Policy Networks and Policy Communities: Conceptualizing State-Societal Relationships in the Policy Process
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How should one conceptualize the relationship between state and non-state actors in the policy process? How does this relationship differ across policy domains and political systems, and what are the implications of different patterns of state-societal relations for policy outcomes? Conceptual development of the constructs of policy community and policy network represents an effort to answer these questions. From their origins, the terms underscored the assumption that a focus on formal state institutions failed to capture what was deemed to be “a real change in the structure of the polity” by the 1970s (Borzel 1998a, 260). Policy making had become more complex, specialized, and fragmented with the expansion of state involvement in society and the economy in the postwar period. Interventionist states found themselves unable to realize their activist agendas without the informational resources and acquiescence or active support of societal actors. The result was the emergence of policy subsystems in which state (principally bureaucratic officials) and non-state actors were implicated in both policy formulation and implementation. To understand policy making and policy outcomes, then, it was necessary to focus on these decentralized, and more or less regularized and co-ordinated, linkages among state actors and organized interests.

Beginning life as a term to describe a model of state-interest group intermediation, the construct policy network is now a central one in theorizing around the policy process. Policy networks, state Carsten Daugbjerg and David Marsh (1998, 55), “are crucial political structures through which we are governed or ruled.” In a similar fashion, Tanja Borzel (1998b, 354) describes networks as “one, if not the, predominant mode of governance in modern societies.” The British scholar who has arguably done the most to popularize the construct also turns to policy networks to tell us “‘Who rules?’, ‘How do they rule?’ and ‘In whose interest do they rule?’” (Rhodes 1997, 10).

This chapter argues that Canadian scholars have played a significant role in contributing to the analytical popularity of the policy community/policy
network concepts among students of public policy and contemporary governance. In doing so, they have been both intellectual “borrowers” and “givers.” The innovative work on policy networks by Michael Atkinson and William Coleman (1989a) – as well as that subsequently by Coleman, his coauthors, and other Canadians – built upon but also extended what was, and continues to be, principally a European literature. Indeed, it is the British nomenclature – their definition of policy community as a particular type of policy network – that is the most widely cited in the burgeoning literature on policy networks in developed and transitional political economies. Nonetheless, Canadians have helped to refine the key theoretical concepts, building on intellectual developments in the social sciences to address persistent criticisms surrounding the concepts and their usefulness.

The first criticism is that the concepts of policy community/policy network add little explanatory power; rather than the features of the network itself, it is the attributes of actors in policy networks that are consequential for policy making and policy outcomes. The second criticism is that the concepts of policy community/policy network are static, capturing a patterned relationship at a point in time, and have little capacity to explain political change. Policy networks need to be situated contextually if the construct is to provide insight into the dynamics of power relationships and the factors that can cause these relationships, and presumably policy outcomes, to change over time. To that end, greater recognition needs to be given to the role of agency within policy networks as a driver of policy outcomes and policy change. A third criticism is that current realities of governing no longer replicate the conditions that gave rise to the concepts and therefore undermine the case for their continuing analytical utility. Whereas policy networks characterized by associational group-state linkages may have described policy-making patterns in an era when domestic policy making was largely insulated from external forces, governing in the current period is marked by internationalized policy environments, multilevel governance, and social actors who transcend national borders. And, finally, if it was the exigencies of effective governing that constituted the original rationale for network governance, is this mode of societal-state interaction still dominant in an era when legitimate governing has acquired heightened priority and prompted governments to engage in mechanisms of direct citizen engagement?

As this chapter demonstrates, Canadians have helped to mitigate some, but not all, of these criticisms by incorporating insights from the institutionalist and ideational turns in comparative politics and engaging with the theoretical literature regarding developments in the international political economy. No less significant is their empirical contribution through single case and comparative case studies. Despite these gains, if Canadians are to continue to be givers to the study of comparative public policy, they
would do well to tackle gaps in their understanding of the functioning of policy networks in the Canadian context.

This chapter is organized in four parts. The first part examines the conceptual foundations and central tenets of the policy community/policy network approach. The second part discusses the criticisms of the policy community/policy network approach and efforts to mitigate them by integrating the constructs more fully with theories of political behaviour and policy change. The third part traces how theorizing around policy communities/networks has been affected by changes in domestic and international political economies that have brought issues of legitimate and effective “governance” to the fore. And the fourth part suggests some lines of inquiry for scholars of Canadian politics to fill gaps in the existing literature and addresses the issue of the continuing salience of policy networks for effective and legitimate governing.

Before proceeding further, I should offer an important caveat. The literature overview that follows makes no pretense to be comprehensive of the voluminous international body of scholarship in which the concepts of policy network/community figure large. Nor does it make reference to the entirety of the smaller Canadian literature, particularly when it comes to empirical case studies of policy networks. The focus is narrowed to the role of policy communities and networks in the public policy and governing process (rather than in other areas of social activity) and to literature that appears to have had the greatest impact or to be the most promising in terms of its theoretical insights.

**Conceptual Foundations**

As many have noted, there is no single policy network approach in public policy. The policy network literature divides roughly into two strands: the one conceives of networks as *interpersonal* relationships; the other, which has dominated among political scientists and public policy analysts, conceptualizes networks as *structural* linkages between corporate public and private actors. Within and across the structural and interpersonal conceptualizations of policy networks, there is methodological and epistemological pluralism. Some scholars rely on qualitative methods to map policy communities/networks, while others adopt more quantitative methods. Moreover, among network analysts, there are differences in their assumptions about the factors that account for behaviour within policy networks; some assume a rational actor, others adhere to institutionalist assumptions, and still others situate themselves within constructivist approaches.

The Canadian literature on policy networks fits within the structural (not interpersonal) approach, the dominant approach among students of governing and public policy. Its overriding premise, as observed above, is that policy making within discrete policy fields is characterized by regularized...
patterns of interaction between state actors and representatives of societal interests. These “structures” constitute the policy process alongside the formal and macrolevel decision-making bodies such as Parliament, cabinet, and first ministers’ conferences. Early network theorizing focused on linkages between state actors, on the one hand, and business or other economic interests, on the other. Over time, it has been extended to encompass other societal actors. Although some policy community/network analysts argue that networks are so ubiquitous as to constitute the dominant pattern of governance in certain polities such as the European Union (Ansell 2000; but also Peterson 2001; Pfetsch 1998), Canadians have generally been more cautious, suggesting that whether policy making proceeds via policy networks is a possibility that must be empirically investigated and established (Coleman and Skogstad 1990). Policy communities, however, seem to exist in virtually all policy fields.

The early Canadian literature made an important distinction between policy communities and policy networks. Borrowing from British scholars, William Coleman and Grace Skogstad (1990) used the term “policy community” to refer to the set of actors, public and private, that coalesces around an issue area and shares a common interest in shaping its development. They adopted Paul Pross’s (1986) subdivision of the policy community into two parts: “the attentive public” who are interested in, follow, and attempt to influence policy but do not participate in policy making, and “the subgovernment” that is actively engaged in policy design or implementation. The term “policy network” captures the power relationship among the actors in the subgovernment of this policy community (Coleman and Skogstad 1990). This conceptualization in which the policy community is distinguished from the policy network has the advantage of drawing attention to those (the attentive public) who are excluded from the subgovernment/policy network. The framework has resonated with Canadian scholars, and the term “policy community” has moved into the lexicon of practitioners no less than it has into that of academics.

The observation that modes of interaction between public and private actors differed across policy domains (and countries) spurred the construction of typologies to delineate these different patterns of interest intermediation. Atkinson and Coleman were early typology builders. They demonstrated that the binary distinctions between strong and weak states, and between pluralism and corporatism, failed to capture the range of patterns of interest intermediation and state-societal linkages. Their 1989 delineation of eight different policy network prototypes, subsequently used in the edited collection of case studies in Coleman and Skogstad (1990), distinguished networks on the basis of the structural resources of state and society actors: more specifically, the bureaucratic autonomy of societal interests, the co-ordination capacity of state actors, and the mobilization or
organizational development of societal actors. In their prize-winning book, *The State, Business, and Industrial Change in Canada*, Atkinson and Coleman (1989c) linked these structural attributes directly to the adoption and success of different types of industrial policies. The Atkinson-Coleman-Skogstad typology postulated various power relationships between state and non-state actors, including hierarchical relationships (state-directed networks), those where societal actors were in the driver’s seat (clientele pluralist networks), and those where there was a more equitable balance between state and economic actors (corporatist networks). The typology has itself been refined by other Canadian scholars (Haddow 2002; Lindquist 1996; Pal 1992) but without abandoning its two structural axes (of state capacity/autonomy and organizational development of societal actors) or the premise that these attributes shape the power dynamic between state and society in a policy sector.

Whatever its appeal to Canadian analysts, the Canadian typology and distinction between policy communities and policy networks have not been equally embraced outside Canada. There are several other typologies, constructed on dimensions such as the number and type of participants, the functions performed, and the balance of power in the network (see, e.g., van Waarden 1992). Arguably, the most widely referenced schema is the continuum developed by David Marsh and R.A.W. Rhodes (1992). It contrasts policy networks in terms of their degree of integration, membership, and distribution of resources among members. At one end of this continuum are policy communities as integrated, stable, and exclusive policy networks; at the other end are issue networks of loosely connected, multiple, and often conflict-ridden members.6

The appeal of the Rhodes and Marsh categories, and their reference to “policy community” as a specific type of policy network (integrated, stable, closed), has relegated the Canadian usage of policy community more or less to the fate of the Betamax video. Despite critics’ complaints that the British formulation is not very helpful (Atkinson and Coleman 1992; Peters 1998), its distinction between policy communities and issue networks has emerged as the predominant one in the literature – the VHS video – and continuing efforts at typology development represent modifications of the British policy community-issue network continuum (see, e.g., Bressers and O’Toole 1998; Daugbjerg 1998).

The debate about the merits of various network typologies continues, as do problems with operationalizing existing categories of networks. Identifying the type of network in place is often difficult. For example, determining whether state actors possess the requisite autonomy of business to characterize a concertation relationship rather than a clientelist one (Coleman and Skogstad 1990, 27-29) can often be hard since state and business actors usually share overlapping goals that cannot be realized without close
co-operation. Nevertheless, delineating the salient dimensions on which policy communities/networks differ appears to be necessary if these concepts are to take us beyond a description of different sectoral patterns of interaction across public and private actors to an account of how the latter shape policy developments, including policy change. If policy networks are to serve as an independent variable, then they must, after all, vary on some theoretically significant dimensions.

**Criticisms and Reconceptualization**

However helpful the policy community/network concepts may be in providing a descriptive snapshot of a policy process at a given point in time, critics suggest that there are important limits to their power to explain policy outcomes until three matters in particular are attended to. First, it needs to be demonstrated that attributes of the network itself, rather than characteristics of the parties to the network, are the primary explanatory element. Second, policy networks as explanatory factors must be linked more systematically to contextual factors. The broader political and economic environment within which policy networks function is the source of policy ideas and agendas that generate change and explains why particular types of networks and communities, privileging certain actors and policy outcomes, arise in the first place. And third, recognition must be given to the role of “agency” in policy communities/networks: that is, the capacities of individual actors to reflect and act on their interests and preferences (Daugberg and Marsh 1998; Dowding 1995, 2000).

Alongside their international colleagues, Canadian scholars have responded to the first and second criticisms, helping to demonstrate the policy-making constraints (and opportunities) posed by the policy network itself as well as the need to situate policy networks within their broader context. Their structuralist approach to networks has equipped Canadian scholars less well when it comes to adapting the framework to take account of the role of strategic actors on modes of interaction within the policy network and, ultimately, the combined effect of structure and agency on policy outcomes. Here the most interesting insights are arguably those of the British academic Colin Hay (2002), who lays out a framework that views political actors, policy network structures, and contextual factors in interaction.

**Policy Networks as Independent Variables**

Drawing on insights from a wide body of literature – including neo-institutionalism, ideational frameworks, and policy-learning theories – analysts have attempted to explicate more fully the attributes of policy networks that shape behaviour of actors and that are, in turn, consequential for policy making and policy outcomes. Doing so has entailed incorporating into network analyses factors previously ignored or undertheorized.
The structural approach to policy networks favoured by Canadians and many British scholars posits that the attributes of the network itself shape the behaviour of the parties to the network. As Atkinson and Coleman (1992, 172) phrased it, “networks are governed by sets of rules which determine how decisions are made and who participates in policymaking.” They did not suggest, however, where these rules that govern network activity come from or how they shape policy making. Implicit in the attention to the distribution of organizational and other (technical knowledge) resources across state and non-state actors is the premise that these factors determine the relationships of power within the network and in turn shape how decisions are made and by whom. By extension, networks in which actors are mutually dependent on the resources of one another to realize their objectives would then have a different mode of behaviour and different consequences for policy making than those in which resources are unevenly distributed.

Efforts to specify how policy networks matter for policy making – for example, by shaping definitions of policy problems, the selection of appropriate solutions, and thus the substance of public policies – have been advanced by drawing on a wide body of literature that elaborates how formal and informal rules, procedures, and norms condition actors’ behaviour. Consistent with institutionalist premises, and as relationships that are continuous over time, policy networks can be conceived as structures that both “define the roles which actors play within networks” and “prescribe the issues which are discussed” and how they are dealt with (Marsh and Smith 2000, S). A number of analysts argue that networks that are stable over time and characterized by dense interactions among network members (what British scholars call policy communities) can foster shared values and beliefs. Ideas about desirable goals and instruments to realize them, as well as appropriate rules of conduct, become institutionalized over time to shape actors’ behaviour within the network (Marsh and Smith 2000, 6; see also Bressers and O’Toole 1998; Daugbjerg 1998; and Pemberton 2003). By contrast, such a transformative effect of network interactions is much less likely in less integrated and less institutionalized “issue networks.” Work by Canadian scholars has also contributed to how these dynamics vary, depending on the power dynamic and stability of the policy network (Coleman and Skogstad 1995; Coleman, Skogstad, and Atkinson 1997).

Attention to the cognitive dimension of policy networks has been stimulated, at least in part, by two bodies of literature that posit shared cognitive and normative beliefs as a constituent basis for networks. These literatures are those on epistemic communities (Haas 1992) and advocacy coalitions (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993). The theorizing on advocacy coalitions in particular has been instructive in reminding policy network scholars of the strong ideational component to policy networks. Paul Sabatier and Hank
Jenkins-Smith (1993) argue that policy sectors are dominated by a winning advocacy coalition whose members share core beliefs about desirable policy objectives. The existence of other coalitions in the policy subsystem, advocating for other sets of ideas, creates an environment for learning within and across contending advocacy coalitions. The epistemic community approach also assumes that there are multiple communities competing to affect policy through their ideas.

This effort to bring a cognitive/normative element into analyses has added ideational factors as a second structural feature of some policy networks, normally those that are tightly integrated (Marsh and Smith 2000, 6). Doing so strengthens the case that it is the existence and characteristics of networks themselves, rather than the properties of constituent actors, that shape behaviour and ultimately policy outcomes.

Situating Policy Networks within the Broader Context
Policy network analysts have been criticized for paying insufficient attention to the broader context of macro political, ideological, and economic structures within which policy networks themselves are situated. Those who attribute importance to broader structural factors – the nature of the political economy, for example – argue that these factors define the composition of policy communities and the pattern of interactions among network partners to a far greater degree than adherents of this approach are willing to admit (Haddow 2002; Marsh and Smith 2000). Their arguments are perhaps most compelling when posed as the following questions. Why does a policy community/network exist in the first place? What explains who is included and who is excluded from the network? And why has this type of network and not another taken shape? These questions cannot be answered by recourse to the criteria on which network typologies are constructed without engaging in a tautological argument.

Canadian scholars have long argued for the need to situate policy communities and policy networks within the broader structural and macro-context. When Coleman and Skogstad (1990, 314) reviewed the empirical evidence on policy communities in Canada in the late 1980s, they concluded that “policy networks and policy communities are best understood when attention is paid to first, the broader political, economic, and ideological environment within which they function; and second, the legacy of history.” In their appraisal of the literature on policy communities/networks in the early 1990s, Atkinson and Coleman (1992) signalled the need for further incorporation of the influence of macropolitical institutions and dominant political discourses. They argued that these broader contextual factors helped to explain the existence of particular types of networks. Subsequent case studies, for example Eric Montpetit’s (2002) comparative study of agroenvironmental policy networks in Canada and the United States,
show how macropolitical structures, like variations in federal arrangements, shape policy networks and interact with them to affect policy design. In other institutional settings, other scholars make a persuasive case for incorporating other institutions, including parliamentary institutions, into policy network analyses (Daugbjerg 1998).

What is missing in these case studies, some would argue, is more systematic theorizing about how agency, networks, and contextual factors together interact to shape policy making and policy outcomes. Phrased differently, there is a compelling need, critics say, to integrate microlevel explanations of human behaviour with macrolevel accounts of the state and the political economy. British scholars have proposed a dialectical model that they claim does just that.

**Networks as Agency, Structure, and Context in Interaction**

Hay (1998, 2000) lays the theoretical groundwork for a model of policy networks that takes both agency and structure – where the latter refers to both the pattern of relations of policy community actors and macrolevel structures – seriously and integrates microlevel theories of human behaviour with macrolevel accounts. Individuals, says Hay (2002, 131-32), act strategically to realize their intentions and preferences, and these preferences are not solely determined by contextual factors, be they material, ideational, or institutional. Courses of action are informed by a strategic assessment of the relevant context in which individuals find themselves. The context favours certain strategies over others and therefore influences actors’ abilities to realize their objectives. Accordingly, actors modify their strategies, and sometimes their intentions, as they learn what is or is not feasible within a given context. But contexts are not “given”; their implications for behaviour are not always clear, and actors have only a partial understanding of them. At the same time, individual actors have the scope “to appropriate” the context, assign it meaning, and through their actions change it. Hay (2002, 116-17) describes the dynamic interplay between structure and agency in the following way: “Actors influence the development of [a structured] context over time through the consequences of their actions. Yet, at any given time, the ability of actors to realise their intentions is set by the context itself.”

Hay (1998) argues that policy networks should be seen as sites of strategic action whose modes of internal governance and ultimate impacts result from the interactive effects of context and agency. Such an interactive approach has been incorporated into a “dialectical” approach to policy networks by Marsh and his colleagues (Daugbjerg and Marsh 1998; Marsh and Smith 2000; Toke and Marsh 2003). Although the norms of policy networks define the roles that actors play within them, “resource dependencies are not fixed and ... the way in which they are discursively constructed by the
participants affects their behaviour and the policy outcomes. So it is agents who choose policy options, bargain and conflict and break up networks; although all of these are also affected by the broader context” (Marsh 1998, 195).

All dialectical models are difficult to validate empirically, even with longitudinal analyses of comparable cases and process tracing over time. Still, the argument of a two-way relationship between network structures and political actors, as well as between the context within which networks operate and the network itself, is intuitively appealing. It is consistent with institutionalist thinking that emphasizes that policy outcomes have feedback effects on the structure of the network and actors’ strategies. Few would deny that contextual factors exogenous to the network affect policy communities/networks, but most would also agree that there is always scope for interpreting the “meaning” and implications of the context for human behaviour. In this respect, this dialectical model is more intuitively satisfying than structuralist accounts.

Policy Networks and Policy Change
Even as evidence mounts that policy communities/networks are helpful in explaining policy outcomes, a long-standing criticism remains that these concepts are not of much utility when it comes to accounting for policy change. By definition, policy networks are regularized patterns of social interaction whose constituent actors and modes of exchange are stable over time. Instances of appreciable, indeed paradigmatic, policy change in policy communities that had seemed impenetrable and whose networks were highly institutionalized provoked the criticism to which all institutionalist accounts are prone. The criticism is that institutions (policy networks) explain everything until they explain nothing. The model of routine decision making that the concepts of policy community/network are designed to capture is not necessarily deficient because it cannot accommodate non-routine decisions.

Even so, if policy communities/networks are intermediary variables between broader contextual developments and policy outcomes, their role in both incremental and more radical, paradigmatic change must be theoretically specified. What is necessary is a model of policy change that assigns an independent role for the attributes of policy communities/networks rather than one that accounts for policy change solely in terms of the (shifting) resources and interests of network actors. In response to this imperative, at least three theoretical thrusts are evident.

The first line of theorizing, suggested by Atkinson and Coleman (1992, 172), is to focus on changes in the composition and boundaries of the policy community: that is, the movement of new actors into the policy community and within it between the influential core or subgovernment and the periphery or attentive public. Developments exogenous to the policy
community, such as transitions in prevailing belief systems and political institutions, are a principal catalyst to these “boundary shifts” in policy communities (Atkinson and Coleman 1992; Coleman and Skogstad 1990, 320-26; Coleman and Perl 1999). Using different terminology but thinking along similar lines, Michael Howlett (2002) elaborates the pathway from the injection of new ideas and actors into the policy community to either incremental or paradigmatic change. He posits policy networks as a crucial intervening variable; paradigmatic change occurs only when they are penetrated by new ideas and new actors.

A second line of theorizing about the intermediary role of policy networks in policy change focuses on the functional logic or internal modes of governance of the network. Coleman, Skogstad, and Atkinson (1996), for example, distinguish between networks that are governed by a consensus-based, problem-solving calculus compared with those where a self-interested bargaining dynamic is uppermost. Networks, such as corporatist networks, in which a problem-solving calculus is operative, can facilitate a process of incremental and cumulative paradigmatic change that contrasts with the abrupt paradigmatic change characteristic of pluralist policy networks wherein actor exchanges are motivated by self- and not collective interests.

The British, dialectical approach, introduced earlier, is a third line of theorizing around how policy networks evolve over time, with consequences for policy change. Hay (1998, 49) suggests that network formation, transformation, and failure are linked to the willingness and capacity of “the various partners in this constitutive strategic alliance” to “find new foundations for, and bases of, collective strategic action.” Their imperative to do so is triggered by changes in the broader context within which networks are embedded; as this context shifts, so do the perceived strategic interests of individual network partners and the balance of strategic resources among them. Says Hay (1998, 49), “networks are transformed, then, in response to: perceptions of the changing external context; perceptions of network failure; or, indeed, the perceived realization of strategic goals.” Discourse thus plays a large part in Hay’s account of the circumstances under which networks are likely to undergo piecemeal adaptation versus failure. Hay does not link network evolution directly to policy change, but it is not hard to arrive at propositions of this nature from his theorizing.

Keeping Up with Developments in the Domestic and International Political Economies

As observed at the beginning of this chapter, the policy community/network approach originated as an effort to describe policy processes as they functioned in practice rather than as implied by formal lines of institutional and political authority. The world of “real” politics was defined to be one in which routine policy making takes place in discrete and specialized
policy subsystems with limited political visibility and in which state actors are dependent on the resources and/or support of non-state actors to accomplish its objectives. Policy networks are a response to this reality; they provided a means to co-ordinate resources of information, support, and authority across state and non-state actors. In this fashion, they also promised more effective government, even if their contributions to legitimate governing were more suspect.

Writing in 1997, Grant Jordan and William Maloney observed that policy networks constituted “part of the common sense of policy making” (579). Significant changes in the context and structures of contemporary governing in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries could lead one to quibble with their claim. First, domestic policy making has become internationalized: that is, constrained and influenced significantly by events and actors beyond national borders. Second, new structures and processes of multilevel governance have become more significant, with states sharing their sovereignty with supranational regulatory bodies. And third, in the domestic and international realms of policy making, new conceptions of governance have emerged that see state actors delegating their authority to private actors or sharing it with them in public-private partnerships. Given these developments, what analytical purchase on policy making and governing is captured by the policy community/network concept? And if the concepts remain theoretically salient, in light of the foregoing developments, what adjustments are needed to our understanding of the role of policy communities/policy networks in the policy process?

Most policy network scholars conjecture that policy communities/networks constitute as much a part of the institutional architecture of the domestic policy process today as they did in the past. The internationalization of the domestic policy arena and the emergence of multiple orders of government create a highly complex decision-making environment in which the interests and activities of a plurality of governmental and non-governmental actors need to be aggregated and co-ordinated. This context makes state actors as dependent as ever, if not more so, on the resources and support of non-state actors to realize their governing objectives.

The argument about the centrality of policy networks in an institutional framework of fragmented political authority, high legitimation requirements, and limited state resources is arguably most advanced in accounts of governing in the European Union. German scholars have long conceived of policy networks as an alternative mode of governing to markets and hierarchies: that is, to the hierarchical chain of command where the state alone delivers public goods and to the absence of co-ordinated action when discrete, unco-ordinated actors are given the task (Borzel 1998a). In an extension of this argument, several scholars describe governing via networks as the standard pattern of routine policy making in the European Union (Ansell
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Canadians have contributed to three interesting lines of theorizing and empirical inquiry about the functioning and role of policy communities and policy networks in the current context of internationalization, multilevel governance, and new “privatized” models of governance. The first is the proposition that transnational policy communities – some composed of experts, others of civil society actors – are more likely to emerge to link actors in the national and international arenas. Transnational policy communities are associated, in particular, with the delegation of authority to supranational institutions, bodies that are normally highly dependent on the resources and support of other actors for information and expertise, the implementation of policies, and indeed legitimacy. These transnational policy communities do not necessarily displace national policy communities, but they do inject new interests and new ideas into them and can thereby cause policy network shifts. William Coleman and Anthony Perl (1999) are instructive in hypothesizing these effects, delineating how transnational policy communities are likely to differ from national policy communities, and the types of policy networks that one can expect as transnational policy communities become important. Separately, Steven Bernstein and Benjamin Cashore (2000) have theorized and demonstrated empirically how the type of domestic policy network in place mediates the influence that transnational actors have on domestic policy development.

The second thrust is to argue that policy networks are the crucial linchpin in the capacity of governments to adjust their economies and public policies to the constraints and opportunities posed by globalization. In an argument highly reminiscent of Atkinson and Coleman’s thesis on the linkage between policy networks and industrial policy, Linda Weiss (1998, 2003) advances the proposition that globalization requires states to undertake transformative industrial strategies and that doing so is possible only in the presence of closely co-ordinated linkages between state and business. To the extent that globalization constrains domestic (elected) states’ degrees of freedom, policy networks take on added importance as vehicles through which state officials can extract and co-ordinate the resources of information, support, and/or compliance that are necessary for both effective and legitimate governing (Skogstad 2000, 819-20).

A third body of literature points to the emergence of governing arrangements that bear similarities to policy networks in the form of entailing
“horizontally coordinated governing arrangements” but differ in the crucial respect that state actors are not a prime factor behind their construction or even dissolution over time (Cutler, Haufler, and Porter 1999). This species takes the form of self-regulatory regimes or private interest governments in which interdependent organizations are the salient actors. These structures share attributes of policy networks in that they form because of the mutual resource dependency across these private actors, and they survive, in no small part, because of the trust that builds up as a result of these actors’ continuing interactions. (For an example of the phenomenon, see Cashore 2002.) However, they also differ in the important respect that the term “policy network” has traditionally been reserved to describe a regularized exchange between state and non-state actors wherein the state retains (at least theoretically) ultimate authority. As such, it is probably more appropriate to describe private governing arrangements that exclude state actors as distinct from policy networks: a new species more consistent with a market mode of governing.

**An Agenda for Policy Network Inquiry in Canadian Politics**

Where might students of Canadian or comparative politics focus their efforts to capitalize on the insights of scholars who work within the policy community/network approach? By way of answering this question, I suggest one tenet of the policy community/network approach that is important to keep uppermost and four areas of inquiry to which attention could profitably be directed.

First, it is important to treat policy networks as a variable. In their early typology building, Atkinson and Coleman (1989b) pointed out that the resource dependency across state and societal actors – and thus the power dynamic – varied considerably across policy communities and sectors. To some extent, this recognition that policy networks diverge in terms of the symmetry or asymmetry of the power relationship between state and non-state actors has been eclipsed by a (British) convergence around a conceptualization of policy networks as relationships that are governed by a logic of consensus building and in which consensual knowledge, shared values and beliefs, and trust are the predominant dynamic. Certainly there are some policy networks in which such a co-operative dynamic is present. But in many, if not most, other policy networks, strategic actors are seeking to maximize the interests and ideas of those whom they represent. Conflict is thus inevitably a feature of policy networks, including those that are well institutionalized and share a common frame for addressing problems.

Second, important insights into the workings and durability of policy networks can be gleaned from the dialectical approach of British scholars, in particular Hay’s conceptualization of policy networks as sites of strategic interaction, in which relationships are shaped by the wider context and
which in turn act on that context. This observation brings actors/agency back into policy networks without abandoning the premise that the structural attributes of policy networks are vital to shaping policy development.

Third, there is a need to explore the role of policy networks in the implementation of government programs and the delivery of public goods and services. Students of Canadian public administration have observed Canada’s embrace (even if not to the same extent as in other Anglo democracies) of principles of new public management and governments’ emphasis on delivering public programs through mechanisms other than the traditional bureaucracy. On the face of it, these initiatives provide fertile ground for the emergence of program/policy implementation networks. Indeed, Leslie Pal (1997, 214) has observed that “policy communities and networks are important today not because they represent interests that have to be integrated into the policy process, or information that is crucial to analysis, but because they are relatively untried sinews for implementation and delivery.” Is this the case?

Fourth, empirical work on the fate and functioning of policy networks in the context of both multilevel governance and internationalization is scarce. Canadian students of federalism have placed undue emphasis on intergovernmental dynamics – and at the summit level of first ministers – to the neglect of non-state actors. There needs to be more systematic empirical inquiry into the functioning of policy networks, not simply at a single order of government but also in the context of intergovernmental forums. With respect to the fate and operation of policy networks in the context of internationalization of Canadian policy making, empirical work could build on hypotheses laid out earlier in this chapter, including their role in successful adjustment strategies to cope with the perceived heightened competitiveness pressures of global and regional economic integration.

Fifth, there is a need for more systematic exploration of how policy networks fit alongside other patterns of state-societal relationships and modes of authoritative governing that have come onto the scene (Skogstad 2003). In an effort to enhance their legitimacy, Canadian governments have extended their consultative efforts to a broad segment of the public, for example, via advisory committees or website comments. To what extent do these mechanisms of citizen engagement complement or undermine policy networks, not only in terms of bringing other social actors into the policy process, but also in terms of undermining their legitimacy? Furthermore, how compatible are governing via policy networks and representative democracy? Are those whose interests are articulated and aggregated in parliamentary committees, for example, the same groups who are at the centre of policy network exchanges?

Policy network scholars have long presumed that policy communities/networks are a worthy subject of investigation because they provide not
only an empirical lens on governing arrangements but also a rationale for state-societal linkages. The rationale is that policy networks matter for effective and legitimate governing. Even if the structures and contexts of the polity have changed over time, the imperative that governing be both legitimate and effective has not. It is the linkage of policy networks to the imperatives of legitimate and effective governing – the contribution that they make to enhancing it or undermining it – that has underwritten theoretical and empirical inquiry into policy communities and policy networks. From my perspective, it continues to constitute a strong rationale for their investigation.