Towards a Generative Policy Analysis:
Elaborating the fit between policy analysis and the political.

Hendrik Wagenaar
(Department of Public Administration,
Leiden University.
Leiden, The Netherlands


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1. Introduction. Elaborating the fit between policy analysis and its subject: three features of political reality.

Since Brian Fay (19750 argued for the social and political embeddedness of epistemology in policy analysis, the argument has been picked up by other policy scholars who have attempted to break down the conventional wall between science and social-political reasoning. Fay built upon arguments put forward by phenomenological and hermeneutic philosophers, and further developed by Winch, that empiricist social science is incommensurate with the subject matter of the social sciences, and that only an interpretive approach could do justice to its normative and meaningful nature of social reality. In a similar vein, Taylor showed that neutrality in political science is a myth as every explanatory framework necessarily implies a conception of the good (Taylor, 1985). In the wake of this “restructuring of social and political theory” (Bernstein,…) the emergence of a critical, post-empiricist policy analysis from the mid-1970s onwards, by scholars such as Martin Rein, Lawrence Tribe, Frank Fischer, Deborah Stone, and John Forester was predicated on the conviction that traditional policy analysis failed to address the normative, argumentative dimension of policymaking. Later Dryzek argued that policy analysis for it to be relevant to its subject must address its political setting, the world of public policy, which is characterized by contestation, uncertainty and intense interaction. In a delightful small textbook he and Bobrow developed one of the consequences of a policy analysis that follows its subject: it can never be unitary. A post-empiricist policy analysis relevant to its subject is by implication pluralistic, realizing that no conceptual scheme and no methodological approach fully exhausts the infinitely rich and elusive world of collective human activity, and that each approach, depending upon our way with the world, is able to throw a relevant light on it.

Similarly, in the introduction to our book Deliberative Policy Analysis (2003), Maarten Hajer and I addressed the normative and sociological challenge to a post-empiricist policy analysis in the following key question: “What kind of policy analysis might be relevant to understanding governance in the emerging network society?” (1995, 13). Our answer to this question is, not surprisingly, that we believe that an interpretive, deliberative approach to policy analysis would be relevant here. However, much more important is the injunction that follows, and that to my mind, should be the lode star of any treatise on interpretive method in policy analysis: “(A) new interpretive policy analysis finds its warrant not so much in being epistemologically or methodologically different from the mainstream approach, but first of all by demonstrating its analytic fertility and practical usefulness in the context of the changes described in the preceding sections” (1995, 13). Again, there is that double movement towards relevancy. Policy analysis should speak to the normative and sociological challenges of the world of policy making (challenges we described “in the preceding sections” in primarily sociological terms as the transfer of policy to new political spaces, the radical uncertainty that plagues policy making, the deep pluralism of contemporary society combined with an awareness of interdependence, and the fragility of trust), and policy analysis should be kaleidoscopic.

Yet, on the face of it, fit is a difficult kind of argument. You want to go beyond the obvious. Clearly someone who aspires to do relevant policy research in the presidential system of the US will have to include the dynamic of presidential decision making into his analysis and will not get very far if he approaches his subject with the conceptual imagery of, let’s say, neocorporatism. Differently put, you will want your fit to be on a deeper, more substantial or enduring level. You want your description of the thing to be fitted to be some kind of endpoint description; a way of putting it that goes beyond the epiphenomenal manifestations of the thing. The philosophers of the “restructuring” period solved it by stating that what
distinguished the world of human interaction was its meaningfulness, and that therefore any science that aspires to say something relevant about that world must be able to capture meaning. Ergo, interpretive social science. But what characterizes the world of public policy? Its normativity? Surely. And post-empiricist policy analysis squarely addresses that aspect of policy making. But has the “political setting” of policy making been exhaustively or even sufficiently characterized by normativity?

In the remainder of this chapter I will address this rhetorical question by further unpacking the issue of the normative, sociological and epistemic fit of (interpretive) policy analysis. I will argue that the object of policy analysis is characterized by three intrinsic features: complexity, time, and conflict. From these follow other features such as the normative and interactive nature of policymaking and its action-orientation. Is this a return to essentialism? Essentialism has acquired a bad reputation in contemporary social science (Sayer, 2000, 81). Misplaced essentialism, no doubt, easily contaminates value-laden debates about gender, sexuality or ethnicity, but it makes sense to approach the concept with an open mind. Complexity, the arrow of time, and pluralism are essential in that they are generative properties of policy making. Generative means that these properties “determine - or are indispensable for – what it can and cannot do” (Sayer, 2000, 84). They do not necessarily identify or distinguish policy in a unique or exhaustive way. Complexity, time and pluralism are probably characteristic of any form of human collaboration. But it is safe to say, I believe, that the outcomes of policy making and the process by which it comes about are strongly conditioned by these three features.

I also think that they go beyond more time-bound and contextual characteristics of public policy as described in the Hajer and Wagenaar book; or more precisely, that the latter characteristics are particularized manifestations of the features I describe here. This is not to say that “lack of trust” or “the trend towards governing through networks” are less important than complexity, time and pluralism. In fact, at any particular place or time they could well be more important than the three more ‘essential’ features. By foregrounding complexity, time and pluralism I do not want to make a foundationalist claim. These features are not ‘obvious’ or immediately given. I do not place complexity, time and pluralism outside the ordinary

1 Essentialism in philosophy attempts to distinguish the crucial from the merely accidental. “Essentialism is generally taken to be the doctrine that objects have certain properties which make them one kind of a thing rather than any other” (Sayer, 2000, 82). Essentialism is often confused with reductionism, but those features which are deemed to be crucial for the thing to be what it is, are not the only features, and certainly not the only important features. Essentialism is also often confused with foundationalism. That is, the features that are deemed crucial are though to be so obvious or certain or true that they are deemed obvious or ‘transparent’, as requiring no explanation. outside the ordinary regime of inquiry and confirmation. Sayer, who has written a useful and clarifying chapter on essentialism I the social sciences, believes that concept is made to do too much. First it used in generative and identifying way, and the two are not necessarily compatible. We saw an example above. Policy is conditioned by complexity, time and pluralism, but we cannot very well use these features to distinguish it from other collective activities. Sometimes the two functions do coincide. Sayer, comes up with the example of the capital-labor relation as the essence of capitalism, both in a generative and distinguishing sense. But capitalism has other essential features, such as industrialism, which do not distinguish it from socialism, for example. finally, Sayer makes the useful statement that referring to essential characteristics is not the same as asserting sameness. We already argued that it might very well be the non-essential features that are most important in understanding a phenomenon. What we should be concerned about, according to Sayer, is mistaken claims of homogeneity. “We should be concerned about assertions of non-existent commonalities or denials of significant differences, and equally about assertions of insignificant differences and/or denials of significant commonalities. Racism, Sayer adds, involves both kinds of error (2000, 83).

2 Or other policy texts for that matter. I am thinking here of the traditional policy stages model that organizes many textbook sin policy analysis, or a differentiation in policy aspects. I consider these as aspects that are imposed by the analyst, and that are therefore design-dependent.
regime of inquiry and confirmation. To say that these features are essential to the policy making process, and therefore crucial to the issue of fit, is a substantive, empirical statement. We can – and we will in the remainder of this book – argue for its validity.

What makes complexity, time, and pluralism basic? They are basic because they are design-independent. With that I mean that everyone who decides to wade into the thicket of collective problem solving will, unfailingly, be touched by one, some or all of these characteristics. No matter what the intentions of the policy maker are, his political affiliations, the nature of the collective problem, the composition of the political agenda, or the structure of the political system, these are qualities of collective decision making that every policy maker will have to reckon with or ignore at his own risk. A simple and well-known example will illustrate what I mean. In chapter 1 I cited Dunn’s critique of assessing the benefits of alternative solutions of industrial pollution. He refers here at a recurrent critique of cost-benefit analysis in that it doesn’t take conflict over preferences into account. The formulation of the policy choice and the selection of costs and benefits privileges a particular set of values and preferences. As Dunn states it, assessing the cost-benefit ratio of alternative solutions to industrial pollution already assume that industrial pollution is the problem. In other words, the application of cost-benefit analysis in a particular situation preempts any political discussion about alternative problem formulations and solutions. Cost-benefit analysis is insensitive to the inherently conflictual and normative nature of policy making.

The relation between these “structural” features of the world of politics and human agency is a subtle one. Complexity, time, and pluralism are features that emerge from the past activities of agents, but cannot be reduced to the beliefs and actions of particular individual agents (McAnulla, 2006, 121). So, while agents obviously play a role in the morphology of complexity, time, and pluralism, in the sense that these do not exist independent of them, and while it is agents who have preferences and interests, no single agent or group of agents has a decisive influence over them. The reason for this is that complexity, time, pluralism have properties of their own, which, while not completely outside the reach of individual agents, cannot be easily influenced by them. For example, while individual policy actors may attempt to condition future events by stating policy goals, these intentional statements have little influence on the chains of unintended consequences which evolve as the inevitable expression of entropy that is inherent to all natural and social systems (Adams, 1990, 63; Stenger and Prigogine, 1984). Similarly, individual agents react in purposeful ways to particular aspects of their environment to influence according to their needs or aspirations. However, following the laws of complexity, individual agents have little influence over the emergent effects of the thousands of interactions that ensue from their individual actions. So, entropic time and intentional time, or emergent effect and individual action, form two relatively autonomous forces, in which the first circumscribes, constrains and enables the second (McAnulla, 2006, 122). Differently put, for all practical purposes policy actors operate in a pre-existing world which, while not observer-independent, is to a considerable extent independent of the particular designs that observers impose on that world. Yet, as we will see later in this chapter, intentional statements and individual actions do influence the outcome of complex social systems.

2. Complexity.
There is growing recognition that complexity is a crucial issue for understanding the limits and possibilities of concerted human action. (Axelrod; Urry, Kiel), and that complexity theory, the eclectic body of knowledge about the functioning of dynamic systems, has important implications for the policy sciences. (Kauffman, 1995, Waldrop, 1993, Urry, 2003,
Morçöl, 2002, Anderson) In particular, as some policy analysts have argued, complexity limits traditional strategies of centralized, managerial policy making (Axelrod & Cohen, 1999; Dryzek, 1990; Torgerson, 2004; Wagenaar, in press).

What is complexity? A useful definition of complexity is this: “(A) system is complex when there are strong interactions among its elements, so that current events heavily influence the probabilities of many kinds of later events” (Axelrod & Cohen, 1999: 7). From this definition it follows that the core aspect of complexity is the density of the interactions in a system - more so than the number of its parts - although most theorists believe that complexity is caused by a large number of parts and density of interaction among the parts (Cilliers, 2005, see also Dryzek, 1990). Interaction density in turn makes for unpredictability. Because of the large number of connections in a complex system, small effects may reverberate through the system in unforeseen ways adding up to unpredictable, and, in case of policy systems, unintended outcomes. Small effects may, under certain conditions, magnify into large effects. Similar initial states may, through self-propelling mechanisms of positive and negative feedback, turn into multiple possible outcomes. As a result, indeterminacy and novelty are pervasive in dynamic complex systems. (Waldrop 1992) Complexity thus defies prediction. For our understanding of social systems, and the relevance of the concept of complexity for policy making, I will draw out some important implications from this definition, in the process defining some basic auxiliary concepts.

First, key to understanding complexity is that the whole exhibits properties that are not readily explained by an understanding of the parts. (Waldrop 1992; Kauffman 1995, vii) Complexity theorists talk in this respect of emergent properties, properties of the system that the separate parts do not have, and that are produced by the interaction between the parts. (Axelrod & Cohen, 1999: 15; Waldrop, 1992: 82) The standard example is liquidity. Liquidity is a property of water. Of the ceaseless interaction of millions of molecules. Not of a single H2O molecule. Perhaps, for the purposes of this book, an example from the social world will be more convincing. Local preferences of individual citizens, such as the desire to have ethnically similar neighbors or to be friends with someone from one’s own socio-economic stratum, can lead to a society that is massively segregated along lines of income and ethnic background (Urry 2003).3 Neighborhoods and societies exhibit the properties of complex systems

I need to mention an emergent effect that is particular to social systems. The categories of the social sciences (poverty, mental illness, juvenile delinquent, policy networks, etc) differ from the categories of the natural sciences (rocks, genes, microbes, trees) in that those who populate these categories (the poor, metal patients, criminal youth, administrators) possess awareness. This awareness results in a very peculiar kind of interaction, namely that between the individual and the category to which he is assigned. There is nothing mysterious about this effect, which is sometimes designated with the term ‘reflexivity’. People who find themselves assigned to, let’s say the category of juvenile delinquent, will be treated differently as people not so classified. They will put into institutions, addressed by police officers, courts personnel, jail wardens, social workers, etcetera. They will see certain options in the labor or

3 A recent example comes from the Netherlands. The social demographer Jan Latten has concluded that the social segregation between a “white” elite and a largely ethnic lower class has increased over the last decade in the Netherlands. Latten observes a “sorting out” mechanism is at work that is largely driven by choice of marital partner. Both ethnic minorities and the white elite marry within their own group. Thereby handing social advantages and disadvantages down to the next generation. The result is that, increasingly, social classes retreat within their own schools, move in different parts of the labor market, live in their own streets, and move almost exclusively in their own social networks. (Latten, 2005)
marital market being closed off, and others (the company of bad friends) suggested to them. They will also develop a certain awareness of themselves as being regarded by others as criminals. They might bring their self-image and behavior in line with that awareness, or they might resist it. Both may in turn lead social analysts to redefine or challenge the original categories. The point is that the categories of the social sciences are reactive. This kind of self-referential interactivity poses great problems for policy analysts, because their categories are always “on the move”, as the philosopher Ian Hacking (from whom this analysis comes) calls it (1999, 108), thereby raising doubts about their “realness”. I will have more to say about these “interactive kinds” (Hacking again, p. 103) in chapter 6, but for the moment I just wanted to draw attention to the fact that these reflexive effects on the carriers of social categories, and on the categories themselves, can very well be seen as a complexity effect, as emergent properties, which contributes to the indeterminacy of social systems.

Complex systems have indeterminate outcomes. This is not merely an obvious statement about unpredictability, and the concomitant inability to control the everyday world, but a key property of the morphology of complex systems; a property moreover that has decisive implications for public policy. The principle of indeterminacy is in fact the negation of the proven and tried analytic strategy of reductionism. Where reductionism dictates the analyst to reduce everything in the world to a few variables or a few statistical associations that postulate an invariant relationship between these variable, complexity shows, inversely, how a few simple principles can produce the infinitely rich variety and dynamism of the natural and social world. (Waldrop, 1992: 153) For example, the basic elements of chess are few and simple (a limited number of board pieces, a few rules), but the number of possible moves and outcomes is almost unlimited. Not only do such systems present themselves to the actors who move about in them an “immense space of possibilities”, but, to bring this insight back to policy terminology, also no realistic hope exists that complex systems will have an optimal or “one best solution”. The best that actors can hope for is to find fruitful ways to explore this space of possibilities and look for improvements (Waldrop, 1992: 167).

If we translate this insight about complex systems to public policy, it has momentous implications. It basically means that the usual strategy of bringing expert knowledge to bear on policy situations is flawed, or at the very least, partial. As expert knowledge is primarily aimed at the understanding (and alleged control) of the separate parts of the system (such as labor markets and unemployed workers, food producers and consumers, health care providers and consumers, etcetera), it threatens to miss the emergent properties of the system entirely. A complex system on the other hand can never be fully understood because the myriads of interactions between its constituent parts can never be captured in full. As a result: “The intra- and intersystem relationships change as a result of self-organization for complex systems. Systemic properties emerge in complex systems as a consequence of such dynamic interactions, and they cannot be reduced to the properties of the system’s constituents.” (Morçöl, 2002, 150-151) Policy outcomes are an emergent property of complex policy networks.

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4 Waldrop provides an estimate that there are $10^{120}$ possible moves in chess, to add to this that it is: „a number so vast to defy all metaphor“. (151)

5 Some policy areas begin to exhibit an understanding of the emergent properties of the policy system as something above and beyond the properties of the individual parts. For example, the food sector is now regularly framed as a chain, in which problems in one part of the chain can have disastrous consequences higher up in the chain. Similarly, among some scholars and policy makers the Dutch Disability law is regarded as complex system of employers, employees, administrators, certifying physicians, overseers, and others, whose interactions add up to undesired outcomes that are extremely resistant to policy intervention.
Complex systems are constantly evolving in unpredictable ways, but that does not mean that they mutate randomly. Over time it will be seen that most systems will not move over all possible phase states, but center on certain restricted states. These are called attractor states. The simplest example is that of a pendulum. After a while the pendulum will, through the drag of friction, have come to rest at a fixed point in the center. Feedback mechanisms are central to the occurrence of attractors. Again, a simple example is the negative feedback of a central heating system in which the temperature always returns to a particular range specified by the feedback system. But perhaps more important for social systems are positive feedback mechanisms. Positive feedback occurs when a change tendency is reinforced instead of damped down, leading the system away from an earlier equilibrium to unspecified, indeterminate states. Urry gives as an example the phenomenon of increasing returns in certain economic systems:

“A social science application of positive feedback can be seen in the economic and sociological analysis of the increasing returns that can occur across a whole industry or activity. This can lay down irreversible path dependence where contingent events set into motion institutional patterns that have long-term deterministic properties. One example would be the way the privately owned steel-and-petroleum car developed in the last decade of the nineteenth century and came to exert an awesome domination over other fuel alternatives, especially steam and electric power that were at the time preferable. The path dependence of the petroleum-base car was established and got ‘locked’ in.” (Urry, 2003, 28)

However, the trajectories of social systems are not necessarily driven by blind forces completely outside the grasp of its constituents. In general, through revisions and rearrangements of their building blocks that are both the result of conscious intervention and the unintended consequences of such interventions, social systems as a whole travel on trajectories from one phase to another. In this process actors’ images of the future – ideal, perspectives, metaphors, storylines - are essential. It is a condition for the system’s ability to adapt. All actors, and by extension, all complex systems, build models to anticipate the future. (Holland, in Waldrop, 1993: 177) In the case of human actors, these models of the future are often based on past experiences that have been transformed into expectations about what so and so will say or do. By constantly checking their past and current experience with their image of the future, the actors in a system gain from experience. This process of learning from feedback results in a modifying and rearranging of the system as a whole. (Holland, in Waldrop, 1993: 146) This does not necessarily mean that the system will improve. In fact, just the opposite might happen, as when through selective outmigration a neighborhood ends up in a segregated, dilapidated state. (Healey, 2002, 181) On a higher level of organization, however – for example, that of a housing corporation or a city council – this deterioration of the neighborhood will not fit its mental model of the projected effects of urban renewal and leads to adaptation of the renewal strategy. In any case, it is these models of the future, feedback and learning that turn complex systems into adaptive complex systems.

Finally, complex systems create their own environment. Or, to put it more precisely, complex systems do not develop against the background of a stable environment but they evolve together with their environments. The principle of coevolution, as this is called, contains a deep and subtle principle about complexity with important implications for the policy sciences. First, from the perspective of the actors in a complex system the world is always in

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6 The term „trajectory“ is from Strauss (1993). It denotes both a development of something from A to B, plus the largely contingent nature of that development.

7 The concept of co-evolution has been introduced in complexity theory to deal with the circumstance that complex systems evolve without a central planner who directs the system towards a preconceived goal. In fact, complex systems, physical, biological and social, self-organize and evolve without their being very clearly defined problems for the agents to struggle with, and without a clearly circumscribed criterion of fitness or
flux. As John Holland says: “(E)ach agent finds itself in an environment produced by its interactions with the other agents in the system. It is constantly acting and reacting to what the other agents are doing. And because of that essentially nothing in its environment is fixed.” (in Waldrop, 1993: 145). Or as Kauffman puts it: The coevolution of organisms alters both the organisms themselves and the way organisms interact……..the very process of coevolution itself evolves”. (Kauffman, 1995, 208)

“Nothing is fixed” is perhaps too strong when translated to the world of policy making and policy networks (after all, there are such structuring phenomena such as laws, regulations, and institutional inertia), but the essentially interactive nature of policy environments suggests that the possibilities of managing such environments – as opposed to harnessing them - are at best limited. This follows from the implication that complex systems cannot be studied from an external point of view. Knowledge of the system is in principle contextual and participatory. This is not so much a methodological (although it has important methodological implications as we will see later) as a constitutive principle. The nature of a system is partly defined by the subject. Or, in an observation that has strong relevance to the role of policymakers, “(W)hatever complexity such systems have is a joint property of the system and its interactions with another system, most often an observer and/or controller…..So just like truth, beauty good and evil, complexity resides just as much in the eye of the beholder as it does in the structure and behavior of a system itself.”. (Casti, 1994, in Morçöl, 2002, 191)

The policy implications of the principle of coevolution are wide and deep. First, the continuity of system and observer makes that our collective images of social systems are determined by our point of observation. What we see depends on where we stand. Paul Blondeel, a Belgian urban anthropologist provides us with an example. (Blondeel, 2005, 40-42) On its website the Dutch city of Rotterdam provides descriptive statistics that are disaggregated to the neighborhood level. Statistical indicators on level of education and employment show that the Mathenesserkwartier, a “low income neighborhood with a high percentage of ethnic minorities”, scores consistently worse the city average on both indicators. Yet, as Blondeel`s observations make clear, many of the residents in this neighborhood are employed in the rich tapestry of semi-formal and informal businesses that make up the neighborhoods economy, most of which that not registered by the local Chamber of Commerce and therefore absent from the official municipal statistics. This economy is also the training school where many residents follow practical training and internships that are customized to their needs. Far from being a wasteland of unemployment, forced idleness and absence of education, the neighborhood turns out to be a densely networked economy of small, local businesses and voluntary organizations that contributes strongly to the social cohesion of the neighborhood. Second, policy measures that are based on biased images of social systems run the risk of reward to decide in advance who might win or lose out. As Axelrod & Cohen put it: „Harnessing complexity involves acting sensibly without fully understanding how the world works.“ (1999: 45) Co-evolution answers to this that agents evolve and system states emerge because everyone is constantly adapting to everyone else. Agents and systems evolve because they form each other’s environment, effectively dissolving the age-old dichotomy between actor and context.

8 With the parentheses I want to indicate the problem of language as one expression of the continuity of system and observer. The phrase in parentheses is typical for the way that neighborhoods such as the Mathenesserkwartier are described in the public sphere. The whole point of the example, and of Blondeel’s study, is to show that underneath this official image, a different neighborhood exists that can be accessed with ethnographic observation. Blondeel himself speaks of “strong” and “weak facts”.

9 Blondeel observes an “informal economy of temporary and made-to-order subcontracting for example in connection with the car business on the Mathenesserserdijk. The same goes for the furniture industry and –retail, for the packaging industry, and the supply of parts for regular retail businesses. It is important that we do not neglect these networks when we talk about social cohesion.” (2005: 49)
being misguided or irrelevant. Apart from the fact that the official image of the neighborhood and its residents has a stigmatizing effect, Blondeel’s observations again demonstrate that policy measures that are based on the official image miss the mark. For example, efforts to improve the general educational level of the population ignore the rich experiential basis of practical training that many residents have obtained through being employed in the semi-formal and informal economy of the neighborhood. Later we will see more examples in which the interpenetration of system and observer has led to an underestimation of social complexity and persistently failing policies.

Third, the contextual and participant nature of complex systems results in the reformulation of two heralded (and related) conceptual dichotomies that determine policy analysis: the structure-agency and the physical-social dichotomy. I will elaborate the implications that these coevolutionary mechanisms have for policy making in the next sections, but let me introduce them briefly by providing two short examples. With regard to the conjunction of the physical and the social Urry, commenting on the complexity of global systems, says the following:

“Such complexity derives from what I have described as the dialectic of moorings and mobilities. If, to express this far too simply, the social world were to be entirely moored or entirely mobile, then systems would not be dynamic and complex. But social life seems to be increasingly constituted through material worlds that involve new and distinct moorings that enable, produce and presuppose extensive new mobilities. So many more systems are complex, strangely ordered, with new shapes moving in and through time-space. (2003: 138)

In policymaking there is no such thing as an Archimedean point. Structure merges into agency and vice versa. The mental health example in the preceding chapter showed how psychiatrists in their critique of deinstitutionalization, somewhat disingenuously portrayed themselves as outsiders to a system run amok. Yet, the qualitative study revealed how patients, their families, and service providers were all an integral part of a complex coping system that was brought about by the transformation of the mental hospital. The planning theorist Patsy Healey provides another striking example of the continuity of structure and agency, observer and system. In her overview of several decades of urban renewal in the city of Newcastle, Healey observes the unnoticed but decisive impact of the decision makers’ own political predicament on the way they frame the problems and solutions of Newcastle’s urban policy. After describing the City Council’s strategic effort Going for Growth, as articulating “a new image of the city’s social community and a new approach to citizen-state relations”, she concludes that in reality little neighborhood consultation has taken place, and that in effect, the plan calls for significant demolition of housing in neighborhoods that have been designated as ‘weak’. Healey notices a gap between rhetoric and practice: “Thus a classic 1960s ‘comprehensive development area’ strategy is being re-invented, clothed with the vocabulary of community and diversity current in national urban policy discourse of the late 1990s.” The result is that an unprepared and baffled city council is once again confronted with a disaffected, deeply skeptical citizenry united in massive protest against the demolition plans and failures of consultation. Healey looks for the causes of this policy failure in the effect of the Councils’s perspective on its definition of Newcastle’s problems

“The vocabulary of Going for Growth thus positions itself primarily in relation to the council’s own political and managerial concerns and the agendas of the regional, national and EU funders. Areas are referred to in terms of the presence and absence of problems as faced by public agencies, including the city council as owner of much of the housing and supplier of key services such as education. Despite a good deal of local involvement in neighborhood management in the West End over the years, the strategy contains no direct reflection of citizens’ perceptions and does not speak to them. Rather it pronounces at them. Nor is there any celebration of the distinctive qualities of the city, of the city centre or the locales within it. As a place vision, it is very sketchy,
largely shaped by the discourse of urban policy professionals and directed by the immediate preoccupations of the city council as land and property owner and service manager.” (2002: 188-189, italics in original)

To summarize, in this section I have elaborated complexity theory and some of its implications for policy analysis. In particular, indeterminacy because of nonlinear interaction, system states as emergent effects, self-organization, the emergence of attractor states, and coevolution pose serious problems for traditional, centralized policy making. As Morçöl puts it: “Complexity theory depicts a picture of reality that is quite different from the Newtonian picture of reality. It is a complex reality where nonlinear relationships generate partly indeterministic patterns and self-organizing mechanisms create emergent complexity.” (2002: 190) The upshot of these basic elements of system complexity, as we have seen, is that the deductive methodology common in the policy sciences whereby analysts attempt to simplify reality by boiling it down to a small number of variables, collapses in the face of the behavior of complex systems. System states are not reducible to the characteristics of its constituent parts. Instead the state of a complex system is the emergent, self-reproducing property of the ongoing interaction of the separate parts, whereby small changes in the initial values of some of the characteristics of the system can lead to wholly unpredictable outcomes. Complex systems can in principle not be known in full, and policy makers and analysts cannot hope to be extraneous to the systems in which they intervene.

3. Time.
Public policy is the art of anticipation. It can fairly be described as concerted human action to improve or ameliorate a current state of affairs that is considered problematic or undesirable. Or, in a more utopian vein, as an attempt to attain an ideal or purpose that springs forth from our creative imagination. Also, policies develop in time as plans move into action and begin to generate effects, both foreseen and unforeseen. Public policy, thus, has an intimate relationship to time. Or, perhaps more precisely, policy is immersed in time, straddling past present and future, both in imagination as in actual experience. Restlessly public policy travels the historical trajectory from past to present to future and back, and this, it will become clear, generally not in neat linear fashion. Time is a key feature of public policy, and by extension of the analysis of public policy. However, despite this obvious fact, I am aware of very few policy texts in which the role of time in public policy or policy analysis is explicitly discussed. In almost all policy texts, time is implicit, non-reflected, taken for granted. How then does time play a role in policy analysis? And, hardly less important, what kind or kinds of time play a role in policy analysis? We get closer to the role of time in policy analysis when we consider the different roles that policy analysis plays in the institutional structure of governance. Generally speaking policy analysis contributes to institutionalized governance in two ways: by clarification or enlightenment and through, what I call, aid-in-decision-making. Clarification is the oldest and best known of these two and involves all varieties of research for and of the policy process (Lasswell, …). For example, an experiment to assess the effects on health care consumption and health outcomes of different insurance packages, a comparative study of labor market participation, or a theory-driven study of the obstacles that hamper the implementation of a subsidized jobs program, are all examples of policy analysis aimed at clarification. In the words of Carol Weiss, this kind of policy analysis aims at enlightenment (Weiss,…), and interestingly enough, it has been enthusiastically adopted by post-empiricists as an alternative to a more hands-on, “instrumental”, “technocratic” image of policy analysis. As Fischer puts it:

“In this view, policy evaluation was seen to play a less technical, more intellectual role. It wasn’t so much that evaluators should be expected to discover usable solutions to complex problems; the task was more appropriately
understood as supplying information and analytical perspectives that could assist decision makers – albeit more indirectly – in refining their reflection and deliberation about public problems. From this point of view, the conceptualization of a problem was seen to be as important as an innovative solution” (1995, 8).

Or, as one policy maker in the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs once put it to me in the course of interview about policy evaluation in child services: “I always talk to X (a particular researcher. HW) because he makes me smarter. When I return to my office I ask less dumb questions about child services”. From the “albeit more indirectly” in Fischer’s quote we infer about policy enlightenment a) that its relation to policy action is tenuous (more about that later), and b) that its time orientation is implicit. By helping policy makers “discursively understand the ways in which they can make and remake their social and political systems” (Fischer, 1995, xi), transformation is expected to occur but how and when remains unstated.

Situated on a time line that extends from the past towards the future, one could say that the enlightenment function of policy analysis looks predominantly backward. It aims to aid the future by extrapolating the past. Aid-in-decision making on the other hand deliberately looks forward. Analysis directly seize upon an immanent policy decision with the aim, through systematic analysis, to improve its outcome. Examples are the well-known techniques of decision analysis, linear programming, Markov-models, queuing models, and cost-benefit analysis (Stokey & Zeckhauser, 1978).10 Aid-in-decision making proceeds by formulating policy goals, specifying alternative courses of action, and predicting the consequences and valuing the outcomes of the alternatives. The final decision is a self-evident outcome of the analytic process (op. cit., 5). Analysis boils down to creating a model. Models are purposeful, highly simplified renditions of the world. The model can be descriptive or prescriptive, in the first case it “predicts how some variables will respond to changes in the system” (op. cit., 14). In the second case it suggests “procedures for choosing among alternative actions, given the decision makers’ preferences among the outcomes” (ibid.). As these examples show, assumptions about (future) time are explicit in aid-in-decision making. For example, Markov models are probabilistic models of the way the agents in a system behave in the future. Another example is the discounting function of cost-benefit analysis. It is a direct attempt to incorporate the unidirectional effects of inflation on the value of investments (an example of entropy) into the calculations of current costs.11

Enlightenment and aid-in-decision making constitute the two institutional roles of policy analysis; one looking backward hoping that reflection on the past results in a better anticipation of the future. The other looking forward hoping that simplification of the present results in a better grasp on the future. Together they signify that policy analysis operates in a perennial, uneasy and not very well understood tension between past, present and future time. Let us try to unravel some of the issues at stake.

Ordinary people have a remarkably flexible, multidimensional sense of time. According to the circumstances, time in everyday life can be unidirectional, irreversible, cyclical, accelerating, decelerating or even coming to a complete standstill, stretching out into the past as in historical time, stretching out into the future as in intentional time, or nested (in which the past and the future are folded into the present). In opposition to this, the time that is implicit in policy analysis is one-dimensional clock time. Clock or natural time is usually opposed to

10 Any direct advice of consultants to political decision makers falls under this category, but I am reluctant to discuss this large element of institutionalized policy analysis because of its weak analytic base.

11 Take the opening sentences of the chapter on the “Valuation of Future Consequences: Discounting” in Stokey and Zeckhauser: “Many decisions made today will have repercussions next year and n the years thereafter. Some decisions will have effects that stretch for decades” (1978, 159).
experiential or social time, and is described as “purely quantitative, shorn of qualitative variation” (Sorokin and Merton, in Adam, 1990, 150). Unlike experiential time, clock time is characterized by invariance and quantity. Clock-time is a derivative of Newtonian time. In Newtonian physics time is seen as a quantity: “invariant, infinitely divisible into space-like units, measurable in length and expressible as number” (Adams, 1990, 50). Clock time marches onwards from the past through the present into the future in a relentless rhythm. The ultimate expression of Newtonian time is clocks. Like all mechanical devices, clocks are realizations of Newtonian laws, and as such they represent the above-mentioned time principles such as invariance, equal intervals, and extension. (See also Adams, 1990, 53). But perhaps more importantly clocks are seen as the graphic expression of “the arrow of time”, the trajectory extending from the past into the future that is the expression of quantifiable time of Newtonian physics. The movement of the hands on the clock thus comes to stand for the inexorable motion of absolute time.

Commenting on the dual dimensions of time, Connolly observes that clock time encourages you to think of the past, present and future as separate and discrete (Connolly, 2005, 99). At first blush this cutting up of the flow of time in discrete units makes ultimate sense. Now I’m working at my computer. In two hours I will be picked by a colleague to drive to an appointment together in the town of Leiden. This evening a friend will come by for dinner. Clock time helps us to organize our life and our activities in time and space. And so it is with policy making. In October 2002 Dutch parliament passed a law that legalized sex facilities in the Netherlands. Two years later most Dutch municipalities had a licensing and monitoring system in place. Currently Dutch authorities and the representatives of the prostitution sector are debating labor regulations and the proper fiscal regime. The past is related to the present, and extends further into an anticipated future. Prostitution policy is neatly organized along the dimension of time.

Or is it? Two rather apparent observations cloud this simple unidirectional time scheme. First, those involved in prostitution policy disagree about its origins. Some describe the law as the outcome of a progressive feminist discourse on prostitution and the sexual autonomy of women, tempered by an awareness of trafficking (Outshoorn…). Others see the law as the regrettable outcome of naïve do-gooders who exposed vulnerable women to the base objectives of clients and sex bosses. In fact, the law made the Netherlands a haven for traffickers in women. Brought back to our conception of time: disagreement suggests that the past is tied to our beliefs, understandings and intentions. Or rather, the past is not an invariant slice of history, but is based on how we read the present. As Oakeshot puts it, the “(P)resent determines what particular past shall be sought, and the relationship between this present and its past is contingent” (1983, 9). So instead of an orderly succession of past and present, in Dutch prostitution policy – and in any policy for that matter – the present extends into the past as the past into the present, both affecting each other in unforeseen ways.

Secondly, what retrospectively is seen as past was once prospectively considered future. Or, differently put, the future doesn’t follow from the present as self-evidently it looks from the vantage point of the present. With hindsight, things look much more determined and linear as they once were. The progress of time tends to bleach contingency out of history. Take the introduction of the licensing scheme that followed the legalization of sex facilities. The creation of licensing and monitoring schemes by municipalities was written in the law. In this respect the creation of these schemes is a simple example of policy implementation. Shortly after the legalization I studied the creation of a licensing system in the city of The Hague (Wagenaar, 2006). At the time the creation of this scheme was not a done deal at all. In fact,
brothel owners resisted it and engaged in protracted fights with city officials, both parties taking each other to court several times. In the end, thanks to the deliberative skills of an enlightened police official, a licensing system was created that was underwritten by city officials and brothel owners. However, subsequent developments made this accomplishment look like a Pyrrhus victory. In advance of their entry into the EU, visa requirements for Bulgaria and Rumania were relaxed in the summer of 2003. The result was a sharp increase of economic immigrants; the men were recruited as illegal workers in the agricultural industry, the women often ended up in prostitution. However as the law stipulated that all women from non-EU countries who worked in prostitution were by definition illegal, they had nowhere to go. Licensed sex facilities were off-limits to them and many ended up on the street, particularly the designated street walking area that The Hague had created. At the end of 2003, the number of women in the designated street walking area had more than tripled, and anecdotal evidence suggested that many of the young Eastern European women who worked there were in the hands of middle men.

This story contains a number of lessons about policy and time. Time develops contingently. How things will work out is undetermined. Time is not a geometrical line with the past, present and future sequentially arranged as beads on a thread. Such a spatial image of time is highly misleading. It suggests that the future already exists. But a pre-existent future is an impossibility. We can imagine the future but we cannot access it. The only way it opens itself to us is through becoming (Čapek, 1971, 131). Prospectively, before the future has solidified into the past, situations are chockfull of potential. They can unfold in many different directions, depending upon the obstacles and resistances they bump into and the subsequent actions and reactions of the actors involved. The present is brought into being not through planning, extrapolation, or control, but by winging it, and improvising on the spot. (Wagenaar & Cook, 2003,…) Policymakers anchor their policies into diagnoses of the past and anticipations of the future. Problem statements and goal formulation mask the twisting and turning, the happenstance and fortuity with which policies unfold in time.

The deeper problem with the preponderance of clock time in our collectively held images of policy making is a confusion between two dimensions of time: succession and becoming (Jacques, 1982, 87). Succession is reconstruction. It consists of the projection of events on a time line that extends in time-space. Succession is closely related to Newtonian clock time: invariant, universal, forward moving, discrete. We need succession to orient ourselves in space-time. It is the ultimate organizer of our experience and perception, as Connolly puts it, succession, clock-time, “(O)rganizes experience in the interests of potential modes of action” (2005, 98). Succession is, thus, the medium of design. It is the symbolic representation of the plans we have with the world.

But succession must be seen for what it is, a projection, a reconstruction, a symbolic representation, that is unrelated to the becoming that is emerging time. While succession or clock time is expressed in terms of nouns such as bits, events, periods, discrete units, emerging time is expressed in the infinitive: flowing, becoming, streaming, unfolding. Again, images may deceive us here. Emergent time should not be seen as a continuously moving,

12 See also Adams, 1990, 153: “The Newtonian-Cartesian understanding (of time. HW) causes yet another difficulty. Elias insists that we need to understand time as an immense synthesis rather than an abstraction. However, the conceptual tools that are being used to understand this synthesis are, as we have seen, based on an understanding of reality that abstracts bits, particles, aspects, units, events, or periods in order to understand them. It is becoming obvious that the wrong conceptual tools are being used to if we seek to grasp and theorise synthesis, qualitative rhythmicity, intensity and acausal relationships with the aid of Newtonian and Cartesian assumptions.”
autonomous stream of primordial natural-biological process, independent from our strivings and endeavors, in which we are immersed and which carries us along helplessly. Emerging time is not the time of biorhythms which, as a kind of natural essence underlies the social time of memory, foresight and symbolic representation (Adams, 1990, 70). Emerging time includes both biological and social time. Emerging time cannot be seen apart from our activities and the way we orient ourselves in the landscape of action. Emerging time is not time flowing but the unfolding of actions and the experience of change and novelty that accompanies it. Our actions are not in time. Time is not an “empty and inert receptacle, additionally filled up by concrete changes and events”. Or as Čapek, from whom these words are, continues: “In other words, there is no distinction between the duration itself and its content. Psychological events are not in time, since they in their ceaseless emergence constitute true time itself” (1971, 9. italics in original)

Čapek summarizes here a conception of time as duration or durée as developed by the philosopher Henri Bergson that is highly relevant to an understanding of policy making. Bergson’s durée emphasizes becoming and novelty. Time is a “continuous emergence of novelty and can never be conceived as a mere rearrangement of permanent and pre-existing units. It never barely is, it always becomes” (Čapek, 1971, 90. italics in original). In durée the past does not exists separately from the present but is an integral part of it. The past survives in the present as the novelty of the present is created by the very act of becoming (Čapek, 1971, 130). Past, present and future are part of one ongoing, flowing mental field that is brought into being and maintained by our wishes, desires, intentions, expectations and memories (Jacques, 1982, 83). Time as becoming is, by its nature, always incomplete, “being always a fait accomplissant and never a fait accompli” (ibid.); a fact about the everyday reality of policy making that is expressed by Aaron Wildavsky in his famous insight that most policy making is its own cause (Wildavsky 1979). Perhaps even more pertinent to policy making is the insight that emerging time is predicated upon our active engagement with the world. By acting upon the world we set in motion those chains of action and back talk that “constitute true time itself”. Emerging time is coterminous with practice.

It is in its identity with practice that emerging time touches upon two of the other design-independent features of policy making: complexity and pluralism. The key that unites all three is the inevitable slippage that results from practical engagement. When we act upon the world to set some wrong right or to attain some imagined good, we intervene in a complex system. These perturbations set in motion trajectories of interactions, the consequences of which far exceed our ability to control (Wagenaar, 2007). “The result is an uneven trajectory of development that can be rendered intelligible retrospectively, though not predicted” (Connolly, 2005, 83). In other words, time as lived experience requires our participation, yet it exceeds it (Connolly, 2005, 103). Systems change, develop and move along, only partially controllable and barely predictable. This, as we will see shortly, amounts to a pluralist view of the universe; an acknowledgement that some parts of the world, some connections and combinations will always exceed our intellectual and practical grasp. As I said earlier, the stable, linear world of clock time, where the present is causally or intentionally related to the past and pointing towards a reassuring future, is a powerful tool to organize the continuous flow of emerging time. To use a metaphor, clock time functions as a map of emerging time,

Yet, at the same time, it is these barely understood preliminary affinities and intuitions which enable us to act at all; and to engage in the patterned, contextualized stream of activities which we call practice. I will return to practice, and the way it is embedded in an unarticulated reservoir of background knowledge in the next section on pluralism, and more extensively in chapters 6 and 7.
and can be used to navigate the flow of experience in the interest of a particular ideal or intention. But just as maps are always partial renditions of real landscapes, so clock time is never more than an impoverished form of the richness and layerdness of emerging time. Again, there is inherently nothing wrong with that except when policy makers confuse their static maps with dynamic, ongoing becoming.

Policy making occupies an unusual position here. Self-advertised as the craft of collective problem solving it is, as we saw earlier, intently focused upon the past and the future. Moreover, policy making, and its wake policy analysis, project a promise of control. In policy analysis control is knowledge, explanation, enlightenment. But all these are, by their nature, after the fact, and for that reason only tentatively related to the eternal becoming of emerging time. As Connolly puts it, himself quoting Bergson:

“Sure, after the fact you and I might “explain” the whole process, or fit the story into a familiar narrative scheme. Quantitative explanation or deep, authoritative interpretation, the two options competing unevenly for hegemony in the human sciences. Each is relatively easy to do………But ‘it is always possible to take the latest phase of renovation, define it by a concept, and say that the others contained a greater or less quantity of what the concept includes, that therefore they all led up to the renovation. But things assume this form only in retrospect: the changes were qualitative and not quantitative; they defied all anticipation’ ” (2005, 109).

Alternatively, policymakers and analysts can find recourse in the future, in the utopian, unanswerable realm of projected ideals. “The growth of the public sector is out of control, but if we privatize public agencies public sector spending will be curtailed and efficiency improved.” Or, “A prolonged stay in a mental institution has deleterious effects on the patient. Ambulant care in the community will emancipate mental patients”. Or, “By legalizing sex facilities we will not only be able to separate ‘good’ prostitution from its criminal side effects, but it will also result in improved working conditions for sex workers”. Similar to explanations policy goals aim at control, but both flounder on the irrepressible novelty of emerging time. The “qualitative changes” in the preceding quote point towards the unexpected, unpredictable combinations and recombinations that emerge from the waves of interactions in complex systems.

We can continue, but the point is made I assume. Policies are projections, and although as important as explanations for guiding our actions, both bear only a tentative relationship to the everyday practice of policy making. In a friendly vein we can say that explanation and intention are necessary to temporarily stabilize a world in flux to allow us to act on it in an intelligent way with insufficient knowledge. From this perspective, both are necessary forms of reflection. In a more cynical vein explanation and intention are manifestations of denial; the suppression of anxiety, of the awareness that the world of public policy is a world of deep uncertainty and chains of unintended consequences unleashed by our interventions that threaten to overwhelm the policy maker. That is not to say that we are helpless before the irrepressible novelty of becoming. What the theory of practice teaches us is that we can participate in becoming, that we can rely on our experience and know-how to engage in the kind of guided improvisation that helps us to negotiate the situation at hand (Wagenaar & Cook, 2003; Wagenaar, 2004) Differently put, practice helps us to navigate a pluralistic universe. It is to that aspect of policy making that I will turn now.

The term pluralism refers to an ontology, a moral theory, and political philosophy. Perhaps above all, it suggests that, at the risk of inconsistency, the three cannot be seen as separate domains. Our beliefs about the architecture of the natural and social world spill into our
ethical beliefs, which in turn inform our understanding of what politics is about, and vice versa. It seems that when you accept diversity and incompatibility in one realm, you cannot very well deny it in other realms. The world in which we move about, our values and passions, and our propensity for collective problem solving are like a suite of rooms with the connecting doors wide open.

Although ontological, ethical, and political pluralism set different emphases, their relevance for public policy is inescapable. Pluralism shatters any hope for unitary solutions in policy making. With unitary solutions I mean, for example, decision making algorithms whose economic logic results in “the one best solution” (Stokey & Zeckhauser), purportedly rigorous scientific studies whose results cannot but sway policy makers, or interpretive studies which reveal the “real” interpretation of a policy phenomenon. Pluralism suggests that the world refuses to be organized under one overriding external principle, whether it be a scientific epistemology, universal moral principles, or a rational politics beyond power and doctrine.

**Ontological pluralism.** Ontological pluralism depicts a world that is intrinsically incoherent and open-ended. Clearly the world is governed by regularities, but a) these do not exhaust the whole diversity of the natural and social world, and b) these are anthropocentric (Connolly, 2005, 73). That is, whatever regularities we discern are not hardwired into the world out there but the result of an ongoing interaction between our interests with the world and the resistances it puts up to our meddling and intruding. Natural regularities precariously balance between convenience and affordance. One reason why the world always eludes us is that it is permanently in flux. Complexity theory taught us that systems permute into unforeseen and unpredictable states because of the interaction of its component parts. Even when systems self-organize into a state of dynamic equilibrium, it is always vulnerable to new permutations because of external shocks to the system. The notion of duration, as emerging time, taught us the centrality of becoming and novelty. In the unceasing flow of duration, stable states are moments of retrospective reprieve that help us to find our bearings in a developing universe and to recalibrate our intentions and goals. Taken together, complexity and duration make the world fundamentally indeterminate. What is clear, true or obvious now may not be so tomorrow.

In discussing William James’ *A Pluralistic Universe*, Connolly draws out an aspect of ontological pluralism that is highly relevant to the shape and direction of an interpretive policy analysis. Connolly muses on a remark by James that the world is filled with “litter”. Litter refers to spillage, debris, things left over; objects which have no place in whatever organization we prefer to impose upon the world. But why does this ontological litter remain? Why does it resist being stored in a natural or social law, a master narrative, or a policy utopia? Connolly’s answer, surprisingly, points in the direction of tacit background knowledge. Litter remains because:

“There are always subterranean energies, volatilities and flows that exceed our formal characterizations of being. These elements either exceed the whole, if you treat the whole as the gathering of everything that exists, or they show the whole to be more than rational, smooth or intelligible in the last instance, if you define the whole as everything that exists and subsists”(2005, 73).

Connolly then proceeds to quote James on indeterminism. “Indeterminism…says that the parts have a certain amount of loose play on one another, so that the laying down of one of them does not necessarily determine what the other shall be……Indeterminism (…) denies the world to be one unbending unit of fact. It says that there is a certain ultimate pluralism in
it….To that view actualities seem to float in larger sea of possibilities from out of which they are chosen” (James, in Connolly, 2005, 88).

And then, in a language that echoes complexity and emerging time, Connolly comments:

“This “loose play” between elements is the medium of “indeterminism”, or better, emergent causation in nature. In a process of emergent causation the novel concatenation of disparate elements on occasion issues in something new, which could not have been predicted before it came into being and may set the stage for other unpredictable emergents in the future. Emergent causation participates in creative evolution rather than mechanical evolution. …….The loose play referred to by James operates in nonhuman nature as well as human-centered processes. The word “chosen” seems to point to a series of affinities and resonances between human and nonhuman processes. James does not invest agency entirely in humans while divesting it altogether from nonhuman processes. Chemicals, minerals, and electrical currents enter into the composition of our being. These elements carry an energetic element of loose play in them; and our own experiences of complex decision making, choice, will, experimentation, and the like may be imbued with selective affinities to those primordial processes. Certainly the lose play in the former processes preceded and conditioned it in us. It is because of the loose energy in nature that we may feel a host of affinities and connections to the larger world in which we are set. Such feelings occur at different levels of awareness and degrees of complexity, depending upon the affinities in question.

The rationalist division of the world into “subjects” and “objects” represses such affinities insulating our consciousness form the world that courses through, over, and around us.……….The lines of difference between human beings and the rest of nature now become multiple rather than singular., and distributive rather than categorical. Each difference now comes equipped with a corollary connection. Our capacities to think, feel, see, smell, choose, deliberate, speak, and innovate are prefigured in other sectors of the world; and some of these capacities in us are exceeded elsewhere. Since ethical life, for James, is more a matter of inspiration and attraction than command and obedience, the point is to encourage this feeling of interspecies connection across a broad array of differences.” (2005, 88-89).

In a pluralistic world of novelty and possibility, things are not only connected causally, but also, and perhaps more pertinent for our ability to act effectively and appropriately in an indeterminate environment, through affinities, echoes, associations, correspondences and resonances. Many of these we are only dimly aware of, while others jump to our attention; but glimpsed or not these accordances affect us in multiple unseen, subliminal ways. The result, as Connolly explains, is that the border between ourselves and the world is much more porous as we tend to believe. In fact, pluralism suggests that we are continuous with the world. The world is as much in us as we are in the world; a theme that was articulated both in Dewey’s famous dictum that we don’t live in but by means of an environment (Dewey, 1938; Burke, 1994, 26), and Taylor’s notion of background knowledge as a precondition for appropriate action (Taylor, 1995, FR). I will return to the importance of background knowledge in chapters 6 and 7.

Value pluralism. Values were the proverbial camel’s nose in the tent of rational, empiricist policy analysis. Early critics, such as Martin Rein, Lawrence Tribe, and Frank Fischer all argued that rational policy analysis either was unable to deal with the role of values in political decision making, or, more pernicious, obscured the hidden value positions in more instrumentalist procedures of policy analysis under a veil of rationality or economic efficiency. The problem was seen as one of methods and epistemology. Policy empiricists adhered to the positivist dogma of value noncognitivism, better known as the fact-value dichotomy. Values were seen as expressions of feeling, and therefore devoid of any cognitive content. Value statements could therefore not be subjected to scientific procedures to verify their truth content. Obviously this was not an innocent distinction. As Mary Hawkesworth

14 For a fascinating discussion of the role of “echoes” in organizing experience through oral discourse, see Gee….For an application of this idea, see Wagenaar & Hartendorp, ….
rightly observed, the fact-value dichotomy serves as a crucial boundary marker, a regulative ideal that demarcates science from non-science (1988, 37). The very soul of rational policy analysis hinged on its alleged value neutrality. To let values inside the tent was tantamount to fatally compromising the whole rationalist project. There would be nothing to distinguish policy analysis from politics as usual, biased, distorted, swayed by passions and prejudice.

The philosophical critique was bolstered by methodological innovation. Values in public policy could become the subject of reasoned analysis through techniques such as frame critical analysis (Rein, 1976; 1983), practical reason (Fischer, 1980; Hawkesworth, 1988), normative evaluation (assessing policy goals as to their compatibility with current social arrangements, Fischer, 1995), value identification (explicating the values that inform a particular policy), or a more general probing of the theoretical presuppositions that make up policy claims (Hawkesworth, 1988). These are important additions to the conceptual and methodological tool kit of policy analysis, but with few exceptions, these early critics of empiricist policy analysis have failed to address, what is surely one of the key characteristics of values, namely that they ineluctably and irredeemably clash. 15

Moral theory, like public policy, is about conceptions of the good life. Moral or value pluralism postulates that a good life requires the realization of different values that in their practical consequences, inevitably, conflict or exclude each other (Kekes, 1993, 11) 16 For example, in most countries national health policy strives to attain high quality health care that is both affordable and accessible for all. In their practical realization the drive for high quality and optimal accessibility conflict with the containment of health cost inflation. Similarly, introducing national ceilings for health care outlays reduces accessibility by creating waiting lists. Value pluralism describes the condition in which conceptions of desirable social states are plural and in which the realization of these conceptions mutually exclude each other. As the moral philosopher John Kekes puts it: “Pluralists are committed (...) to the view that the conceptions of a good life and the values on whose realization good lives depend are plural and conditional. These conceptions and values, however, are often related in such a way, according to the pluralists, that the realization of one excludes the realization of the other.” (1993: 21) Conditionally in this phrase means that no value or moral code exists that is sufficiently authoritative to always override other values in case of conflict. Instead pluralists assert that every value or combination of values may be defeated by some other value or combination of values that, in the specific context, is more important (op. cit.: 20).

Genuine value conflict presents itself to the individual as a situation with no obvious way out. The alternatives can be so compelling, necessary, or binding that the foregoing of one of them is experienced as a genuine loss (Berlin 1997: 11). Or, on the contrary, the alternatives that present themselves to the actor can both be so repulsive that the forced choice of one of them amounts to a sense of irreparable damage (Stocker 1990). There is nothing exotic about this. Loss and dirty hands are an unavoidable part of the policy making process as every seasoned politician knows. What makes these conflicts intractable is the circumstance that the values involved are both incompatible and incommensurable. These are complex concepts and for

15 The obvious exceptions are Martin Rein in his analysis of the conflicting frames that structure a policy controversy, and Deborah Stone, whose analysis of the conflicting interpretations of core values such equality or efficiency in concrete policy proposals is still matchless (Rein, 1983; Stone, 1997).

the purpose of understanding serious value conflict in public policy making we need to be clear about their meaning.

Incompatibility arises when “some values are so related as to make living according to one totally or proportionally exclude living according to the other” (Kekes 1993: 55). The incompatibility derives not from any external source (lack of knowledge, deficient organization, bad planning), but from qualities intrinsic to the values themselves or to human nature. We can’t pretend to be a dedicated father, yet spend sixteen hours a day seven days a week at the office. Commitment to our children and blind ambition cannot be reconciled. These are incompatible values because either one implies the denial or negation of the other and because of the biological fact that human organisms need at the very minimum five hours of sustained sleep.

Incommensurability arises when no common denominator or overriding value exists to which we can reduce the conflicting claims. Lukes states it most succinctly: “The key idea, then, is that there is no single currency or scale on which conflicting values can be measured, and that where a conflict occurs no rationally compelling appeal can be made to some value that will resolve it” (1991: 12). Incommensurability of values is wide-spread in everyday life and not necessarily a matter of much concern. It arises when people express widely different tastes in, for example music (Bach versus the Beatles) or interior decorating (Biedermeier versus Bauhaus). We live with it by leaving each other in peace and not push the issue. In public policy, incommensurability is a usually a more serious matter. The choices involved are comprehensive in that they affect large portions of the life of a person or community (Raz 1986: 32). For example, the fact that we experience an acute sense of loss when we are forced to demolish a centuries old river landscape to fortify the dikes (van Eeten,….), flows from the incommensurability of safety against floods and natural beauty. A sure signal that some conflict is the result of the incommensurability of the values involved is the aforesaid experience of a sense of loss. It is not only that the actual choice between the conflicting claims, even by compromising on one or both, entails an irredeemable sense of loss, but even inactivity would evoke the experience of loss as it is the situation itself that is tragic. Being confronted for the first time with incommensurable values is what we have come to call the loss of innocence, and is seen as an inevitable, even required element of maturation, both in private and professional life.

17 For a more extended and formal treatment of incommensurability, see Kekes (1993) and Raz (1996). Raz defines incommensurability as a breakdown of transitivity: “Two valuable options are incommensurable if (1) neither is better than the other, and (2) there is (or could be) another option which is better than one but is not better than the other” (1986: 325). One of the main reasons for such a failure of transitivity is an “incomplete definition of the contribution of criteria to a value”. That is, the criteria that make up the value of the options are so numerous, and in addition are themselves evaluations, that we are unable to arrive at any stable and definitive ranking. This in turn makes it impossible to compare such a complex option with another, usually equally complex option, be they the relative merits of great writers or the rightness of two great values.

18 Loss as a concomitant of tragic choices has been described by several authors on value conflict; a particularly eloquent description comes from Kekes: “The sense of loss, therefore, is a frequent experience in our lives. It need not be due to having made a choice that we come to regret. For we can feel that we have lost something important even if we are convinced that we have made the right choice and that we would make it again if we had to. If the loss is accompanied by regret, the regret is about life’s being such as to exclude the realization of all the values we prize” (1993: 54). See also Hampshire, S. (1983). Morality and Conflict. Cambridge, Massachuestts, Harvard University Press.


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Political Pluralism. Value pluralism arises when values are both incompatible and incommensurable. This makes it highly pertinent to policy making. Most policy issues centre on situations that involve irreconcilable goals. Do we expand the airport to stimulate economic growth or do we heed the warnings of environmentalists about noise and air pollution? Do we restrict legal rights of citizens to be able to better prosecute islamist extremists or do we leave those rights alone and make ourselves potentially more vulnerable to terrorist attacks? Do we emancipate mental patients by giving them all the civil rights of other citizens or do we make it easier to hospitalize them? Do we keep rent control in place or do we liberalize rents? In all these cases major values – economic growth versus environmental integrity; justice versus safety; freedom versus safety; positive liberty versus negative liberty – conflict because in their realization they point to courses of action and consequences that exclude each other, and/or there are no standards or higher order values that can arbitrate between the claims of each policy alternative. We can clench the case by saying for example that economic growth, safety against terrorism, the freedom of patients to live as they choose, and the freedom of property owners to obtain a just rent override the other options, but that doesn’t make the claim of the other option go away. In fact, there will be reasonable people who argue that noise and air pollution are serious matters and that the supply of low cost flights or tax-breaks on kerosene or a consumerist life style create an unnecessary demand for air traffic (Griggs & Howarth, …; ). Or, some will argue that the freedom to live one’s life as one pleases is a great good, but that some mental patients have a hard time sustaining themselves in the community or pose a danger to others so that they and the community would be better off if we could hospitalize them if necessary against their will. In such cases it is difficult to find an easy way out. No compromise, appeal to higher order values or fixation on desired outcomes, or conversely, no denial of the conflict by reducing it to mere emotions or passions, will make it go away. There simply is no common ground in these cases from which to arbitrate rationally between the conflicting values. Conflict in such situations seems unavoidable.

Political pluralism acknowledges the unavoidability and ubiquity of conflict in the realm of politics. Conflict cannot be wished or reasoned away because of the incompatibility and incommensurability of the values involved. It this fact that prevents one overriding value or combination of values to settle the conflict. As Kekes puts it:

“For it seems that the claim that any particular value should always override any incompatible or incommensurable value that may conflict with it is bound to be arbitrary. On what grounds could any value be regarded as invariably overriding if the values it is supposed to override are so utterly unlike as to exclude the possibility of comparison between it and them” (1993, 22).

Although political pluralism issues from value pluralism, it distinguishes itself from it by its emphasis on conflict, power and the functioning of political and administrative institutions. One could say that political pluralism is value pluralism as it expresses itself in the real world of politics and collective problem solving.

Similar to the other pluralisms, political pluralism has to make its case against powerful monist propensities. One such propensity is the claim of ruling elites in liberal democracies that their regime is based on consensus and general agreement. They have been democratically elected, thus the majority of the people agree with its political program and its ideological presuppositions. Surely there are people who disagree, but they are a minority and, for all practical purposes, have less standing. Election results are the hard evidence of the legitimacy and rightness of the elite’s position. Otherwise the adversaries would have won. Another monist proclivity in politics is the deep-seated ideal that for all societal problems
rational or scientific analysis will be able to dissolve the original, underlying conflict. In earlier chapters we have already seen that rationalism in politics usually amounts to obfuscating the underlying values that are at stake. A plea for a rational approach to this or that problem usually means that one value, usually economic efficiency, or one interest, usually those of the business community (Hays,…), surreptitiously drives the policy solution. A third monist tendency is the belief in a common political culture. Governments of leftist, centrist of rightist signature may come and go, people may exhibit widely different life-styles, but we are all united by a common set of values, a Leitkultur, a language, a shared history, and trust in the adjudicating power of a set of democratic procedures to resolve societal conflict.

Value pluralism is an ethical theory and consequently it moves in the rarefied realm of abstract philosophical argument. Political pluralism deals with the everyday world of politics. Political scientists and students of public administration prefer to portray that world as one of consensus and reasonableness, and in many cases it is, but there is another side to it. The world of politics is ruled by power differentials. Deception, discrimination, manipulation, and double crossing are common means to clench political conflicts. People get duped, hurt, marginalized, or are denied their rightful claim. Power can be seen as yet another engine of monism. Power either forces the issue by brute domination or, more subtly and more commonly in the liberal democracies in which most of us live, by organizing some positions out of the spectrum of legitimate, feasible, reasonable or even imaginable options (Lukes,…; Foucault,…). Covert or latent power is a particularly effective means to cover up real and potential conflict. The active ingredient is the denial of standing to a particular group or position. Standing is denied because the group is said to lack core values, to speak the wrong language, to lack necessary skills or attitudes, because their desires would imperil ‘obvious’ values or benefits, because they don’t play by the rules, etcetera. The intended effect is, through the exertion of overt or covert power, to circumscribe a domain in which a consensus of interest and values is established and one value position goes unchallenged (Mouffe, 2000, 91).

5. Conclusion.
The incompatibility theorem has hovered over the social sciences since the early days of phenomenology, now more than a century ago. It states that a social science that is true to its subject, the life-world of everyday human beings, must be able to elucidate what is characteristic of that world, namely that it is meaningful, intentional, value-laden, and action-driven. We cannot hope to understand social phenomena unless we are able to situate them in categories of human action (Bernstein, 1976, 154). Applying the impossibility theorem to policy analysis, I reformulated it in terms of fit. A policy analysis that is true to its subject, the world of politics and collective problem solving, should fit that subject. There is much diversity about what it is exactly that characterizes the world of politics and collective decision making, with some descriptions being rather impressionistic (policy making is political), and others steeped in sociological imagery (policy is currently made in networks). I suggested that we would get closer to our goal of outlining a policy relevant policy analysis by suggesting three characteristics of the world of policy making that every public official has to reckon with because they capture something essential; essential in the sense that they determine the limits and possibilities of policy making. For this reason I called them design-independent; no matter what our plans and intentions with a particular slice of the world are, we will always run into complexity, the flow of emerging time, and the various forms of pluralism.

19 A rare exception is Adams a.o. , 2004.
So, the conclusion of this chapter is that a policy analysis that fits its subject should not only
do justice to schemes of meaning and intention, but on top of that it should take complexity,
time and pluralism into account. That’s a tall order. It is not enough to state that policy
analysis must be interpretive and normative, but it must also be able to throw light on the
effects that complexity, time and pluralism have on the process and outcomes of public
policy. It must be able to assist in navigating policies into emerging time and steering them
between the shoals of irredeemable value conflict. In this concluding section I will briefly
discuss this second part of the compatibility equation. I will elaborate the notion of fit in two
ways; as dealing with the limits on policy making and with the creative, productive
possibilities these limits hold out.

Complexity, time and pluralism set limits to policy making. In a shorthand kind of way, these
limits can be described as limits to understanding, limits to designing the good life, and limits
to organizing the good life. All three, taken together, result in constraints on the capacity to
control collective problem solving. The indeterminacy that follows from the cascading
interactions in a loosely coupled complex system and the constant emergence of novelty in
“the twists and swerves in the flow of time” (Connolly, 2005, 110), make it hard to
understand and predict what is going on while we are in the middle of it. Anticipation is
difficult if not impossible, and whatever understanding we have of the situation at hand is
imposed on the situation retrospectively. The inevitable conflict between the values which we
deem essential for our conception of the good life, make it hard to realize that ideal. The
incompatibility and incommensurability of values can be denied or acknowledged. In the first
case policy makers rally behind one value (equality, economic efficiency, safety) which they
declare overriding, and worry about the negative unintended consequences of their policies
later. In the second case the policy design reflects the tensions between multiple key values
but feels like a lame compromise, and policy makers experience a sense of loss and fear
public disapproval. Finally, the realities of asymmetrical power relations and conflicts of
interest in our political institutions make it difficult to effectuate and implement whatever
compromise in good living we have arrived at. Again we see two types of reactions. Those
affected by policy decisions that they consider as antithetical to their interests will resist them
as much as they can. Alternatively, when a despised policy can not be averted the affected
parties will “play the system” by using the policy in a such a way that it is more conducive to
their own interests and practices (Wagenaar 1995).

However, acknowledging complexity, time and pluralism is not synonymous with fatalism.
Although choices can be tragic, and the wise policy maker is attuned to a sense of the tragic,
in the final analysis value conflict can be a source of novelty, discovery, and creativity.
People make effective, creative, and feasible choices al the time in situations where
understanding is limited and design is thwarted by irredeemable conflict. Indeterminacy and
pluralism wreak havoc on policy strategies which aim at control and centralization, but as I
will discuss more fully in later chapters, there are many strategies for dealing with situations
of limited understanding and deep value conflict. So, how then do policy makers and
administrators deal with complexity, emerging time, and pluralism in ordinary circumstances?

To arrive at judgments policy makers employ different strategies. Key is the experiential,
hands-on knowledge that is embedded in practices. I will return to practices in chapter 7, but
what makes them pertinent to indeterminism, dynamic change, and pluralism is their
contextuality. Context is a relational term; it signifies both the active, ongoing relationship
that an actor maintains between himself and his environment, and the fact that this
relationship is driven by the particular intentions and understandings of the individual as they emanate from the task that he engages in. Instead of passively reacting to the constraints of a particular context, the term “setting” denotes that the actor purposively seeks out those elements of his environment that are relevant to the task at hand. In this sense the actor “negotiates” his environment. This negotiating is a largely habitual, routine, second nature, but, at the same time open and improvisational affair. In this sense, practice is always situated, meaning that the actor and his setting mutually bring each other into being in the course of participating in a particular practice, and action-driven, that is, “carried in patterns of appropriate action” (Taylor…, 51).

But practice is a blanket term. Under its auspices many subtle, hard to perceive, hard to describe skills and activities occur with which we deal with everyday reality. We engage in practical judgment (Beiner 1983), in which we display a greater or lesser degree of wisdom (Sternberg, 1990). We employ self-knowledge in reflection (Velleman, 1989), and we explore the possibilities of life and negotiate the unknown future by various forms of moral imagination (Kekes, 1993, Warnock, 1976). We gain a better understanding of problems and imagine possibilities for resolution by engaging in intensive interaction with our colleagues and peers (Wagenaar, 2004). We attempt to deal with unavoidable conflict by deliberating, negotiating and by engaging in various forms of conflict resolution (Kekes, 1993, Forester, 1999, Susskind a.o, 1999, Raiffa, 1982).

What these skills and activities have in common is that they project a policy analysis that is a form of becoming, a kind of guided improvisation, as I called it earlier. This kind of policy analysis does not fixate the future by stipulating policy goals, but treats goals as intentions, as a form of imagining. This kind of policy analysis is open-ended, attentive to the emergent effects of unforeseen and unpredictable interaction effects in complex social systems. In this sense it is suspended in emerging time, encompassing past experience and future imagination in its attempt to negotiate the evolving nature of the present. It uses the inevitable partiality of a point of view not as a form of distortion and bias to be avoided, but as the starting point for dialogue and joint exploration (Gadamer,…; Taylor, 2002, Inner & Booher, 2003). It deals with political pluralism through agonistic respect, critical responsiveness and democratic listening (Connolly, 2005, Bickford, 1996, Mouffe, 2000, Wagenaar, 2005). Research for policy is participatory and dialogical; involving professionals and stakeholders in the definition of problems, the cogeneration of relevant knowledge, and the interpretation of experience (Greenwood & Levin, 1998). Such a policy analysis I call Generative Policy Analysis. It is aim is not certain knowledge and the exorcism of bias and political conflict from the policy making process, but instead the return of the political in policy making. Generative Policy Analysis is concrete, interactive, pragmatic, personal and action-oriented. It aims as much at good result as at proper procedure. But what counts as result is not the definitive resolution of a conflict, but the temporary stabilization of a situation that is unhinged or threatens to become so. In the final analysis Generative Policy Analysis is a return to Lasswell’s ideal of policy science of democracy.

References.


20 Compare Wenger (1998): "I intend the term negotiation to convey a flavour of continuous interaction, of gradual achievement, and of give-and-take".


