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# **TRANSPORT POLICY AND POLICY RESEARCH: SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS**

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## **Introduction**

As a conclusion to this special issue on transport policy research, we want to come back to the question of what is the gain of policy research for the specific needs of the field of transport policy.

Opening this volume, we have outlined some three general axes of research interest we consider especially interesting for the present object of analysis. We have argued that the questions of coordination, of policy design, and of innovation are somewhat inherent to the field of transport policy.

First, coordination is a major issue in transport policy as it is a pronouncedly interdependent field of public action, not only interlinked with planning, housing, and land-use policy, but in a much wider sense subject of foreign policy, economic policy, and regional equalization attempts to name just a few.

The question of policy design, then, is relevant for every public policy, of course. In the field of transport policy, however, we have argued that the chosen instruments are of special interest for the following reasons: first, as already pointed out, transport policy has many cross-sectoral implications, which makes its goals largely interdependent. The policy design, thus, not only has to influence individual and societal behavior in one direction, but in many directions at the same time, thereby taking into account the cross-

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sectional character of the policy. Second, transport policy is treating the general societal phenomenon of mobility - the very nature of today's society rather than a mere characteristic. Transport policy treats a core trait of the modern world. It cannot be the goal, therefore, to change mobility itself, but rather the patterns of mobility in order to find a way to make the said nature of today's society compatible with actual society. Sustainability in this understanding is besides its already broad meaning also a question of speed - social, economic, and regarding the use of natural resources. This complexity of political goals in transport policy makes the question of policy design outstandingly interesting for policy research.

Finally, it is for the same reason that we consider the question of innovation a third major stake for the analysis of transport policy. Transport is a field, which is almost as much subject to technical innovation as is the field of information technologies. This important technological progress offers great opportunities, but embraces also threats. The opportunities lie in possibility to solve political problems linked to transport without challenging the mobile nature of society. The threats, however, are to be found on the very level: it is a grand illusion to think political problems can be solved on a purely technical basis, ignoring all their social components. The question of innovation in the field of transport policy, therefore, is also a question of the balance between technical and social solutions to political problems.

It is along these three streams that we discuss the question of what is the specific contribution of policy research for the field of transport policy. We will address this question based on the articles collected in this volume.

## **The question of coordination**

There is not one article in this volume that would not at least touch on the question of coordination. Policy research identifies the three forms of coordination: inter-sectoral, between political entities at the same level, i.e. horizontal, and between higher and lower levels, i.e. vertical. In most cases, coordination takes place in all three forms at the same time.

To begin with the supranational level, Liana Giorgi and Michael Schmidt describe the history of European transport policy as a "long process of approximation of national transport policies". Beginning as a mere exchange of ideas without any decision making ambitions, this process takes its turn with the development of the Common European Transport Policy in 1985 and starts producing decisions more binding upon the member states. While Giorgi and Schmidt highlight the turn from negative towards positive integration, we might as well speak for the present purposes of a turn from a negative to a positive coordination as Scharpf (1994, 1997) describes them.<sup>1</sup> As Giorgi and Schmidt show in their article, this shift from negative to positive coordination has important effects on the processes of institutional innovation (cf. below).

A different perspective is taken on by Dirk Lehmkuhl who challenges in his article assumptions of a broad harmonisation of national transport policies as a result of vertical coordination activities within the Common European Transport Policy. On the contrary, Lehmkuhl identifies a wide range of different national responses to the Common Policy with the complete railway liberalization in Great Britain on the one hand and the very low reform capacity in Italy on the other. Lehmkuhl states: "Europeanisation is not convergence, although convergence may be one dimension of Europeanisation". Vertical coordination does not necessarily lead to horizontal coordination.

While Christian Hirschi's, Walter Schenkel's, and Thomas Widmer's contribution only implicitly concerns the question of coordination,

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<sup>1</sup> "In welfare-theoretical terms, successful negative co-ordination will ensure that new policy initiatives must be Pareto-superior to the status quo, while positive co-ordination aims at the more ambitious Kaldor optimum. Procedurally, positive co-ordination is associated with multilateral negotiations in intra- or interministerial task forces whose mandate includes consideration of all policy options of all participating units. By contrast, negative co-ordination will typically take the form of bilateral 'clearance' negotiations between the initiating department and other units whose portfolios might be affected - but whose own policy options are not actively considered. Moreover, explicit clearance will often be reduced to a mere formality when the initiating unit is able to anticipate objections and to adjust the design of its proposal accordingly" (Scharpf 1994: 39).

namely by treating the highly intersectoral concept of sustainability, it is the two articles concerned with transport policy at the local level that give deeper insights in the question of coordination inherent to transport policy.

In his comparison of transport policies in five European cities, Bernard Jouve points out a whole catalogue of reasons for coordination in urban transport planning in order to be able to link content and form, i.e. policy and polity: do different problems lead to different solutions? In his in depth analysis of the problems of urban transport, he enumerates coordination needs ranging from public finance to participation and inter-organisational exchange.

Mario Gualdi and Carlo Sessa describe the major shift in Rome's planning policy from a sectoral to an intersectoral approach resulting in a new Master Plan somewhat integrating land use planning culture and transport planning culture. The benefits from this integration are evident: Identifying different urban zones leads to road classification according to their actual function and enables authorities to meet the demands for public transportation by proper planning.

Both articles, however, take the lack of coordination as the starting point for institutional and procedural innovation.

Taken together, the articles presented here show the important relevance of the question of coordination for the analysis of transport policy. However, what we also find is how policy research concepts help a lot in order to fully understand dynamics of transport policy processes.

## **The question of policy design**

As we have seen before, the analysis of transport policy measures and instruments is of specific interest due to the lack of a clear sectoral goal instead of the highly inter-sectoral character of transport policy. It is this problem of choosing political goals which takes Giorgi and Schmidt to the prognosis of a paradigm shift on the EU-level towards a re-definition of transport policy, thereby pondering the problems of pollution and congestion stronger than they are within the actual paradigm of liberalisation.

Lehmkuhl shows us in his contribution how much the national responses to the Common European Transport Policy differ, and makes a strong point that the choice of policy measures adopted remains to a great extent determined by the preexisting political conditions in a member state.

It is then Hirschi, Schenkel, and Widmer who pose the question of the actual effects of transport policy design. From their cross-country as well as cross-issue comparison, they draw three crucial conclusions: First, they find that the acceptance of regulatory measures depends on the politico-administrative traditions of a country rather than on the actual instruments chosen.

Both this first finding of Hirschi et al.'s as well as Lehmkuhl's conclusion strongly support the culturalist thesis held by sociologist neo-institutionalists (March and Olsen 1989) postulating that the main character of political institutions such as regulatory policy designs is their appropriateness with their socio-structural context (Hall and Taylor 1996). Institutions will not develop nor last unless they 'fit in'. A trivial finding, one should think, but often left unconsidered when new policy designs are being formulated.

In a second finding, Hirschi, Schenkel and Widmer state on the impact-side that an inclusive policy design, i.e. a policy design in accordance with the inter-sectoral character of transport policy and thus meeting the need for coordination, is not less accepted than a more sectoral policy design. Gualdi and Sessa expect the same effect when they describe the changing planning paradigm from sectoral to inter-sectoral planning, integrating both transport and land use approaches (an imperative for urban planning policy as highlighted by Jouve). The output of this shift so far is an inclusive Master Plan for Rome. Hirschi et al.'s finding has quite an optimistic implication regarding the omnipresent goal of sustainability - a goal that Giorgi and Schmidt expect to become more important than now also on the European level.

The third conclusion of Hirschi et al.'s then formulates the big challenge for the future: The better a transport policy's short term elements can be connected to its long term measures, the better it can be communicated to the public and the higher its acceptance will be.

It is these two latter conclusions which show us that transport policy analysis not only profits from concepts provided by policy research, but that the analysis of transport policy also highlights specific aspects of policy design and thus can enrich policy research as a whole.

## **The question of innovation**

As a both very technical and very social field of public action, transport policy, more than other policies, is confronted with the question of how to balance technical and political innovation. The present articles put the respective political institutions in a very pivotal position between the technical and the social, i.e. political level of innovation. So, what triggers institutional innovation?

As stated above, some of the findings presented in this volume are in line with certain claims of the so-called 'limited rationality'-school of the new institutionalism. When we draw our attention to the question of institutional innovation, though, we will find that also postulates from both the public choice-school and the historical new institutionalism are supported.

We already have seen that Lehmkuhl's as well as Hirschi et al.'s findings support the culturalist assumption that new institutions only develop and existing institutions only change when the innovation is appropriate for the social and political culture of their context. The slow start of the European transport policy described by Giorgi and Schmidt also fits in this line of argument.

A competing assumption to this thesis is the 'calculus approach' pursued by the public choice-school linking institutional innovation to the interests of their members. Hall and Taylor (1996) have labeled this approach the "logic of consequences" as opposed to the mentioned "logic of appropriateness". This functional line of reasoning is well suited to the explanation of the further process of European transport policy as observed by Giorgi and Schmidt. While Lehmkuhl highlights the limits to a future European Transport Policy, Giorgi and Schmidt focus on its requirements, thus sticking to the functional approach: the main challenge of a future transport policy is the political agreement on "a suitable institutional framework on how to reach policy decisions". The same logic is

adopted by Sessa and Gualdi who see the urgent need for more coordination in urban planning as the trigger for institutional innovation in Rome. The centralization of tasks in the new independent agency is a rational decision by the involved actors in order to solve a well-defined problem.

Finally, Jouve evaluates the innovation capacity in five European cities with a strong focus on the technical aspects of transport policy. While generally in accordance with the sociological school, Jouve observes a strong path dependency in policy change. Historical institutionalists use this concept in order to explain why chosen policy options are not always fit for the problems at stake but rather well compatible with policy options adopted in former policy choices. A way out of this somewhat vicious circle is proposed, though. By adopting a culturalist perspective, Jouve argues that the reconstruction of political leadership sensitive to questions of transport policy can be a way to change social norms and categories, thereby preparing the context for innovative policy solutions that address the present problems. "We have to hold on to both ends of the cord", Jouve concludes: "'technify' public matters and democratise technical debate."

## **Conclusion**

We have introduced this volume by outlining three research interests we consider specific for the analysis of transport policy, namely the questions of coordination, of policy design, and of innovation. We have checked in these concluding remarks how the articles collected in this issue treat these questions in order to find out what is the contribution of policy research for the specific field of transport policy.

As we hope we could show here, not only does the policy benefit from the research, but the theorizing profits from the specific policy field. On the one hand, concepts of policy research not only help understand coordination processes and institutional innovation, but also contribute to the drawing of lessons and the formulation of practical recommendations. In this vein, we have to hallmark the high relevance of political institutions as it is introduced by the different schools of new institutionalism. This theoretic approach helps a great deal in understanding transport policy, as the different

contributions show, by recognizing the salience of action or choice and defining choice as expressions of expectations of consequences in the policy process.

On the other hand, the deeper analysis of the specific features of transport policy in turn offers new insights relevant for policy research as a whole and contributes to the further development of its concepts and theories.

As a final point to this collection of scientific articles we would like to emphasize this high mutual relevance of social sciences and practical politics. Social science does not only contribute to the solving of political problems, it also profits from the twists and turns politics comes up with on a daily basis.

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