997; McGuire 2002; Mandell 2002; O'Toole 1997; Osborne 2000; Perri 6 et al. 2002.

[8] The literature may be preoccupied with adducing lessons for would be managers but it also analyzes network management as, for example, brokerage. See Bardach 1998; Carpenter, Esterling, and Lazer 2004; Fernandez and Gould 1994; Taylor 1997.

3. Debates and Challenges

Paralleling the earlier discussion, this section looks at the debates and challenges that confront policy network analysis. In turn, I examine some descriptive, theoretical, and prescriptive pitfalls.

3.1 Describing Governance

The notion of a policy network can be dismissed as mere metaphor. It is not a metaphor because there is no analogy. Policy making *is* a set of interconnected events and communicating people. It is no more a metaphorical term than bureaucracy. The term's resonance and longevity stems from the simple fact that for many it represents an enduring characteristic of much policy making in advanced industrial democracies.

In his review of British studies of pressure groups and parties, Richardson (1999, 199) claimed that Dowding's (1995) critique of policy networks marked the "intellectual fatigue" of the approach. The sheer number and variety of articles published since this "watershed," including Richardson's (2000) own prize-winning paper on networks and policy change, testifies to the continuing utility of the term. Not only are there innumerable case studies of British policy networks but casting the net wider, beyond the confines of political science, policy networks are staples in, for example, criminology (Loader 2000; Ryan, Savage, and Wall 2001). The international relations literature on networks expanded, with Haas's (1992) notion of epistemic communities influential. They are transnational networks of knowledge-based experts with an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within their domain of expertise. The distinguishing features of these networks are their shared beliefs and professional judgements. Directly analogous to Haas's network of experts are Keck and Sikkink's (1998, 1) transnational advocacy networks of activists. For example, the UN, domestic and international non-governmental organizations, and private foundations form an international issue network to counter the "forgetfulness" of governments. The network is an alternative channel of communication that argues, persuades, lobbies, and complains to inject new ideas and information into the international debate on human rights (see also Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999; Sikkink 1993).

Transnational networks are also a feature of policy making in the European Union (EU). For Peterson (2003, 119, 129), "policy network analysis is never more powerful as an analytical tool than when it is deployed at the EU level" and "few . . . would deny that governance by networks is an essential feature of the EU."[9] Policy network

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[9] See also Ansell 2000; Andersen 1990; Josselin 1997; Kassim 1993; Mazey and Richardson 1993; Rhodes, Bache, and George 1996.

analysis has also colonized intergovernmental relations in and between states, most notably federal–state relations (Galligan 1995; Rhodes 1988; Wright 1978).

Finally, there is governance in a globalizing world. It comes in several varieties. Keohane's (2002, 204, 210–12, 214) version of global governance is one of "networked minimalism." In other words, there is no hierarchy but a network of nation states, private firms, NGOs, and subunits of government, which pursues "minimal rather than ambitious objectives." The nation state will remain the "primary instrument of domestic and global governance" but "it is not the only important actor" (see also Slaughter 2003). Rosenau (2000, 172–3) provides a more dramatic vision of a "multi-centric" world composed of diverse transnational collectivities that both compete and cooperate and do not lend themselves to hierarchic control or hegemonic coordination. The world is a network and networks are the world.

In short, I doubt there could be a clearer example of "have theory will travel" and, therefore, there is a problem. There is no synthesis of the findings of this diverse literature. Indeed, a synthesis may not be possible. The key question would be, "what type of network emerges in what conditions with what policy outcomes?" There have been many willing to tell us how to answer this question (Dowding 1995; Thatcher 1998). Only a few brave souls have tried to give an answer, and even then they confine their analysis to either comparing several policy sectors in a single country or a single policy sector in several countries (see for example Considine 2002; Marsh 1998).

When seeking to compare policy networks across countries, the problems are probably insurmountable. Policy networks are but political science writ small. The problems that bedevil comparative government also plague policy networks. They were devastatingly summarized by MacIntyre (1972, 8):

There was once a man who aspired to be the author of the general theory of holes. When asked "What kind of hole holes dug by children in the sand for amusement, holes dug by gardeners to plant lettuce seedlings, tank traps, holes made by roadmakers?" he would reply indignantly that he wished for a *general* theory that would explain all of these. He rejected *ab initio* the as he saw it pathetically commonsense view that of the digging of different kinds of holes there are quite different kinds of explanations to be given.

Such "modernist-empiricism" (Bevir 2001, 478) treats policy networks as discrete objects to be measured, classified, and compared. It may not be one of "the more dangerous kinds of practical joke" (MacIntyre 1972, 26) but it is only one way of studying networks.

The story about the rise and rise of governance raises a second issue. This "new orthodoxy" does not carry all before it. Marinetto (2003) disputes the "Anglo-Governance School's" claim there has been a loss of central control. He suggests that it exaggerates the ruptures in history, arguing there has been a long-standing tension between centralization (government) and fragmentation (governance) in Britain. In a similar vein, Holliday (2000) insists Britain still has a strong core executive, the center has not been hollowed out, networks have not spread, and the center can and does exercise effective control. Whether the Anglo-Governance School has "to undergo an intellectual crisis wrought by the growing weight of criticism" and

the extent to which this "critical response is underway, albeit gradually" will become clear over the next few years (Marinetto 2003, 605–6). I too expect to see "alternative ways of conceptualising the institutions, actors and processes of change in government," to listen to a new generation of stories about governance, and to ponder another round of debate about whether changes are epiphenomena of present-day government policy or more deep-seated ruptures. Stick around long enough and the aphorism "what goes around comes around" sounds like a balanced summary of fads and fashions in the social sciences rather than irony or even cynicism.

3.2 Explaining Change

The most common and recurrent criticism of policy network analysis is that it does not, and cannot, explain change (for a summary of the argument and citations, see Richardson 2000). So, policy network analysis stresses how networks limit participation in the policy process; decide which issues will be included and excluded from the policy agenda; shape the behavior of actors through the rules of the game; privilege certain interests; and substitute private government for public accountability. It is about stability, privilege, and continuity.

There have been several attempts to analyze change and networks but I must make two preliminary points. First, it is no mean feat to describe and explain continuity and stability in policy making. Second, the analysis of change may be a recurring problem but, and this point is crucial, it is not specific to the study of networks. Just as there are many theories of bureaucracy, so there are many theories of policy networks. There is no consensus in the political science community about how to explain, for example, political change, only competing epistemological positions and a multitude of theories. Students of policy networks can no more produce an accepted explanatory theory of change than (say) students of bureaucracy, democracy, or economic development. Debates in the policy network literature mirror the larger epistemological and ontological debates in the social sciences.

Of the several efforts to build the analysis of change into policy networks, three have attracted attention: advocacy coalitions, the dialectical model, and decentered analysis.

The advocacy coalition framework (ACF) has four basic premises. First, "understanding the process of policy change... requires a time perspective of a decade or more." Second, "the most useful way to think about policy change... is through a focus on 'policy subsystems'." Third, "those subsystems must include an intergovernmental dimension." Finally, "public policies... can be conceptualized in the same manner as belief systems, that is, sets of value priorities and causal assumptions about how to realize them" (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993, 16). Sabatier argues that coalitions try to translate their beliefs into public policy. Their belief systems determine the direction of policy. Their resources determine their capacity to change

government programs. Resources change over time, most commonly in response to changes external to the subsystem. Most distinctively, Sabatier distinguishes between core and secondary beliefs and argues that coalitions have a consensus on their policy core that is resistant to change. In sharp contrast, secondary aspects of the belief system can change rapidly (paraphrased from Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993, 25–34). Moreover, these beliefs are central to understanding the actions of policy makers who are not necessarily motivated by rational self-interest. However, as Parsons (1995, 201) succinctly points out, the model works well for the federal and fragmented government of America, but there is little evidence that it travels well.

The dialectical model proposed by Marsh and Smith (2000) suggests that change is a function of the interaction between the structure of the network and the agents operating in it, the network and the context in which it operates, and the network and policy outcomes. They see networks as structures that can constrain or facilitate action but do not determine actions because actors interpret and negotiate constraints. Exogenous factors may prompt network change but actors mediate that change. So we must examine not only the context of change but also structure, rules, and interpersonal relationship in the network. Finally, not only do networks affect policy outcomes but policy outcomes feed back and affect networks. This dialectical model provoked heated debate and lectures on how to do political science, but little convergence and a mere tad of insight (compare Marsh and Smith 2000, 2001, with Dowding 2001).

Grappling with the same issues as the formation, evolution, transformation, and termination of policy networks, Hay and Richards's "strategic relational theory of networks" is a sophisticated variation on the dialectical theme. To begin with, they avoid the ambiguities of, and controversies surrounding the term "dialectical." They argue individuals seeking to realize certain objectives and outcomes make a strategic assessment of the context in which they find themselves. However, that context is not neutral. It too is strategically selective in the sense that it privileges certain strategies over others. Individuals learn from their actions and adjust their strategies. The context is changed by their actions, so individuals have to adjust to a different context. So a networking is "a practice—an accomplishment on the part of strategic actors ... which takes place within a strategic (and strategically selective context) which is itself constantly evolving through the consequences (both intended and unintended) of strategic action" (Hay and Richards 2000, 14; see also Hay 2002).

A different challenge comes from those who advocate an interpretative turn and argue that policy network analysis could make greater use of such ethnographic tools as: studying individual behavior in everyday contexts; gathering data from many sources; adopting an "unstructured" approach; focusing on one group or locale; and, in analyzing the data, stressing the "interpretation of the meanings and functions of human action" (paraphrased from Hammersley 1990, 1–2). The task would be to write thick descriptions or our "constructions of other people's constructions of what they are up to" (Geertz 1973, 9, 20–1; and for a similar recognition that the political ethnography of networks is an instructive approach, see Heclo and Wildavsky 1974; McPherson and Raab 1988).