



# The organisation of complexity: A set of five components to organise the social interface of rural policy making



Elke Rogge\*, Joost Dessein, Anna Verhoeve

*Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research, Social Sciences Unit, Burgemeester van Gansberghelaan 115, Box 2, B-9820 Merelbeke, Belgium*

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 12 March 2013  
Received in revised form 13 June 2013  
Accepted 17 June 2013

### Keywords:

Governance  
Rural policy making  
Social interface  
Multi-stakeholder process

## ABSTRACT

During the last decades the European countryside has witnessed some major changes. This ‘rural restructuring’ implies a shift from an agricultural and manufacturing-based economy towards a service-centred economy in which the countryside is considered to be a place of consumption instead of a place of production. These major changes are accompanied by a shift in policy towards more engagement of stakeholders for the development and implementation of government objectives. However, making this shift from a steering government to a more enabling one does not come about naturally and authorities often lack adequate resources, professional skills and equipment to take on this enabling role. In their search for the development of sound policy, policy makers are often confronted with a social interface to overcome. In line with Long (2003), we defined this social interface as “a critical point of intersection between different life worlds, social fields or levels of social organisation, where social discontinuities based upon discrepancies in values, interests, knowledge and power, are most likely to be located”. Making an (analytical) distinction between three main dimensions of the interface of policy making, namely the presence of a multitude of actors, the difficulty of integrating different knowledge systems and the need to reconcile different policy levels, enabled us to deal with the complexity of policy making processes. The objective of this paper is to investigate how this interface can be organised in such a way that a constructive collaboration allows a sound and widely accepted rural policy to develop. We describe three cases in Flanders (Belgium) for which new rural policy needed to be developed: agrarian architecture, the development of a landscape vision and the development of a policy strategy for castles, manors and their parks. Based on the comparative analysis of these cases, we were able to define five components that allow the organisation of the social interface: define common goals; identify the actors; integrate different knowledge systems; design the process; and guard transparency, fairness and procedural justice of the process.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## Introduction

Immediately after the second World War, the main land-use policies were implemented through centralised planning and were inspired by a vision of the ‘provider-state’, as in many other areas of governance (e.g. education, health and social services). As Dwyer (2011, p. 676) describes ‘this vision was for a land surface largely preserved as countryside and held in private hands, for the purposes of agricultural production and amenity’. However during the past decades, the advances in environmental science, as well as a perceived growing public demand for recreation and landscape appreciation lead to processes of fundamental

change within rural Europe (Dwyer, 2011). This ‘rural restructuring’ (Floysand and Jakobsen, 2007, p. 208) results in a shift from a rural, agriculture- and manufacturing-based economy towards a more service-centred economy, and a related commoditisation of the countryside as a predominantly residential and recreational area (Woods, 2005). For the wide majority of people the countryside is therefore no longer essentially devoted to the production of agri-food goods; but it has become an essential lifestyle component (Vouligny et al., 2009).

From the 1980s on several rounds of CAP reforms sought to realign policy more closely with societal demands and have gradually broadened rural development policies (Shortall, 2004; Dwyer, 2011). Slowly, there was a shift from support to agriculture-related practices (pillar 1) towards more attention for and financial support to the environment and the countryside (pillar 2), the quality of life in rural areas and the diversification of the rural economy (pillar 3) (European Commission, 2001). In literature, this major shift from an agricultural sector that is characterised by intensification, concentration and specialisation (Bowler, 1985; Walford, 2003) to

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +32 9 272 23 64; fax: +32 9 272 23 41; mobile: +32 496 62 62 16.

E-mail addresses: [elke.rogge@ilvo.vlaanderen.be](mailto:elke.rogge@ilvo.vlaanderen.be) (E. Rogge), [joost.dessein@ilvo.vlaanderen.be](mailto:joost.dessein@ilvo.vlaanderen.be) (J. Dessein), [anna.verhoeve@ilvo.vlaanderen.be](mailto:anna.verhoeve@ilvo.vlaanderen.be) (A. Verhoeve).

an agricultural system with more diversified objectives than those related to intensive production (Kristensen et al., 2001), is referred to as the shift from agricultural productivism to post-productivism (Ilbery and Bowler, 1998; Marsden, 1995). This means that, besides the production of raw materials such as food, fibre and fodder, there is an enlarged attention for the provision of public services such as recreation, amenity, care and ecosystem services (Mather et al., 2006; Jongeneel et al., 2008; Dessein et al., 2013).

This change in European strategy promoted a greater reliance on framework approaches towards rural policy. This implies an increasing resort to stakeholder ‘partnerships’ in the detailed design and implementation of policy (Shortall, 2008; Dwyer, 2011). The government thus becomes an enabler of processes in which stakeholder partnerships are used to help set and oversee strategic directions in policy. Simultaneously we notice that all policy spheres are moving towards more engagement of stakeholders for the development and implementation of their government objectives, thus shifting from government to governance (Curry, 2001). In political science in general, governance implies that societal and economic actors gain influence over policy (Peters and Pierre, 1998). Political decisions are being discussed and negotiated between state actors and private actors (Böcher, 2008), resulting in a co-creation of policy. In combination with an increasing decentralisation of political and administrative responsibilities (Louw et al., 2003) policy making has become a complex multi-level and multi-actor exercise.

However, making this shift from a steering government to a more enabling one does not come about naturally. As Gedikli (2009) states local authorities or agencies often lack adequate resources, professional skills and equipment to perform decentralised functions. Within Flanders we notice that policy makers at different policy levels are faced with a set of challenges when trying to formulate new rural policy in a participatory style.

In their search for the development of sound policy, policy makers are often confronted with a social interface to overcome. In line with Long (2003), we consider a social interface as “a critical point of intersection between different life worlds, social fields or levels of social organisation, where social discontinuities based upon discrepancies in values, interests, knowledge and power, are most likely to be located”. During the process of policy development, policy makers are continuously faced with such a point of intersection where different point of views, values and knowledge systems meet. Moreover, in a context that is shifting from government to governance, this interface is getting ever more complex as a result of the increasing amount of stakeholders involved. And although there is to some degree a common interest between all these individuals and organisations, the intersection between all these parties is typically a site for conflict and incompatibility. Conflicts that can be due to contradictory interests and objectives, different world views and values or unequal power relations (Long, 1999).

Although the word ‘interface’ tends to convey the image of some kind of two-sided articulation or face-to-face confrontation, social interface situations are more complex and multiple in nature, containing within them many different interests, relationships and modes of rationality and power (Long, 1999). Long (1999) describes the interface as a complex intertwining of actors, institutions, knowledge and power.

In order to get a better grasp of this complexity we distinguish three main characteristics of this interface. Although we are fully aware that these three aspects are mere analytical distinctions that are strongly intertwined, we find them useful to better understand the complex situation of policy making.

First of all, the interface is characterised by the presence of a multitude of actors. Despite several pleas for policy making in a multifunctional spirit (Shortall, 2008; Dwyer, 2011; Li et al.,

2012; Glass et al., 2013), on the field there is often a considerable tension between the different policy domains, sectors and stakeholders. An array of different individuals, groups and organisations are involved (experts, extensionists, farmers, researchers, policy makers, civil servants, politicians, citizens, activists, representatives, ...). All these different parties typically represent particular constituencies, groups or organisations, each with their respective values, ambitions, interests and objectives. Following Long (2003, p. 53), we can expect that “their position is inevitably ambivalent since they must respond to the demands of their own groups as well as to the expectations of those with whom they must negotiate”. Furthermore, the relations between these different actors are complicated by sometimes very intricate power struggles. Power in itself is a very complex concept. As Foucault (in Gorden, 1980) states power is not simply possessed, accumulated and unproblematically exercised (Foucault in Gorden, 1980). It is the outcome of complex struggles and negotiations over authority, status, reputation and recourses (Callon and Law, 1995).

A second aspect that is crucial in understanding interfaces is the difference between various types of knowledge, including ideas about oneself, other people and the context and social institutions. Especially, in situations where a planned intervention is foreseen (such as policy making) knowledge gets a important significance as such situations imply the interplay or confrontation of expert – versus lay forms of knowledge, beliefs and values (Long, 1999). The latter refers to the sometimes chaotic and incoherent knowledge derived from people’s everyday construction of the rural within the context of their own lives (Jones, 1995). The former refers to knowledge generated in a specific academic setting, aiming at objectifying in a structured way the externally observed rural. Although different knowledge systems are present in all social situations, they are particularly important in the context of interventions, such as policy making, as they entail an encounter of beliefs, values and power. This encounter is even more complicated as a specific actor may use, consciously or unconsciously, and simultaneously or consecutively, different kinds of knowledge.

Finally a third important aspect of the interface of policy making is the need to involve different policy levels. There is a growing need for policies to reconcile top down, international and strategic needs and trends with the now-embedded ethos of local partnership and stakeholder consultation in rural governance (Dwyer, 2011). This implies a growing search for an effective division of responsibilities among central, regional and local governments (Gedikli, 2009). As Louw et al. (2003) state policy development is a major challenge especially, where political-administrative responsibilities within territories are divided among municipalities, regional governments and many sectors of government (as is the case in Flanders).

With this research, we do not want to overcome, take away nor ignore the distinctions that can be found at the interface of policy making. Neither do we want to theorise on the concept of social interfaces or is it our intention to make a thorough interface analysis (Long, 1999). Rather, we want to shape “the encounters at the interface” (Long, 1989) in such a way that over time “the interface itself becomes an organised entity of interlocking relationships and intentionalities” (Long, 2001, p. 69). The objective of this paper is to investigate how this interface can be organised in such a way that a constructive collaboration allows a sound and widely accepted rural policy to develop.

After a methodological section, we describe three different cases in Flanders (Belgium): agrarian architecture, development of a landscape vision and the development of a policy strategy for castles, manors and their parks. Based on the comparative analysis of these cases, we are able to define ‘success’ factors in the organisation of the interface of making rural policy, and combine these into a set of components that can contribute to the flexible organisation of rural policy making.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/93190>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/93190>

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