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Rediscovering Public Law and Public Administration in Comparative Policy Analysis: Tribute to Peter Knoepfel.

Edited by Stéphane Nahrath and Frédéric Varone.

Chapter 15 "A pragmatic constructivism"

Philippe Warin

Pragmatic constructivism is characterized in a particular epistemology based on the quest for *parametric objectivity*. In Peter Knoepfel's public policy analysis, this theoretical perspective relates to the study of the construction of marks of objectivity (that is, the measures contained in or inferred by a policy: problems, criteria, procedures, mechanisms, norms) which, according to him, make up the substance of policies. The place granted to the concepts of 'actors', 'resources' and 'institutional rules' in the proposed analytical framework is a clear illustration of this (Knoepfel, Larrue & Varone, 2006).¹ However, this quest is unlikely to be successful if there is no empirical endeavour to explain the interactions between the three concepts. This is why Peter Knoepfel has constantly formulated the equation between actors, resources and rules, in operationalizable terms – in both his research work carried out in close proximity to public action (through various mandates) and in his teaching in Switzerland and abroad.² The policy analysis defended by him is constantly shaped by a pragmatic perspective. The aim is to gain insight into concrete (observable) practices, through which actors produce a shared normative signification, particularly in terms of an hypothesis on problem causation (who or what is 'guilty' or 'objectively responsible' for the collective problem to be resolved?) and an hypothesis on state intervention (how can the collective problem be alleviated or resolved?). This pragmatism is located in a constant effort at methodological operationalization, which is systematically aimed at exploring the explanation for this trilogy (actors, resources, rules) and its interactions as a pragmatic concept. Peter Knoepfel always expects the explanation of a policy to cite factors that are *important*. For him the idea of importance (as for the pragmatists, Hilary Putnam (1990) in particular) is always

¹ This reference work is the main theme of this chapter.

² As I was able to witness by accompanying him for several years at a seminar in the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Grenoble.

dependent on the reason for asking the question *why*? In this instance, why such-and-such an actor, rule or resource?

The constructivist pragmatism which, in my opinion, characterizes Peter Knoepfel's approach to policy analysis can be explained. This is my objective here. To that end, I will: (I) indicate the systemic and non-positivistic nature of his approach; (II) highlight his adhesion to the methodological principle of the contingency of analysis; and (III) demonstrate the axiomatic neutrality of the approach. This will reveal the utility of his analytical framework in finding answers to a fundamental question: i.e. *how are public policies made*?

1. A systemic and non-positivistic approach to policy

The pragmatic constructivism characterizing the framework for policy analysis proposed by Knoepfel can be explained, first, in terms of its simultaneously systemic and non-positivistic conception of policy. He sees policies as a cascade of decisions and activities, the interactions of which produce observable results. This is what makes the system. The idea of *system* implies the consideration of both decisions and activities as perpetual combinations which aim to establish equilibriums between actors – i.e. from deciders to stakeholders – and through them between different social interests. These equilibriums are necessarily partial and provisional at each step of the policy cycle. In this regard, Peter Knoepfel postulates a renewal of them. In a sense it is summed up in the reproduction of one of his works (Peter Knoepfel is also an artist) found on the cover of *Analyse et pilotage des politiques publiques*, which brings to mind ‘Tinguely's Machine’.

At the same time, Knoepfel's approach is also non-positivistic. It starts with observed facts which give policies their substance and avoids referring to them as an ideal type (Coenen-Huther, 2003). However unlike *scientific positivism* (as defined by Auguste Comte) it does not give up asking the question *why*? Consequently, for Knoepfel, policies are inevitably an *act* that is visible and can, therefore, be grasped by the analyst. For this reason, the proposed approach seeks to develop a scientific analysis of public policy, based on the study of variables to be explained (the ‘*products*’ of a policy) by means of explanatory factors (the

actors, resources and institutional rules). The idea is to consider these six products³ from two points of view: i.e. substantial (*‘How to solve the public problem?’*) and institutional (*‘Which actors are going to contribute to the next step in solving the problem, based on which rules and using which resources?’*). The kaleidoscope of explanatory variables changes for each product examined, however the questions remain the same: why such-and-such an actor, rule or resource?

By reasoning in terms of dependent and independent variables, the production of any proposal pertaining to the explanation of a phenomenon (*‘Why this definition of this public problem? Why this politico-administrative programme?’* etc.) is subject to the control of its statements. The analyst is urged to follow a logical reasoning inspired by the Popperian principles of *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (Popper, 1959⁴) for this purpose. To be valid, the approach must respect the ‘golden rules’. For example, Knoepfel always recommends the question *‘Why is there not such-and-such an actor, resource, or rule?’*. Thus an analysis of policies, whose statements can be falsified, is produced. According to Knoepfel, *‘the proposed analytical model can be applied in various scientific perspectives, that is, to describe, interpret, explain or even anticipate the content of a policy’* (Knoepfel, Larrue & Varone, 2006: 276). If it is to be more than an impressionistic account, under no circumstances may the analysis exclude the study of observed facts. Its relevance lies in the reconstruction of the overall logic of a system of decisions and activities taken as a whole. To that end, it is necessary to highlight observed facts and to note their compositional effects. The analysis thus requires a depersonalization and complexification of the logical reasoning (*‘Why these variables and not others?’*) by integrating multiple feedback loops. In this way, linear reasoning loses its plausibility and relevance. Two aspects are particularly important here: first, the fact of highlighting the validity of each observed fact, insofar as it is possible to find the ‘right reasons’ for their presence or absence by reconstructing explanatory variables; second, and above all, the fact of highlighting the simultaneity of explanatory variables, from which it is possible to specify the dynamics of policies on the basis of parts of their content.

To explain the logical reasoning at work, consider for a moment what Peter Knoepfel and his co-authors call the ‘Product n° 1’ of a policy, *‘the political definition of the public problem’*.

³ The products are: *‘the political definition of the public problem’*, *‘the politico-administrative programme’*, *‘the politico-administrative arrangement’*, *‘the action plans’*, *‘the implementation outputs’*, *‘the evaluative statements on the effects of a public policy’*.

⁴ First English translation.

The initial idea is that there are no policies without decisions or activities (legislative, regulatory, administrative, etc.) designed to implement them. The problems addressed by policies are highly specific however: they are problems that are politically defined as public.

If a social problem is the subject of a political controversy it becomes a political problem. From this point of view there is nothing original about the proposed approach. It fits into the *agenda-building* perspective, which shows that the emergence of a problem is accompanied by a process of problem-framing, during which the actors propose their definition of the situation based on their own perception of the problem (Cobb & Elder, 1972). But it is also part of the constructivist approach to public problems, now dominant in North American research,⁵ which, under the impetus of John Kitsuse's and Malcolm Spector's group at the Society for the Study of Social Problems, strongly emphasizes the social construction of the meaning of things and events (Gusfield, 1981, 1984; Spector & Kitsuse, 1987). It also embodies the cognitivist conception of '*agenda-setting* as a '*continuous operation of construction and symbolic reconstruction*' (Padioleau, 1982: 26). The importance of ideas in the political definition of the public problem is not overlooked. The authors point out that '*the assessment of problems depends not only on the objective conditions of the situation deemed to be problematical, but also on its evaluation and subjective weighting (that is, the political definition) by the actors concerned*' (Knoepfel, Larrue & Varone, 2006: 145). Knoepfel nevertheless approaches the issue of agenda-setting (like everything else) from a pragmatic perspective. Like the North Americans, he advises the analyst to strive, above all, to account for the stakeholders' representations of the nature of the problem. To that end, and somewhat akin to researchers in ethnomethodology, the interactionists (Blumer, 1971) or sociologists of science (Latour & Woolgar, 1979), he proposes the same dimensions of operational analysis ('*intensity, perimeter, novelty, urgency of the problem*') as those, around which the actors struggle concretely to reach a political definition of the public problem. It is in this struggle, and not only for pre-established reasons linked to statuses or institutional context, or for existing cognitive schemes (or *framing*), that the '*political entrepreneurs*' so dear to Cobb and Edler *effectively* appear as actors. The analyst then has the possibility of recognizing them if he or she is prepared to undertake an empirical inquiry. For that purpose, it is necessary to examine these dimensions (and others, Knoepfel recommends) as precisely as possible, to show that a situation becomes a public problem not because of its intrinsic characteristics, but

⁵ For an overview of precursory debates, see: Schneider, 1985; Holstein & Miller, 1993.

because of the way in which the actors construe these dimensions to ensure that the situation appears on the political agenda.

2. The contingency of policy analysis

This systemic and non-positivistic approach means *ipso facto* that it is necessary to try to inter-relate decisions and activities; it is naturally situated in the here-and-now of interactions between the two. The epistemological foundation of this approach to public policy analysis is the contingency of the analysis. As Erhard Friedberg, who defends the pragmatic value of the scientific analysis of organizations, says, it is based '*on the implementation of an intuitive and progressive choice of the outlines and central points or sensitive areas whose study allows for the best progress to be made in the understanding of the whole*' (Friedberg, 1993: 244). Hence, policy analysis and its results are historically situated. It is an empirical explication of a construct that the historically and spatially situated actors ('*public actors*', '*target groups*' and '*beneficiary groups*', in Knoepfel's terminology) have instituted to produce the processes of exchange and power that interweave the interactions between decisions and activities. Clearly, an explanation such as this is also historically situated and its demonstration, as both Knoepfel and Friedberg say, cannot claim to exhaust reality or to propose a general model. The validity of the analysis lasts no longer than the policy itself; it loses its relevance as soon as the policy changes. The course of public policies is by no means automatic. It is subject to the uncertainties of the interactions between decisions or activities. Moreover, their duration is subject to the possibility of challenging the '*hypotheses on the causes*' of the problems to solve and the '*hypotheses on the state solutions*' to provide, on which they are based at some point.

The contingency of the analysis does not mean that one should disregard the diachrony and study of change in the definition of the problem causation and state intervention hypotheses, as is so often believed (Friedberg, 1993: 244). Public policies are not eventless; they really happen. Moreover, they have a historicity in so far as – produced by historically and spatially situated actors – they are only meaningful for a limited period. Peter Knoepfel situates himself, therefore, in a synchronic perspective and warns us that the systemic and non-positivistic approach to public policy, which he defends, must recognize the temporal contingency of the analysis thus produced. In his opinion, there is nothing stable or timeless about a policy. On the contrary, it is a dynamic process of interaction. Hence, the empirical

knowledge of the structural mechanisms – especially the general and specific 'institutional rules' influencing the actors' games and stabilizing interactions between decisions and activities – is what enables the analyst to describe and understand policy transformation (or abandonment) processes. The highly instructive example of the public problem of “poisoned water” enables him to get this theoretical message across. From the witches of yesteryear burned at the stake to today's farmers forced to change their production techniques, Peter Knoepfel uses allegory to talk about the historicity of the definition and treatment of a public problem. Moreover, the historicity of public policies is a principal component in this approach in that this dimension accommodates enduring and international comparisons as precisely explained in this book.

The (Hegelian) conception of the historicity of the problem causation and state intervention hypotheses underlying the choice and way of acting explains Peter Knoepfel's interest in '*causal stories*' or, in other words, in public policy discourses which define the problems and legitimize the meaning of the action to be undertaken. His approach to public policies draws explicitly on the assets of cognitive perspectives which, in public policy analysis, serve to indicate the structuring importance of the '*causal stories*' (Stone, 1989) and, more recently, the '*normative frameworks*' or '*scalar narratives*' (Mahon & Johnson, 2006) that point out the 'right' key known for the definition of public problems and legitimate policies and the appropriate means of dealing with them. With Peter Knoepfel (unlike Erhard Friedberg and Michel Crozier) the contingency of the analysis does not lead to a refusal of the importance of ideas in the policy production process for fear of a conception postulated in political terms, like '*totalism*', i.e. as a producer of a general meaning whose effective scope cannot be demonstrated empirically (Leca & Jobert, 1980: 1149-1153). Knoepfel believes that the analyst's work consists in identifying competing causal stories so as to understand how a dominant '*problem causation hypothesis*' emerges in a conflictual debate. We are very close here to 'the approach by reference frameworks' developed in France on the basis of Bruno Jobert's and Pierre Muller's work (Jobert & Muller, 1987; Faure, Pollet & Warin, 1995). Yet with Knoepfel, as with Friedberg (Warin, 1997), the existence of a community of rules, a collective project, founding agreements and higher principles – all explanatory variables taken into account in the cognitivist approaches to policy – structures the field of action less explicitly than it does the capacity of the actors – who are placed in necessarily unequal

negotiating positions in relation to the portfolio of resources at their disposal⁶ – to impose a definition of the causal hypothesis and the intervention hypothesis.

The pragmatism of the approach is measured, therefore, in terms of the deliberately *a minima* treatment reserved for the actors' personal variables (interests, motivations, intentions, beliefs). These exist and influence the actors' behaviours but they are excluded from the analysis because they are not independent of the actors. Pragmatism here resembles a form of *realism*. The analyst retains only those statements which enable him or her to relate any consideration of the actors and their rationale empirically to the reciprocal conditioning between context (set of resources and rules) and action (interactions between decision and activities). In other words, apart from the observation of this mutual conditioning, nothing can be said about the actors' action from the scientific point of view. The proposed approach thus excludes the personal variables that reduce the predictive capacity of the analysis. From a theoretical point of view, we can see that it is carefully kept apart from propositions designed to surpass the rustic utilitarianism of the neoclassical theory of *homo economicus* (Etzioni, 1988, and before him an entire series of heterodox economists: Leibenstein, 1976; Akerlof, 1984). It is however based on a *logical positivism*, which to some extent brings to mind the ethnomethodologists' position when they contend that, apart from analyzing the processes through which the actors construct the situations they are simultaneously living and producing, the analyst has nothing but '*stories for the telling*' (Garfinkel, 1985).

In this type of approach the actors' power is concentrated in this capacity to control the resources and to mobilize them in a context of institutional rules so that they can impose both their opinions and demands on others. From this point of view, Peter Knoepfel does not problematize the political aspects of relations between actors much. He confines himself to an *a minima* conception of the political, amounting to the exchange of resources between the types of actor that he proposes to study: '*public authorities*', the '*target groups*', whose behaviours have to be changed to solve the public problem, and the '*beneficiary groups*' of the policy that is made and implemented. The power is incorporated into the political interaction that guides the definition of the problem causation and state intervention hypotheses, through the mobilization of resources within the framework of pre-established

⁶ The main resources studied are: '*force* (violence resource); *law* (legal resource); *staff* (human resource); *money* (monetary resource); *information* (cognitive resource); *organization* (interactive resource); *consensus* (trust resource); *time* (temporal resource); *infrastructure* (patrimonial resource); *political support* (majority resource)'.

rules. The pragmatic constructivism characterizing this approach to policy is then locked in by the granting of (systemic and non-positivistic) methodological priority to the endogenous explication of explanatory variables. This complicates the connection with the substantive approaches to politics in the production of policies. Starting with this comment, we can now try to discuss this consequence of constructivist pragmatism in public policy analysis, to characterize its specificity with even more precision.

3. An axiomatic neutrality

From the perspective of pragmatic constructivism, policies mobilize configurations of actors, resources and rules with the aim of directly producing or coordinating the responses required to meet the collective needs recognized as falling within the province of the state or other public authorities. From this point of view they are '*instituted policies*'. In this respect the policy approach concerns the actual realization of outputs that are supposed to influence the behaviour of the groups or individuals believed to be at the root of the public problem to be resolved. It studies the performance of these configurations, sometimes following explicit engineering goals, as in the case, in particular, of the evaluation of policies or action programmes. The complex configurations of actors, in particular at the level of the '*politico-administrative arrangement*' of a policy, representing the structured whole of public and para-public actors responsible for its implementation, produces what we now call policy governance. Many research studies are devoted to it, both in France and abroad. They analyze how the logics of reconstruction of public action are structured by the forms of mobilization of the social actors, especially by the shifting of traditional boundaries between legitimate (or incumbent) actors and challengers. Analytical tools have been developed for examining these interdependencies – such as the notions of '*networks*' for linking up actors (Thatcher, 2004) and '*forums*' for the channels of influence on public action (Boussaguet, 2004) – and identifying the importance of the qualification of the objects of action in the processes of actors' interference, especially around the notion of a '*public problem*' (Sheppard, 2004).

This presentation of policies is not, however, the first one selected to explain the role of politics in policy-making. Another approach consists in considering policies as '*instituting policies*', in so far as the process and political implications of their production lie in the very definition of the problems to be resolved (Giraud & Warin, 2008). Within this approach, policies effectively mobilize institutional configurations. However these are studied less for the outputs of the policies that they decide on and implement (resource allocation, setting

legal or administrative rules, decisions on equipment programmes, etc.), than for the relations of domination that they institute in order to structure the political field of action. In this instance, policies are processes involving the social definition of reality, and are analyzed as such.

The policies are '*instituting*' in so far as they develop a representation of the action to be undertaken, which integrates a dual hypothesis on the causes of the problem to be dealt with and the solutions to be provided. The construction of what is then called a '*normative frame*' is at the very heart of the policy production process (Jobert, 1999). This is of particular interest to policy analysts in France. One of the pioneers in this respect, Robert Axelrod, demonstrated it in his own way in terms of the cognitive maps of political elites which are mobilized in public decision-making (Axelrod, 1976). This construction is an eminently political moment, which determines which actor wins or loses. Contradictory interests are expressed and sometimes open up crisis zones which politics has to manage. The return to stability then consists in drawing on a repertory – representative of the political culture – of symbolic and cognitive elements that serve to guarantee the maximum possible compliance on the part of the actors.

The approach to public policies as '*instituting policies*' is presented as a structural approach to politics. It highlights the political regulation of the social order or, in other words, the need to contain the centrifugal forces stemming from contradictory interests, which would otherwise make it impossible to produce any policies at all. The public policy approach to politics raises specific questions with original theoretical foundations. In particular, the importance granted to contradictory interests explicitly takes into account the Habermasian analysis of the fragility of social cohesion and, more implicitly, the analysis of the state proposed by Norbert Elias.⁷ Social cohesion is threatened by both the disparities between the different ensembles that structure society and the non-adhesion of subjects, capable of analysis and judgement, with values and symbols that justify the permanence of a social order. The politicians' specific task is to maintain the political community by safeguarding its structured components and the integration of individuals. To analyze it as such, this alternative approach to public policies asks two questions: How do the main components hold together as a whole? And, how do the

⁷ For Elias, both the problem and *raison d'être* of social order is to render the interdependence of individuals (*individuals need one another*) and their conflicts (*but their interests oppose them*) compatible, to ensure the conditions of *living together* (Elias, 1975).

different individuals, situated in relation to these structural components, adhere to the political community? This conception of the politicians' work refers to a set of actions and functions conceived of as a whole. Politics is, therefore, more a dynamic, a process that tends to include actors and institutions, than a passively occupied space.

The mastery of this fundamental function of politics spurs the ambitions of actors who understand that by dominating the representation of the social reality on which it is necessary to act, they occupy a key position *de facto*. The regulation of these ambitions is needed to ensure social order. It functions in the very production of policies, and determines their form and content. This regulation of ambitions is directly political; it is the business of whosoever accepts the pre-eminence and continuity of stabilized symbolic and cognitive elements. The fact of mastering discourse on the values, norms and rules that have to be complied with for problems to be addressed, puts him or her at the heart of the configuration of actors. We find an anthropological conception of politicians (and politics) here, insofar as this power is that of the *pacifier* whose means are limited to speech (Clastres, 1974: 175-176) and whose hegemony (or monopolization) constitutes the state as a function of arbitration (Elias, 1975), as per the conception of the state theorized by Hobbes ([1642] 1982). This political regulation is nevertheless a result of a mobilization of legitimate constraint (Jobert, 1998). Public action cannot do without arguments for ranking and making more or less compatible the use of political resources. The study of this regulation or the practice of political power is, therefore, crucial here. It concerns above all the clashes between representations of social reality, which necessarily highlight the divergence of interests. This point of view also corresponds to recent analyses. In the late 1990s Renate Mayntz concluded a dialogue with Niklas Luhmann, who pointed out the inanity of politics faced with the irrepressible reinforcement of interests contradictions and with auto-referentiality of ensembles that structure society, by redefining politics as the '*management of interdependencies*' (Mayntz, 2001). The function of politics, thus defined by the famous German political scientist, is compatible with Luhmann's diagnosis: i.e. to avoid the shocks and contradictions resulting from the pursuit of the process of differentiation. This conflict management, central in policy-making, reveals the underlying ambiguity of politics. In a democratic context, politics does not amount to avoiding the shocks of differentiation. It must also find ways of reconciling political equality with social inequalities, as the latter also depend on the ways in which social interests are structured. This debate, which first emerged between Niklas Luhmann and Fritz Scharpf (Luhmann, 1990 ; Scharpf 1990), has had an enduring influence on Peter Knoepfel, who participated directly in

the founding research programme directed by Scharpf and Mayntz in the 1980s (Knoepfel, Weidmer, 1982). Indeed, the approach to policies as ‘instituting policies’ is clearly apparent in Knoepfel’s approach around the question of the potentially conflictual relations between target groups and end beneficiaries and other actors, who are also affected by the effects of a policy. While the politics in the theoretical model may be rather subtle (and in Knoepfel’s teaching), this main dimension is never entirely lacking. The demonstration of its existence is not, however, the ultimate goal in Knoepfel’s policy approach.

The understanding of policy in the approach to instituted policies outlined under the pragmatic constructivism perspective implies an understanding of the processes through which this shared signification of problems and solutions is not only produced, but also produces effects of meaning throughout the course of a policy. That is why it seeks to consider each product of a policy from both a substantial and institutional point of view. Peter Knoepfel equips us with useful tools for identifying the variables to be explained and the explanatory variables, and for understanding the substance of the outcome of the interactions between decisions and activities. He is, however, more vague when it comes to the question of the semantic productivity of problem causation hypotheses and state intervention (ideas and social representations) – that is, when the subject is not totally avoided. Policy analysis does not stop when have defined the play of hypotheses characterizing the *raison d'être* and orientation of a policy. It could even be said that it starts when one wonders which effects of meaning this shared normative signification is going to produce next, particularly during the shift from the 'product' of one public policy to another.

This remark prompts, therefore, the question as to whether the ‘Knoepfelian approach’ to policy contains a theory of ‘*shared cooperative action*’, at least if the pragmatic hypothesis is applied (Bratman, 1992; Coleman, 2001), according to which the semantic productivity of the definition of problems and solutions could be judiciously analyzed in terms of cooperative action. The approach developed by Peter Knoepfel seems somewhat allusive on this point. It appears to have little concern for integrating reflection on the ‘social system’ when the actors interact. Yet it also seems to show that the definition and implementation of a policy cannot be summed up in the achievement of objectives that are intentional or attributed to one or more actors; they also stem from the renewal or transformation of shared beliefs. In other words, the pragmatic constructivism proposed by Peter Knoepfel takes policy analysis to the extreme, insofar as the explanation of a policy is based on a combination of independent

observable variables (actors, resources and rules). The advantage of this epistemological position is to ensure that policy analysis does not go astray – at the other extreme – in the study of the meaning attributed *to* and produced *by* public action, but remains apprehendable from the outside. It is probably correct to point this out at a time when cognitivist approaches are conquering much of the field of policy studies (for France, see: RFSP, 2000). The risk that is run here would be to lose sight of the (supposed) realism needed by the scientific approach, and to focus exclusively on the knowledge, ideas, representations and beliefs of the actors involved. The reason is that they make it possible to describe what politics really resembles, at the observable level of the reciprocal conditioning between context (a set of resources and rules) and action (interactions between decisions and activities).

The proposed approach does not aim, therefore, to show that policies are the result of conflicts between groups of actors who mobilize to guarantee the satisfaction of ‘*causes*’ stemming from shared beliefs and norms (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). This possibility is not, however, denied. It is just that Knoepfel does not consider that the aim of policy analysis is to say that the actors share the same ‘worldview’, no more than it is to show that they act out of self-interest. Peter Knoepfel’s analysis is noteworthy in so far as it does not impose a cardinal theory of the actors as explanatory factors in the birth and implementation of policies. His pragmatism is characterized – as I have said – by a deliberately *a minima* treatment of the actors’ personal variables (interests, motivations, intentions, beliefs). He sees beliefs and interests as inputs that are potentially relevant within the explanatory variables as a whole. If they exist, the analyst will have to account for them by induction. This approach is resolutely oriented towards a methodology for policy analysis. It is based, therefore, on axiomatic neutrality so as to avoid theoretical debates and standpoints which are sterile for the analyst whose analysis helps to steer policy.

For all of these reasons, the constructivist pragmatism underpinning Peter Knoepfel’s approach is clearly distinguished from policy analysis as ‘*pragmatic of democracy*’, as it appears from the cognitivist perspective (Giraud & Warin, 2008). By proposing to approach policies as essentially intellectual constructions, *loci* of debate, and places of transformation of social representations of the reality to be dealt with this other perspective chooses explanatory variables which are substantially different (actors’ logics and interests; social representations; institutional rules that strongly frame – or not – political interaction; possibility – or not – of rigorous and transparent procedures; scenes of debate, controversy or

communication; alliances and power struggles etc.). At the same time, and above all, the variables that are to be explained change. They are ‘*products*’ not of policies, as with Knoepfel, but of the permanent production of the social order through the political work of reconciliation of contradictory interests, which policies support. Policies are characterized here by the necessary adjustment of social representations which change sooner or later. In this case they are studied because, through the possibility of viewing problems and solutions differently, they can call for changes in institutional configurations and sometimes even in aspects of the political culture. As a field for political expression, public policies appear to be a democratic affair; they help to maintain the social order by making its renewal possible. In other words, these two perspectives do not have the same scientific goal. In the one, policy analysis serves reflection on politics and democracy. In the other, it aims to understand how policies are made – and that is the underlying intention of the approach developed by and around Peter Knoepfel.

* *

In the final analysis, the constructivist pragmatism which I see as characterizing the public policy analysis proposed by Peter Knoepfel can probably be explained by his idea of his profession as a university lecturer, researcher, expert and, at the heart of all that, teacher and adviser. The axiomatic neutrality characterizing his approach corresponds to his main objective of equipping analysts, scientists and practitioners with a framework for understanding situations. His scientific contribution lies in the fact of making possible an *ethnography of public policies*. By being wary of the analyst who has only ‘*stories to tell*’, Peter Knoepfel reminds us in a way of an international figure in anthropology, Claude Lévi-Strauss, who started his famous popularized book *Tristes tropiques* ([1955] 1985) with the following incipit: ‘*I hate journeys and explorers*’. Let us therefore dare to compare pragmatic constructivism at the service of a logical reasoning in policy analysis to Lévi-Strauss's break with the travel novel genre, with the aim of establishing an intellectual experience of another kind, that of structural logic.

The axiomatic neutrality that is the framework of the pragmatic constructivism of this approach nevertheless raises a fundamental question that I will leave open: the question of

whether it reduces policy analysis to a technique. The history of the social sciences shows how axiomatic neutrality has served as a requisite for intellectual strategies for promoting reformist formulae that do not challenge the socio-economic order (Guilhot, 2004). I certainly do not believe that Peter Knoepfel's scientific contributions serve this type of goal. Along with other European academic institutions (e.g. the International Management Institute, and the Environmental Research Institute of Berlin), the *Institut des Hautes Etudes en Administration Publique*, where Peter Knoepfel worked for a long time and of which he was also Director, is one of the main places in Europe where the interaction between research and application have contributed to the complete renewal of training in public management, and to the development of the '*policy sciences*' on the basis of a critical view of '*public administration theory*' (Thoening, 1985: 2). In the context of this international perspective, his approach to policy analysis contributes deliberately to a questioning of the policy dimensions that defy the mode of analysis so dear to this theory. Like Dror and others, who strove to introduce organizational or institutional factors, conflicts, ideologies, and even the social value of time – outrageously neglected by institutions such as the Rand Corporation in their biased analysis of government action (Dror, 1968 and 1970) –, Peter Knoepfel endeavours to explain the importance of a methodical approach to the explanatory variables of public policies, which denaturalizes categories and gives depth to the analysis of government decisions and activities. His aim is to provide the means of producing complete scientific statements on which the debate on public policy can be based. From this point of view, his approach helps to make policy analysis a real government science as it shows – mainly through the study of resources – the diversity of approaches (and sciences), from which government authorities can act.

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