



Best of enemies: Using social network analysis to explore a policy network in European smoke-free policy



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ABSTRACT

Networks and coalitions of stakeholders play a crucial role in the development and implementation of policies, with previous research highlighting that networks in tobacco control are characterised by an antagonism between supporters and opponents of comprehensive tobacco control policies. This UK-based study used quantitative and qualitative network analysis (drawing on 176 policy submissions and 32 interviews) to systematically map and analyse a network of actors involved in the development of European Union (EU) smoke-free policy. Policy debates were dominated by two coalitions of stakeholders with starkly opposing positions on the issue. One coalition, consisting primarily of health-related organisations, supported comprehensive EU smoke-free policy, whereas the other, led by tobacco manufacturers' organisations, opposed the policy initiative. The data suggest that, aided by strong political commitment of EU decision makers to develop smoke-free policy, advocates supporting comprehensive EU policy were able to frame policy debates in ways which challenged the tobacco industry's legitimacy. They then benefited from the stark polarisation between the two coalitions. The paper provides empirical evidence of the division between two distinct coalitions in tobacco policy debates and draws attention to the complex processes of consensus-seeking, alliance-building and strategic action which are integral to the development of EU policy. Highlighting network polarisation and industry isolation as factors which seemed to increase tobacco control success, the study demonstrates the potential significance and value of FCTC article 5.3 for tobacco control policy-making.

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1. Introduction

The investigation of policies is an integral part of public health research because political decisions considerably impact on population health. Stemming from a recognition that the development of effective public health policies require concerted effort from various stakeholders (Edwards, 2004; Hecló, 1975), the concept of policy networks, an approach which tries to capture the contribution of various actors in the development of policy, has received increasing attention among the academic community (Bomberg et al., 2008; Marsh, 1998; Rhodes, 1997). Peterson and Bomberg (1999, p. 8) define a policy network as “a cluster of actors, each of which has an interest, or a ‘stake’ in a given [...] policy sector and

the capacity to help determine policy success or failure”. As complex, non-hierarchical groups of mutually dependent actors that engage in policymaking (Hecló, 1975; Peterson, 2009), policy networks allow stakeholders with joint interests and similar values and positions to form alliances and jointly influence policymaking within a given area (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Sabatier, 1998; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993). While some scholars have critiqued concepts of policy networks as being insufficient to provide explanations for policy change or yield detailed insights into the dynamics of policymaking (Dowding, 1994, 1995), others have argued that the analysis of policy networks can increase understanding of policy outcomes (Marsh and Smith, 2000). (For detailed reflections on the concept of policy networks and its application in different legislative contexts, see, for example, Bessusi (2006) or Börzel (1998)). Despite of disagreement in the academic literature about the explanatory power of the policy network concept, social network analysis (SNA) has emerged as a useful tool to map and analyse networks of interconnected actors. One of the major

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strengths of SNA is its compatibility with other methodological approaches and its malleability to different political concepts.

Several scholars have highlighted the crucial role of networks and coalitions in the development and implementation of tobacco control policies (Cairney, 2007; Farquharson, 2003; Princen, 2007; Read, 1992). Their work suggests that policy networks in tobacco control are distinctly and unusually polarised and characterised by two groups which hold strongly opposing views and compete against each other when trying to advance their interests at the political level. Analysing the history of global tobacco control, Farquharson (2003, p. 90) argues that tobacco control policymaking is dominated by “two easily distinguishable and competing” alliances. She describes an anti-tobacco alliance of experts and activists who campaign for comprehensive tobacco control policy and whose views are diametrically opposed to those of tobacco sector representatives who aim to influence “tobacco policy at all levels of government, ensuring that regulations [...] are minimal” (Farquharson, 2003, p. 85). Elaborating on this idea, Smith (2013, p. 382) employs the term “tobacco wars” to describe the hostile debates between proponents and opponents of comprehensive tobacco control policy. A stark divide is also illustrated by articles describing Japanese (Sato, 1999), British (Arnott et al., 2007; Read, 1992), Scottish (Harrison and Hurst, 2005) and Irish (Currie and Clancy, 2011) tobacco control policy. Accounts of tobacco control policy suggest that opponents of tobacco control have historically been more successful in influencing national policies (Read, 1992; Sato, 1999), but that recently and with regard to smoke-free policies, tobacco control coalitions have emerged as a considerable counterforce against tobacco industry action (Arnott et al., 2007; Currie and Clancy, 2011; Drope, 2010; Harrison and Hurst, 2005). Cairney et al. (2011), who provide one of the most recent analyses of global tobacco control, confirm this shift in power within policy networks in tobacco control towards increasing recognition of public health and declining power of tobacco industry alliances.

While the existing literature on stakeholder engagement in tobacco control policy offers useful insights into the antagonism in tobacco control policy debates, most of it is either dated or based on observational accounts of policy processes. No study to date provides empirical evidence or a systematic analysis of the composition and dynamics of policy networks and coalitions of stakeholders involved in tobacco control, a gap which this study aims to fill. Applying concepts of policy networks and alliance-building to an empirical study, this paper analyses the engagement and collaboration of organisational stakeholders in the development of EU action to reduce exposure to second-hand smoke (SHS). The paper, which is the first to employ qualitative and quantitative SNA of documentary and interview data to explore EU public health policymaking, aims to assess the utility of SNA for developing a comprehensive understanding of the structure and formation of a policy network in EU tobacco control policy, shed light on the extent and dynamics of the schism between tobacco industry and tobacco control advocates and explore how the division developed in the context of EU tobacco control policy. Contrasting existing tobacco control research, which has overwhelmingly focused on tobacco industry interference, this paper adds a new perspective on the broader dynamics of tobacco control policy by providing empirical data on the overall policy network and exploring the complex set of social interactions that occur in the political environment.

In the following section, the key events in the development of EU tobacco control and smoke-free policy are summarised. Then, the network analysis of 176 policy submissions and the qualitative analysis of 32 semi-structured interviews are described. After presenting findings on the policy network, its polarity, the position of EU institutions and the actions of tobacco control advocates, the

paper discusses potential reasons for the structure, formation and dynamics of the network and outlines implications for tobacco control policy and practice.

2. The development of EU tobacco control and smoke-free policy

Despite its limited competence to adopt public health legislation, the EU has built a substantial track record of tobacco control policy. EU initiatives to tackle tobacco were first triggered by the Europe against Cancer Programme and the establishment of the Bureau for Action on Smoking Prevention in the late 1980s, followed in subsequent decades by several directives concerning tobacco advertising, tobacco products and the exposure to SHS in the workplace. In 1989, negotiations were initiated concerning a Europe-wide tobacco advertising ban, which, after years of tobacco industry opposition, political deadlock and a court case in the European Court of Justice, came into force in 2006. At the same time, EU institutions negotiated larger health warning labels, disclosure of ingredients and additives, ceilings for tar, nicotine and carbon monoxide, and prohibition of misleading descriptors on cigarette packaging, leading to the European tobacco products directive in 2001.

Despite demonstrating considerable public health successes, the history of EU tobacco control policy provides overwhelming evidence of tobacco industry opposition to, and success in delaying, modifying and preventing, effective tobacco control policies (Bitton et al., 2002; Mandal et al., 2009; Neuman et al., 2002; Smith et al., 2010). Strategies included lobbying policymakers, contesting the policy process and legal challenges. An increased awareness of industry interference has led public health advocates to fight for the exclusion of tobacco industry representatives from tobacco control policy debates (Corporate Accountability International & NATT, 2008; International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease, 2012; World Health Organization, 2009). Calls are frequently made with reference to article 5.3 of the World Health Organisation Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), which requires parties to protect tobacco control policies “from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry in accordance with national law” (World Health Organization, 2003, p. 7), an obligation assumed by the EU in becoming party to the FCTC in 2005.

The EU level process of developing policy to tackle exposure to SHS in workplaces and public places (summarised in Table 1) began with the release of a Green Paper by the Directorate General for Health and Consumers of the European Commission (DG SANCO) in January 2007, which outlined the harms caused by SHS and potential policy options to tackle the problem via the action of EU institutions (DG SANCO, 2007a). DG SANCO initiated a broad public consultation process, generating a total of 311 submissions, including 176 organisational responses (DG SANCO, 2007a). Many submissions expressed support for EU action, with 60% favouring comprehensive EU smoke-free policy without exemptions (DG SANCO, 2007b). In a November 2007 consultation report, the European Commission declared its commitment to assisting EU member states in implementing comprehensive smoke-free legislation (DG SANCO, 2007b). In the following months, DG SANCO commissioned a report analysing the proposed policy options (Scoggins et al., 2009) and established an Inter-Service Steering Group to support work on the impact assessment (DG SANCO, 2008). As part of the impact assessment, DG SANCO invited stakeholders to a targeted consultation (DG SANCO, 2008), resulting in 38 interest representatives (of which 25 represented health and social organisation, 13 industry and one a UK-based smokers' rights organisation) attending two consultation meetings on 19 March 2008 (DG SANCO, 2008). On 30 June 2009, DG SANCO

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