



The reciprocal relationship between policy debate and media coverage: The case of road pricing policy in the Netherlands

Özgül Ardic^{*}, Jan Anne Annema¹, Bert van Wee²

Delft University of Technology, Faculty of Technology, Policy and Management, Transport and Logistics Group, Jaffalaan 5, 2628 BX Delft, The Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 27 November 2013

Received in revised form 28 May 2015

Accepted 10 June 2015

Available online 1 July 2015

Keywords:

Road pricing

Media coverage

Policy debate

Policy process

ABSTRACT

This study examined the changes in the media coverage of two road pricing schemes proposed in the Netherlands in the period 1998–2010, as well as the link between the media coverage and the policy debate. Both pricing proposals were debated for several years and neither was introduced. Our findings show that space allocation for type of overall tone (e.g. negative or positive towards a pricing proposal) and the range of issues and policy actors in the media coverage were very different for the two proposals, and for each proposal fluctuated greatly over time. Our analysis suggests that such a variation in the media coverage was a reflection of changes in the content of the policy debate (e.g. caused by the specific design features of pricing proposal under discussion, the different policy actors engaged in the debate and their messages about the proposal). This indicates that policy-makers can influence the media coverage of road pricing policies to some extent by managing the policy debate. Our findings also show not only that changes in the content of the policy debate were reflected in the media coverage, but also that the media coverage influenced the policy debate: the statements or actions of policy actors received media coverage, which then in turn stimulated the policy debate. However, the influence of media on the policy debate was rather indirect, in that policy actors mostly reacted to the messages from other policy actors reported in the media and to a lesser extent to the media coverage itself.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Road pricing is generally considered an effective measure to deal with transport problems, for example congestion (Verhoef, 2008). Nevertheless, the policy process does not usually progress smoothly due to low public and political acceptability (Isaksson and Richardson, 2009; Frey, 2003; Jones, 2003; Schade and Schlag, 2003). In the policy process, the media might influence public and political support in various ways. Firstly, all policy actors keep an eye on the media to learn about the opinions and actions of other policy actors. Secondly, politicians monitor the media coverage of their policies as a proxy for public opinion and assume that the public is highly influenced by the media coverage (Heffernan, 2006; Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer, 2010). Finally, the media might influence public support because the public acquires most of its information about policy proposals from the media (Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer, 2010; Tresch, 2009).

^{*} Corresponding author. Tel.: +31 (0) 15 2788912.

E-mail addresses: ozgulardic@hotmail.com (Ö. Ardic), J.A.Annema@tudelft.nl (J.A. Annema), G.P.vanWee@tudelft.nl (B. van Wee).

¹ Tel.: +31 (0) 15 2788912.

² Tel.: +31 (0) 15 2781144.

It is therefore not surprising that the question how the media present policy issues has attracted the attention of researchers. Some studies have examined the media coverage of various policy issues in several policy fields such as the environment, health and monetary policy (e.g. Lyytimäki, 2011; Jönsson, 2011; Collins et al., 2006; Böhm et al., 2012; Hayes et al., 2007). In addition, some studies in the area of transport policy (e.g. Rissel et al., 2010; Nygrén et al., 2012; Judge, 2002) have explored the media coverage of transport policy issues. However, only three of these latter studies focused on road pricing policy. The media coverage of the Edinburgh, Manchester and London road pricing schemes was analysed by Ryley and Gjersoe (2006), Vigar et al. (2011) and Gaber (2004), respectively. All three studies drew a similar conclusion, namely that the media coverage had a generally negative tone and that some policy issues had been neglected. Each study presented valuable implications for both future research and policymakers. However, each study examined the media coverage of only one road pricing scheme during a policy process that took one or two years. The media's involvement in a policy process and the media coverage of public policies are contingent on several factors, such as policy content or the type of policy events (e.g. political crisis) in the policy fields concerned (Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer, 2010). Therefore, a more comprehensive approach that considers changes in these factors is needed to elicit the characteristics of the media coverage of road pricing policies. Furthermore, all the studies to date have analysed the British media. Their findings do not necessarily explain the characteristics of the media coverage of road pricing policies in other countries. The media coverage of the same issue can vary between countries because of differences in media systems (de Vreese et al., 2001; Oates, 2008). More importantly, these studies did not question whether and, if so, to what extent the media coverage of road pricing policies influences the policy debate (and policy processes), or vice versa.

To address these gaps, this study analysed the media coverage of road pricing policy in a country with a different media system, namely the Netherlands. For example, reporting is more conflict-oriented in the UK compared to the Netherlands (see Vliegenthart et al., 2011). Moreover, the study adopted a more comprehensive approach than previous studies and looked into the media coverage of two road pricing schemes, rather than only one. The analysis covered a policy process that took 12 years (1998–2010) and explored changes in the media coverage of the two schemes at different stages of the policy process, the roles of a varying number and type of policy actors (e.g. politicians and interest groups) and various types of policy events.

Three research questions were formulated. The first – which was intended to identify the characteristics of media coverage (e.g. its tone and space allocation for issues or actors) – was: To what extent did the characteristics of the media coverage of two Dutch pricing proposals differ from each other and change over time? The two other research questions concerned the relationship between media coverage and the content of policy debate. Studies in the communication field indicate that the relationship between media coverage and the policy debate is reciprocal. While the content of the policy debate (and the policy position of newspapers) shapes media coverage, the policy debate and the course of the policy processes can sometimes be influenced by media coverage (this is dealt with in Section 2). Based on this premise, research questions two and three were: To what extent did the content of the policy debate influence media coverage? And to what extent and how did the media coverage influence the policy debate and the course of the policy process of the Dutch road pricing policies?

Since 1977, there have been several unsuccessful attempts in the Netherlands to introduce a road pricing scheme in one form or another. Two schemes – *Rekeningrijden* and *Kilometerheffing* – were each intensively discussed for several years. *Rekeningrijden* proposed charging road users during peak hours to use the ring roads around the country's largest cities (Den Haag, Rotterdam, Utrecht and Amsterdam) and was high on the political agenda between 1998 and 2001. *Kilometerheffing* was envisaged as a variable kilometre charge according to vehicle type, and time and place on the country's entire road network. The kilometre charge was going to gradually replace the existing annual road tax and car purchase tax. *Kilometerheffing* was on the agenda between 2001 and 2010.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 introduces the theoretical background to the study and outlines the reciprocal relationship between media coverage and policy debate. Section 3 provides the methodological foundation of the study. Section 4 presents the policy positions of Dutch newspapers and explores the degree to which they provide an accurate account of policy debate. Section 5 discusses the variation in the characteristics of media coverage and how changes in the content of the policy debate are reflected in the media coverage. Section 6 concerns the influence of the media coverage on the policy debate and the policy process. Finally, Section 7 presents the main conclusions and policy implications.

2. The relationship between policy debate and media coverage

The relationship between the media coverage of policies and policy debates is dynamic and reciprocal (Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer, 2010; Wolfsfeld, 2014). Fig. 1 depicts a simplified illustration of this relationship. van Aelst and Vliegenthart (2014, p. 394) reviewed studies that had analysed this reciprocal relationship, and reported that whereas some studies show the dominance of 'media-to-politics' influence, others refer to 'politics-to-media' dominance despite a common agreement that 'the influence works both ways': policy actors create and promote their messages, and then the media covers some of these messages, which triggers reactions from other actors and influences the policy debate (Sellers, 2010; Wolfsfeld, 2014). It is also argued that the media are an initiator of this influence cycle, since 'policy actors already in their initial behaviour take into account how the media will react' (van Aelst and Vliegenthart, 2014, p. 395). For public policies, Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer (2010) noted that whether the media coverage triggers changes in the policy debate (and policy process) or vice versa depends on the policy fields in question. The relationship between the media and politics is also conditional: the media

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6781275>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6781275>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)