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John Peterson

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Institut für Höhere Studien (IHS), Wien
Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna

Contact:

John Peterson
University of Glasgow
Jean Monnet Professor of European Studies
☎: +44(0)141 330 5076
email: j.c.Peterson@socsci.gla.ac.uk

Founded in 1963 by two prominent Austrians living in exile – the sociologist Paul F. Lazarsfeld and the economist Oskar Morgenstern – with the financial support from the Ford Foundation, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, and the City of Vienna, the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) is the first institution for postgraduate education and research in economics and the social sciences in Austria. The **Political Science Series** presents research done at the Department of Political Science and aims to share "work in progress" before formal publication. It includes papers by the Department's teaching and research staff, visiting professors, graduate students, visiting fellows, and invited participants in seminars, workshops, and conferences. As usual, authors bear full responsibility for the content of their contributions.

Das Institut für Höhere Studien (IHS) wurde im Jahr 1963 von zwei prominenten Exilösterreichern – dem Soziologen Paul F. Lazarsfeld und dem Ökonomen Oskar Morgenstern – mit Hilfe der Ford-Stiftung, des Österreichischen Bundesministeriums für Unterricht und der Stadt Wien gegründet und ist somit die erste nachuniversitäre Lehr- und Forschungsstätte für die Sozial- und Wirtschaftswissenschaften in Österreich. Die **Reihe Politikwissenschaft** bietet Einblick in die Forschungsarbeit der Abteilung für Politikwissenschaft und verfolgt das Ziel, abteilungsinterne Diskussionsbeiträge einer breiteren fachinternen Öffentlichkeit zugänglich zu machen. Die inhaltliche Verantwortung für die veröffentlichten Beiträge liegt bei den Autoren und Autorinnen. Gastbeiträge werden als solche gekennzeichnet.

Abstract

Modern democratic governance occurs only rarely via traditional Weberian hierarchies or pure 'markets'. Rather, public policies are made via some kind of hybrid arrangement involving a range of different actors, including some representing private or non-governmental institutions. The concept of policy networks - clusters of actors, each with an interest, or 'stake' in a given policy sector and the capacity to help determine policy success or failure - has been developed and refined as a way to try to describe, explain and predict the outcomes of policy-making via such hybrid arrangements. Governance by policy network is rife at the level of the European Union because it is such a highly differentiated polity which is dominated (in important ways) by experts and highly dependent on 'government by committee'. Research on EU policy networks has produced useful results but we remain some distance away from an agreed, plausible 'theory' of policy networks.

Zusammenfassung

Modernes demokratisches Regieren geschieht selten über traditionelle Webersche Hierarchien oder reine "Märkte". Stattdessen werden politische Entscheidungen über eine Art hybrides Arrangement einer Anzahl von unterschiedlichen Akteuren getroffen, von denen einige private oder öffentliche Institutionen repräsentieren. Das Konzept von Politiknetzwerken – Cluster von Akteuren, die jeweils ein Interesse an einem bestimmten Politikfeld und die Fähigkeit besitzen, politischen Erfolg oder Mißerfolg mitzubestimmen – wurde als eine Methode entwickelt und verfeinert, die versucht, die Ergebnisse von politischen Entscheidungsprozessen über solche hybriden Arrangements zu beschreiben, zu erklären und vorauszusehen. Regieren über Politiknetzwerke ist auf der europäischen Ebene so weit verbreitet, weil es auf bedeutende Weise von Experten dominiert wird und stark abhängig von dem "Regieren durch Ausschüsse" ist. Die Erforschung von Politiknetzwerken hat nützliche Resultate geliefert, doch wir bleiben noch etwas von einer einmütigen, plausiblen "Theorie" von Politiknetzwerken entfernt.

Keywords

Policy networks; governance; actors; public policy; interests; policy-making.

Schlagwörter

Politiknetzwerke; Regieren; Akteure; Politikfelder; Interessen; politisches Entscheiden.

General note on content

The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of the IHS Department of Political Science.

Notes

John Peterson was Visiting Professor at the Department of Political Science of the Institute for Advanced Studies from May 15 to 16, 2003

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1. Introduction[1]

Modern democratic governance – imposing overall direction or control on the allocation of valued resources – often bears little resemblance to traditional Weberian notions of hierarchy or neoconservative ideas of delivering public services through private markets. Instead, public policies are made and delivered via some kind of hybrid arrangement involving a range of different actors, including some representing private or non-governmental institutions. Public policies, by definition, are the responsibility of *public* authorities and aim to satisfy some vision of the 'public good'. Yet, modern governance, not least in the European Union (EU), reflects a shift 'towards a sharing of tasks and responsibilities; towards doing things together instead of doing them alone' (Kooiman 1993: 1; see also Rhodes 1997; Thompson et al. 1991; Peters 1996).

The term 'network' is frequently used to describe clusters of different kinds of actor who are linked together in political, social or economic life. Networks may be loosely structured but still capable of spreading information or engaging in collective action. Academic work on networks is often vague or abstract, or both (see Peterson and O'Toole Jr. 2001). But growing interest in network forms of governance reflects how modern society, culture and economy are all increasingly products of relations involving mutuality and interdependence, as opposed to hierarchy and independence. Linkages between organizations, rather than organizations themselves, have become the central analytical focus for many social scientists.

The term *policy* network connotes 'a cluster of actors, each of which has an interest, or "stake" in a given…policy sector and the capacity to help determine policy success or failure' (Peterson and Bomberg 1999: 8). Analysts of modern governance frequently seek to explain policy outcomes by investigating how networks, which facilitate bargaining between stakeholders over policy design and detail, are structured in a particular sector. Three features of European Union (EU) governance give sustenance to policy network analysis.

First, the EU is an extraordinarily 'differentiated polity' (Rhodes 1997). Decision rules and dominant actors vary significantly between policy sectors, such as regional development or external trade policy. Battles for policy 'turf' are frequent and fierce, as are attempts to build high firewalls around policies in a given sector so that they cannot be altered or undone by actors from other sectors. One consequence is that EU policy networks tend to be discrete, distinct, and largely disconnected from one another, even when they preside over policies that are clearly connected, such as agriculture and environmental protection. Most have diverse memberships, extending to public and private, political and administrative, and

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1 The article is forthcoming in: Antje Wiener and Thomas Diez (eds), European Integration Theory, Oxford University Press (2003).

'European' and national (and often international and sub-national) actors, and lack clear hierarchies. But the general picture is one of great diversity. The extension of the EU's competence to new areas, such as monetary and defence policy, has been accompanied by the creation of new, more diverse and anomalous policy structures. Policy network analysis helps us to describe the EU despite its 'polycentricity', or tendency to generate ever more and more dissimilar centres of decision-making and control (Peterson and Bomberg 2000).

Second, EU policy-making resembles supranational policy-making in other international organisations (IOs), such as the World Trade Organization or International Monetary Fund, in that much of it is highly technical. In these and other IOs, experts who share specialized knowledge and causal understandings tend to identify and 'bond' with each other, and often seek to depoliticise the policy process. In the EU, as in other IOs, technical expertise 'can become an exclusionary device, a device that is more effective at the supranational level because representative institutions like parliaments, that can play a surveillance role by holding experts accountable, are weak' (Coleman 2001: 97; see also Radaelli 1999).

Third, EU policy-making is underpinned by an extraordinarily complex labyrinthe of committees that shape policy options before policies are 'set' by overtly political decision-makers such as the college of Commissioners, Council of Ministers, or European Parliament (EP). The Union relies heavily on ostensibly apolitical committees of officials, experts and other stakeholders to surmount dissent, broker agreement, and move the policy agenda forward. EU policy formulation and implementation are usually scrutinised closely and repeatedly by national officials, via Council working groups and the arcane 'comitology' system, with committees at different levels performing different functions and having different but overlapping memberships. Two inevitable questions arise: first, whether and how much agents representing the EU's supranational institutions are empowered by their roles as brokers of intergovernmental agreements; and, second, whether and how often 'representatives of civil society such as consumers' organizations or agricultural producers' interest groups who might have access to, or even participate in, domestic policy networks might be frozen out at the supranational [EU] level' (Coleman 2001: 97). In any event, it is clear that EU policies are significantly shaped and closely scrutinised by different kinds of officials and experts in the EU's committee system, both before and after ultimate policy decisions are taken by overtly 'political' actors.

There exists no agreed 'theory' of policy networks that would lead us to predictive claims about European integration or EU policy-making. Yet, most analyses of the EU which employ the policy network as a metaphor seek to test the basic proposition that the way in which networks are structured in any EU policy sector will determine, and thus help explain and predict, policy outcomes. Nearly all contend that policy outcomes often cannot be explained by exclusive recourse to the mediation of national preferences. In order truly to *theorise* policy network analysis, more (and more thorough) case studies of the actual policy effects of governance by policy network are needed, along with a larger dose of normative thinking

about how to design networks that are efficient and legitimate, particularly as the EU encroaches on progressively more and more diverse national policies (Scharpf 1999; 2002).

1.1 Policy Networks and EU Governance

Policy network analysis starts with three basic assumptions. First (again), modern governance is frequently non-hierarchical. Few policy solutions are simply imposed by public authorities. Governance involves mutuality and interdependence between public and non-public actors, as well as between different kinds of public actor, not least in federal or quasi-federal polities such as the EU.

Second, the policy process must be disaggregated to be understood because 'relationships between groups and government vary between policy areas' (Rhodes 1997: 32). In other words, it makes little sense to talk generally of a 'strong state' or 'corporatist state' – let alone a 'strong' or weak' international organisation (IO) – because states and IOs are much stronger *vis-à-vis* affected interests in some policy sectors than in others.

Third and finally, governments remain ultimately responsible for governance, but that is not the whole story. Before policies are 'set' by elected political actors, policy choices are shaped and refined in bargaining between a diverse range of actors, including some who are non-governmental, all of whom have an interest in what policy is chosen. Policy networks can narrow options and shift the agenda by pursuing 'strategies that generate new political and economic forces' (Thatcher 1998: 406). Sometimes, they can go so far as to 'play a role in the determination of their own environment, with repercussions for the fit between political interests, organizational structures and economic objectives' (Thatcher 1998: 406; see also Dunn and Perl 1994; Peterson 1995b). To cite a specific example, the materialization of an EU social policy regime can be explained in part as the product of collective action on the part of an emergent social policy network to create a more favourable environment for EU intervention (see Falkner 1999).

Arguably, policy network analysis is never more powerful an analytical tool than when it is deployed at the EU level. The Union is a unique polity, with no government or opposition, and powerful policy-makers who are non-elected, such as European Commissioners or members of COREPER. Its policy remit extends to highly technical matters of regulation, including new technologies, thus making the politics of expertise a crucial determinant of outcomes. With its own system of law and the capacity to impose its will on a polity of around 370 million citizens (soon to be 470 million), the EU may seem enormously powerful. Yet, it is extraordinarily weak in terms of resources, and relies heavily on private sector assets and expertise. The effect is to blur the distinction between public and private that is at the heart of traditional notions 'public policy'. To try to describe how the EU works *without* the metaphor

of a network is a challenge on par with seeking to explain, under the same injunction, how international terrorists operate (see Biersteker 2002).[2]

That said, the policy networks literature can be hard going. It features a variety of models and, confusingly, sometimes employs the same term to mean different things. For example, the 'Rhodes model' of policy networks (see below) employs the term 'policy community' to mean a particularly tightly integrated and single-minded policy network (see Rhodes 1997; 1990; Marsh 1998; Marsh and Rhodes 1992). Yet, elsewhere policy community is used to refer to the broader universe of 'actors and potential actors who share a common identity or interest' in a certain policy sector (Wright 1988: 606). Sometimes, works from different sub-disciplines seem like islands in a stream. Keck and Sikkink's (1998) masterful study of 'advocacy networks' of activists in international politics sometimes uses terminology that is incongruous with the 'advocacy coalition' framework developed in the public policy literature by Sabatier (1998; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993). Legal theorising about network forms of governance can seem impenetrable (see Ladeur 1997).

The Rhodes model of policy networks has probably been employed more often than any other in the study of EU governance (see Peterson 1995a; Daugbjerg 1999; Peterson and Bomberg 1999; Bomberg 1998; Falkner 1999; 2000). Simply put, the model assumes that three key variables determine what type of policy network exists in a specific sector:

1) the relative *stability* of a network's membership: do the same actors tend to dominate decision-making over time or is membership fluid and dependent on the specific policy issue under discussion?

2) the network's relative *insularity*: is it a cabal which excludes outsiders or is it highly permeable by a variety of actors with different objectives?

3) the strength of *resource dependencies*: do network members depend heavily on each other for valued resources such as money, expertise and legitimacy or are most actors self-sufficient and thus relatively independent of one another?

A continuum emerges with tightly integrated *policy communities* on one end, which are capable of single-minded collective action, and loosely-affiliated *issue networks* on the other, which find it far more difficult to mobilise collectively. The internal structure of policy networks

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2 The latter task seems impossible. Take, for example, the following policy prescription: 'Among the most effective strategies of defence against a global terrorist network is the development of a networked response. Transnational networks need to be mobilized, global civil society needs to be engaged and private sector financial institutions need to be employed to suppress or freeze the financial assets of terrorist networks' (Biersteker 2002: 83). Or, consider an expert's view of progress in the 'war on terrorism': 'Now you're into a situation where there is a network of networks…With al-Qaeda, if you take out nodal points in the network, they will regrow' (quoted in *Financial Times*, 9–10 November 2002: 8).

is usually considered an independent variable, in that the structure of a policy network will help determine policy outcomes. For example, policy communities have more capacity than issue networks to steer or control the policy agenda.

Policy network analysis is increasingly used to make sense of internationalised policy-making environments such as the EU. A primary aim is often to determine what interests – national or supranational – dominate bargaining within transnational networks (see Coleman and Perl 1999). The answer is usually revealed by considering two questions. First, does the policy sector in question give rise to much public sector activism? In other words, to what extent are politicians and senior public officials directly active and involved, and determined to impose their wills? Second, how much autonomy do supranational institutions have in any given sector? In the EU's case, are the Commission, EP and Court endowed with their 'own resources' in terms of Treaty powers or funding, or are they largely dependent on national and private actors?

One of the strengths of the Rhodes model is that, despite occasional discrepancies in terminology, most other models of governance by network are compatible with it. Take, for example, the concept of 'epistemic communities' developed by Peter Haas (1992: 3) as a way to describe how policy-making can become dominated by 'network[s] of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain', particularly ones subject to internationalised policy-making. Or, consider Sabatier's (1993: 25) advocacy coalition framework, which holds that policy shifts usually occur when the sectoral agenda is seized by overtly political networks consisting of various kinds of policy activist, including public officials representing multiple levels of government, who 'share a particular belief system' and work together over relatively long periods of time (10 years or more) to force policy change. If EU governance is conceived as occurring within a multi-level system in which policies emerge after a fairly standard sequence of different types of decision, it is plausible to see EU governance at the sub-systemic level (in space) and policy-shaping stage (in time) as largely a competition between epistemic communities and/or advocacy coalitions (sometimes by competing versions of them) to steer or control policy networks, with which their own memberships overlap, in specific sectors. Sometimes, epistemic communities and advocacy coalitions may form alliances, particularly to shift the policy agenda in the direction of radical policy change as occurred, for example, when the EU embraced quite radical liberalisation of its agricultural sector during the Uruguay Round which gave birth to the WTO in the early 1990s (see Ullrich 2002).

More generally, policy network analysis can help us explain why EU policy outcomes in a particular sector reflect purely technocratic rationality or, alternatively, the overtly political agenda of key actors (Peterson 1995b: 79-80; see also Peters 1998: 29–30). For example, the Framework programme for funding collaborative research has quietly expanded to become the third largest item of expenditure in the Community's budget, not least because much decision-making about precisely who gets what from the programme has been

delegated to epistemic communities of researchers and scientists (Peterson and Sharp 1998: 163–87). Alternatively, highly politicised environmental policy debates over auto emissions, packaging waste, or biotechnology can be viewed as battles between competing advocacy coalitions – broadly advocating environmental protection vs. industrial interests – for influence within EU environmental policy networks.[3]

Moreover, policy network analysis often works 'best' when deployed together with other theoretical accounts of EU politics or policy-making, for two reasons. First, its explicit task of explaining sub-systemic policy-shaping means that it is compatible with intergovernmentalist or neofunctionalist accounts of decision-making at the highest political levels, where 'history-making' decisions are taken which determine how the EU changes or evolves as a polity. Moreover, policy network analysis often can explain actual policy outcomes that are hard to explain using either of these theoretical accounts (which, after all, are not really theories of *policy-making*). Policy network analysis is also congruent with most institutionalist treatments of the EU,[4] particularly ones which focus on ultimate policy choices, for which authority is very much shared by the EU's institutions (Peterson and Shackleton 2002: 361–3).

Second, policy network analysis adds value to alternative, meta-theoretical conceptions of EU governance. For example, the idea that informal, sector-dedicated, mostly self-organised policy networks are responsible for a large portion of EU governance is obviously amenable to the broader notion that the Union produces a kind of 'network governance', in which 'political actors consider problem-solving the essence of politics and…the setting of policy-making is defined by the existence of highly organised social sub-systems' (Eising and Kohler-Koch 1999: 5). Its compatibility with a theoretical portrait of the EU as a system in which actors must constantly seek to 'escape from gridlock' is obvious:

…the decisional processes are obstacle-ridden, cumbersome and, to say the least prone to stalemate. This in turn gives rise to attempts to use escape routes by those actors who constitute nodes in the multiplicity of criss-crossing interactions, with subterfuge being the only way to keep policy-making going (Héritier 1999: 97).

Policy network analysis also has affinities with constructivist accounts that highlight the ability of international organizations (IOs) such as the EU to generate new categories of actor and

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3 Thatcher's (1998) contrast between policy network analysis and what he calls 'policy learning models', such as epistemic communities and advocacy coalitions, and his claim that 'policy network frameworks cannot simply be mixed with other approaches' are two of the less convincing points made in his otherwise thoughtful critique of policy network analysis. If we compare different approaches and concepts such as policy network, issue network, policy domaine, etc. we find that 'the fundamental principle underlying all these approaches is that relations between actors, rather than the actors' individual attributes, hold the key to explaining public policy decisions' (Knoke 1998).

4 By some accounts, policy network analysis is actually a variant of institutionalism (Hall and Taylor 1996; Lowndes 1996; Peters 1999).

norms. Increasingly, IOs have rational and legal authority to make rules; none moreso than the EU. As they make rules, IOs define international tasks (preventing the spread of AIDS in Africa), create new categories of actor ('political refugees'), and generate new norms (minority rights). They thus generate new social knowledge that can alter the interests of actors in policy-making that occurs at a level beyond the state (see Barnett and Finnemore 1999; Christiansen *et al.* 2001. For instance, EU governments have gradually come to identify their own self-interest in the prevention of 'social exclusion', with the EU hastening a shift in policy priorities in this direction and, particularly, the Commission 'sponsoring' a new social exclusion lobby (see Bauer 2002; Atkinson 2002). This example seems to vindicate assumptions that are central to the portrayal of the EU as a system of 'multi-level governance' (see section 2 below): that is, the Commission retains 'virtually a free hand in creating new networks' (Marks et al. 1996: 359) and is often empowered by its position at the 'hub of numerous highly specialized policy networks' (Marks et al. 1996: 355).

1.2 The Origins of Policy Network Analysis

In broad terms, the application of policy network analysis to the EU is a product of the widely-shared view that the European Union is *not* an ordinary, 'garden variety' IO, but rather a system of governance in its own right. As such, leading theories of European *integration* can tell us little about the EU's processes for making *policy* (see section 1.3 below). Having emerged as the source of a large 'slice' of the total universe of all public policies in Europe, it is natural that tools developed by analysts of public policy at the national level are increasingly deployed at the EU level.

The precise origins of policy network analysis in the public policy literature are a matter of dispute. Richardson (2000: 1006) claims 'British origins of what is now termed the network approach'. Rhodes (1990: 32) concurs that 'American political science was not the major formative influence' on early work which sought to make sense of the British 'post-parliamentary' state using network analysis in the late 1970s. Yet, an eclectic range of early work in the UK, US *and* Europe on interest intermediation – via both corporatist and pluralist structures and focused on intergovernmental (that is, local-national) and government-industry relations – attempted to develop the idea of networks as an analytical concept. An important example is Heclo's (1978) spirited critique of the idea that the American policy process was subject to dynastic rule by 'iron triangles' of mutually supportive legislators, bureaucrats, and private actors. On the contrary, Heclo (1978: 102) argued, the policy process was influenced by a diverse collection of stakeholders grouped into 'issue networks' – that is, complex networks focused on specific issues – which extended far beyond those actors with the formal power to set policy: 'Looking for the few who are powerful, we tend to overlook the many whose webs of influence provoke and guide the exercise of power'. Jordan (1981; Jordan and Schubert 1992) can claim credit for developing the idea that issue networks were one variant of network – and a rather extreme one – which existed on a

continuum ranging from very loose to very tightly integrated. The common denominator of early work on networks, which pre-dated the EU's emergence as a true polity, was an ambition to explain how and why interests were mediated in settings that resembled neither open 'markets' of transactions between independent entities nor hierarchies in which governments – or any other actor – imposed control.

To make a long story short, international political developments in the decade or more after 1990 – globalisation, devolution (in Europe and elsewhere), and economic liberalisation – gave rise to new and different forms of governance, in which power was increasingly shared horizontally. Policy network approaches became both more common in the policy literature and progressively more ambitious. No longer were its advocates content to present policy networks as mere metaphors. New attempts were made to try to theorise about them, and describe, explain and predict policy outcomes by examining exchanges within policy networks (Peterson 1995b; Bomberg 1998; Daugbjerg 1999; Falkner 2000; Nunan 1999; Andersen and Eliassen 2001). The results were decidedly mixed, with some observers finding a widening gap between aims and achievements (see Le Galès and Thatcher 1995; Thatcher 1998).[5]

1.3 The Importance of Policy Networks for Integration

To understand the basic hypotheses and arguments endemic to this approach, it must be acknowledged that policy network analysis does not constitute a theory of political or economic integration, in Europe or anywhere else. In fact, scholars began to investigate the EU using policy network analysis in the early 1990s precisely because the time-honoured debate between intergovernmentalism and neofunctionalism, although revived in interesting new permutations (see Moravcsik 1991; Burley and Mattli 1993; Tranholm-Mikkelsen 1991), shed relatively little light on actual EU policy, and the complex systems that emerged for making it (Rosamond 2000: 105–13). Both intergovernmentalism and neofunctionalism were and remain macro-level theories of international relations, which are designed to describe, explain and predict the broad thrust and path of European integration as a process. Neither are intended to describe, explain or predict the policy outcomes that arise from this process, as policy network analysis often seeks to do.

Even proponents of policy network analysis would be hard-pressed to identify the central features – main assumptions, causal propositions, core predictions – of a 'network theory' of policy-making. Nonetheless, network analyses usually focus on one or more of three basic arguments:

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5 Dissent about the utility or analytical power of policy network analysis is summarised and evaluated in section 2.1 below.

How policy networks are structured in discrete EU policy sectors has tangible, measurable effects on policy outcomes.

Put another way, EU policy outcomes are determined by how integrated and exclusive policy-specific networks are, and how mutually dependent actors are within them. We should expect different kinds of outcome in sectors, such as pharmaceuticals or agriculture, where tightly-integrated, cabalistic policy communities are guardians of the agenda, than in sectors populated by bosely bound issue networks, such as environmental policy. One testable (although still to be proven) hypothesis is that more integrated networks will tend to block radical change in EU policies, while outcomes are far harder to predict when pre-legislative bargaining occurs within issue networks. More generally, policy networks are an independent or 'intervening' variable: 'analyses look at the ways in which network structures affect the selected aspects of the behaviour of actors and their interactions – for instance in the spread of information, strategies of actors, exchanges amongst them and policy outcomes' (Thatcher 1998: 410).

Quasi-federal polities such as the EU naturally give rise to governance by policy network.

Federalism is, by nature, a method for reconciling competing values: strong yet small government, minimum 'federal' standards alongside local discretion, and private sector autonomy with the provision of public goods. These values cannot be reconciled either through strict hierarchies or pure 'market' structures. Rather, they must be reconciled through negotiation and the exchange of resources and ideas. Logically, structured but informal policy networks arise to facilitate this kind of negotiation, particularly in today's federal systems (including the EU), most of which have moved away from 'dual federalism', with ostensibly separate jurisdictions between levels of government, and towards 'cooperative federalism', in which interdependence between levels of government is accepted and even welcomed (see Peterson and O'Toole Jr. 2001).

Governance by policy network gives rise to management and legitimacy concerns, particularly in the EU.

Despite claims to the contrary (see Moravcsik 2002), it is commonly held that the EU suffers from both management and legitimacy deficits. The management deficit arises from the lack of incentives for any actor in non-hierarchical networks to invest in management capacities (Metcalfe 2000). The legitimacy deficit results from a lack of clear rules of process, transparency or judicial review to govern informal bargaining within EU networks (see Dehousse 2002). Moreover, the technical discourse of supranational policy-making is an important reason why networks of government officials and experts are usually subject to less scrutiny than at the national level. In fact, the empowerment of national actors by virtue of their participation in EU policy-making, which is generally not subject to close political control, may well enhance their authority at the national level and empower them in

bargaining that takes place within domestic networks (Ansell and Weber 1999; Coleman 2001).

The 'news' that the EU governs largely by policy network is not, by any means, all bad. Informal bargaining within networks can help build consensus in a system which strives to avoid creating clear 'losers'. Policy networks can diffuse norms of good governance, particularly to states – such as those in Central and Eastern Europe – whose civil services are still maturing. They can also help to ensure that private actors have a sense of 'ownership' of EU policies. Nevertheless, the salience of the EU's management and legitimacy deficits points to the need for normative thinking about how EU policy networks should be structured, managed, and subjected to oversight and control. Complex interdependence between national and EU policy-making means that a lot of EU governance is always going to rely on exchanges within policy networks. Thus, it makes sense to design networks that can manage effectively and are part of the solution to the EU's legitimacy problem.

2. Evaluating Policy Network Analysis

While the EU's future, especially in advance of radical enlargement, is very much unwritten (see Weiler 2002), there is no denying that it is a uniquely successful experiment in transnational governance. Eventually, it could emerge as:

a source of institutional innovation that may yield some answers to the crisis of the nation-state. This is because, around the process of the formation of the European Union, new forms of governance, and new institutions of government, are being created, at the European, national, regional and lo

cal levels, inducing a new form of state that I propose to call the network state[6] *(Castells 1998: 311; see also Howse and Nicolaïdis 2002).*

Upon close examination, the 'network state' turns out to be a rather frustrating concept. Its 'actual content…and the actors involved in it, are still unclear, and will be so for some time' (Castells 1998: 311). What *is* clear is that EU governance occurs simultaneously at multiple levels of government, thus giving rise to 'multi-level governance' (MLG) as a descriptive term for what the EU offers. In theory, and at least sometimes in practice, power is distributed between the EU, national, regional and local levels according to the principle of subsidiarity: that is, the Union as a whole legislates only in areas (such as air pollution or external trade policy) where policy problems cannot be solved at lower levels of government. To portray the EU as a multi-level system of governance is to assume that actors representing different levels of government are interdependent. They thus 'network' with each other to design, implement and enforce EU rules.

Yet, MLG is clearly far more prominent in some policy sectors - above all, cohesion policy - than others, such as competition policy (although even here it could be argued that the EU is shifting towards more network-type governance). MLG was probably less of a general model of EU governance at the end of the 1990s than many would have predicted at the beginning of the decade, when a 'Europe of the regions' seemed within reach as European integration and regional devolution accelerated simultaneously (Marks 1992; Marks et al. 1996). Indicative, perhaps, is Castells' (1998: 331) emphasis on the importance of the EU's Committee of the Regions (CoR) as the 'most direct institutional expression' of subsidiarity, despite general consensus 10 years after the CoR's creation that it had 'earned itself an uneviable reputation for being possibly the Union's most pointless institution' (Coss 2002).

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6 Emphasis in original. The astounding breadth of Castells' scholarship sometimes exposes a lack of depth of knowledge about the EU (a frequent problem for those who study the subject 'part time'). For example, Castells (1998: 314, 317) repeatedly claims that qualified majority voting was extended in the late 1980s in the 'European Council', rather than in the Council of Ministers.

Actual theory-building about governance via 'vertical networks' which link actors representing different levels of government has been rare. In fact, it might be argued that very little progress has been made since Keohane and Hoffmann (1991: 13) observed that the EU was evolving into a polity in its own right, 'organised as a network that involves the pooling and sharing of sovereignty rather than a transfer of sovereignty to a higher level'. About all we can safely conclude from existing research is that most EU policy networks seem to be more *horizontal* than vertical in structure: most are linked to national networks of policy stakeholders (which are considerably embedded in them), but are mainly Brussels-centred and dominated by actors representing national governments and the EU's institutions (see section 4 below), with sub-national actors rarely in positions of much power. EU policy networks are an important purveyor of multi-level governance, but it is difficult to view them as facilitating the dawn of a 'Europe of the Regions'.

2.1 Critique

Policy network analysis has not been short of critics (Kassim 1993; Peters 1998; Dowding 1995; 2001; Le Galès and Thatcher 1995; Thatcher 1998). It tends to be criticised on four specific grounds:

– 'Policy network' may be a useful metaphor, but it does not constitute a model or theory.

König's (1998: 387) complaint is illustrative:

a growing number of studies use the network concept as a metaphor describing the complexity of social and political life, but they have neither explained why private and public actors are mutually dependent, whether their dependency is restricted to the boundaries of specific subsystems and how this dependency affects public decision-making, nor generated testable hypotheses regarding the causal importance of policy networks for public decision-making.

Many proponents of policy network analysis would accept these criticisms. Most would concede that theorising about policy networks remains at an early stage. Nevertheless, theory-building must always start by building on metaphors which abstract from reality, and then point the analyst towards variables that may determine outcomes. Ultimately, policy network analysis may not *answer* many important questions about EU governance. However, it often points the analyst to where the answers may be found: the subterranean netherworld of officials, lobbyists and experts, a world often quite distant from the political world of ministers and parliamentarians.

– Policy-making in Brussels is too fluid, uncertain, and over-populated with an enormously diverse collection of interests for stable networks to exist or persist.

According to this view, 'EU governance is…best described as uncertain agendas, shifting networks and complex coalitions' (Richardson 2000: 1021). This set of circumstances is considered to be bad news for proponents of policy network analysis because:

the utility of network typologies is open to question in situations in which there is rapid change (both of institutions and actors), a lack of clear sectoral/subsectoral boundaries, complexity of decision-making and a potentially large number of actors drawn from different levels of policy formation, as claimed, for instance, to exist in European policy-making (Thatcher 1998: 398).

Proponents of this view sometimes go as far as to question whether stable networks exist at all in Brussels. Actors may form alliances and work together on specific issues – thus the term 'issue network' – but most actors are promiscuous. Thus, once formed, networks quickly disintegrate. It is not surprising, given such fluidity, that 'case studies of EU policy-making tend to examine individual decisions rather than whole sectors or sub-sectors' (Kassim 1993: 21).

This criticism lacks credibility, for at least three reasons. First, stability of membership is a variable, not an assumption, of the policy network approach. The EU, more than most systems of governance, may give rise to loosely-integrated and fluid issue networks more often than stable policy communities. But the matter is one for empirical investigation. Moreover, it is possible to find policy episodes – such as the 1989 directive on automobile emissions (Peterson and Bomberg 1999: 190–1) – when an insecurely structured issue network managed to overcome its own fluidity and capture the policy agenda long enough to produce an outcome that would not have been predicted by pluralist or incrementalist theories. In any event, as the EU matures it is possible – perhaps likely – that 'more stable and manageable networks of policy-makers are likely to emerge' (Mazey and Richardson 1993: 4). The maze of EU committees, whose members outnumber the total number of officials in the Council and Commission combined by about three to one (Van Schendelen 1998: 6), is meant – perhaps above all – to provide stability to policy-making.

Second, the claim that the EU's fluidity cannot be 'captured' by policy network analysis is usually made on the basis of very little evidence. Kassim's (1993) 'sceptical view' of policy networks is based almost exclusively on evidence from the air transport sector, which is far more 'nationalised' *and* 'globalised' than most other European industries (and thus not very 'Europeanised'). Richardson's (2000) dismissal of policy network analysis as overused and inappropriate at the EU level relies mainly on secondary sources on national lobbying strategies and EU external trade policy.

Third and finally, relatively loosely-constituted networks are, somewhat ironically, often more effective channels of communication than tightly-integrated policy communities. The so-called 'strength of weak ties' argument (Granovetter 1973) holds that:

In a world of cliques of tightly knit social circles, individuals are better off investing time in acquaintances (or 'weak ties') because it is through acquaintances that cliques are bridged and that information diffuses through a policy network…information communicated by strong ties – within-clique communication – will tend to be redundant, and will tend to travel short distances relative to the size of the network as a whole (Carpenter et al. 1998: 418—9; see also Granovetter 1973).

It may be that communication is more important as a lubricant to the policy process in the EU than in most other systems of governance. Consensus is ingrained as a norm and a vast number and diversity of policy stakeholders must typically agree before an EU policy may be 'set'. Timing is particularly crucial in EU policy-making: the losers in policy debates (despite attempts to avoid creating any) are frequently those who are unaware of when a dossier is 'ripe' and ready for a decision, and are caught out because they lack adequate communication channels.

– Policy network analysis lacks a theory of 'power'.

This criticism is a serious one, but it neglects the *interstitial* nature of policy network analysis: that is, the power of classical EU actors – particularly member governments – is not denied but it is not viewed as wholly determinant of EU outcomes.[7] Network analysis looks for explanations in exchanges that cover over the cracks or crevices that separate different levels in a system of MLG, or different sets of institutional actors in systems where multiple institutions wield a slice of power. It contends that the EU system produces outcomes that cannot be explained exclusively by recourse to the mediation of national preferences, as is sometimes claimed (see Bueno de Mesquita and Stokman 1994). Policy network analysis is 'pitched' at a meso or sub-systemic level of decision-making, and thus is entirely compatible with macro-theories of politics, such as pluralism, elitism, and Marxism (see Daugbjerg and Marsh 1998). In the EU's case, more or less power is concentrated at the sub-systemic level depending on which EU policy sector is under scrutiny: for example, a considerable amount of power for determining the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is delegated to the sub-systemic level, while relatively little power resides at this level in relation to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Thus, policy network analysis is likely to tell us more about how the CAP is determined than how the CFSP is made (see section 2.2. below).

Consensus has become widespread that policy network analysis should be deployed within a portfolio of theories pitched at explaining outcomes at different levels of governance (see Peterson and Bomberg 1999; Wallace 2000; Andersen and Eliassen 2001; Peterson 2001; Bomberg and Stubb 2003). Interestingly, the plausibility of *intergovernmentalist* theories of power in EU governance is frequently conceded in such schema, as only one kind of actor –

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7 I thank Renaud Dehousse for making this point to me.

national actors – are powerful at *every* level in what has clearly evolved into a multi-level system of governance. However, most proponents of policy network analysis reject as artificial and false the dichotomy between 'intergovernmental' and 'supranational governance', since virtually 'no administrative [EU] action can be developed without national administrative authorities being associated with it' (Azoulay 2002: 128).

– The literature on policy networks is often vague and caught up with insular, and purely academic debates about terminology.

Sometimes, debates in the public policy literature between advocates of competing models – and especially between network 'theorists' and their detractors – seem increasingly unproductive. They often focus on rather trivial questions of terminology, and can be embarrassingly self-absorbed (Rhodes 1997; Richardson 2000; Marsh and Smith 2000; 2001; Dowding 2001).[8] Still, few serious students of European integration would deny that governance by networks is an essential feature of the EU. In fact, governance by network may be becoming a steadily *more* important feature of the EU, as evidenced by recent initiatives including (*inter alia*) the use of interest groups or NGOs in the implementation of environmental or development policies, the Commission's (2001) emphasis on dialogue with civil society in its White Paper on Governance, and the increasing ubiquity of the so-called 'Open Method of Coordination' of national policies through exchanges between purpose-built EU level networks of national officials (see Hodson and Maher 2001; Mosher and Trubek 2003).

2.2 Application: Policy Network Analysis and the CAP

Any survey of recent literature on EU governance will uncover a variety of analyses using policy network analysis as an investigative lens. Cohesion policy (Ansell et al. 1997; Ward and Williams 1997; Bache 1998; Bomberg and Peterson 1998) and research policy (Peterson 1991; Peterson and Sharp 1998) are two of the most frequent targets of investigation via this method, not least because they are bastions, respectively, of policy-making by linked clusters of national, sub-national and supranational actors and unusually technocratic procedures. However, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has probably been the focus of policy network analysis as much as any other EU policy sector (see Daugbjerg 1999; Smith 1990; Coleman 2001; Ullrich 2002), for at least three reasons.

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8 As much as the authors cited here may be diligently seeking to advance or critique policy network analysis, their frequent resort to self-citation and tendencies to try to rewrite their and other authors' places in the literature mean that a diligent postgraduate student could be forgiven for concluding that recent debates seem to have become so petty and personal that the approach itself is best avoided.

First, CAP decision-making is shared between networks of product-specialised officials ('the beef people', 'the cereals people', etc.) responsible for managing specific markets on a day-to-day basis, and the Agriculture Council, which is one of the busiest and most insular of all versions of the Council of Ministers. The Commission and Council Secretariat together act as institutional nodes that facilitate communication and exchange within a broader CAP policy network. This network's autonomy and guardianship of the policy agenda – within the broad political framework set by the European Council and multi-year EU budget – are jealously guarded. The EU's agricultural policy network is a true policy *community*.

Second, although the CAP is one of the EU's only truly 'common' policies, in the sense that it effectively replaces national policies, it is in fact highly decentralised with considerable discretion held by national agricultural ministries and ministers (see Grant 1997). Arguably, the CAP is considerably less 'common' today than it was when the problem of surplus production reached outright crisis proportions in the early 1980s, and powerful networks of experts were given autonomy to manage the crisis. More generally, as a case, the CAP seems to lend credence to the general hypothesis that as the focus of policy activity becomes more international, a supranational network dominated by experts can be expected, in most cases, to emerge. Over time, however, most policy networks become more subject to domination by *national* actors and intergovernmental bargaining, even if they are configured *horizontally* and sometimes enjoy considerable autonomy from their national political masters (Coleman 2001).

Third, the CAP is a favorite whipping boy of Eurosceptics, who cite its wastefulness, regressiveness, and easy exploitation by transnational networks of criminals, including the Italian mafia and Irish Republican Army (Galeotti 2001: 213). In reality, of course, the main problem is a classic 'pooled sovereignty, divided accountability' problem (Peterson 1997): national administrations, not EU institutions, are mainly responsible for spending controls and the policing of fraud. A well-publicised CAP scam in the UK in summer 2002 saw Edward Leigh, the fiercely Eurosceptic chair of the relevant parliamentary committee, slam the British *national* system for spending CAP funding, and its responsible ministry, as 'appallingly lax'.[9] The wider point is that regardless of the reputed virtues of governance by policy network, the CAP is emblematic of the management and legitimacy deficits to which this form of governance can give rise.

9 Quoted in *Financial Times*, 22 August 2002, p.4.

3. Policy Network Analysis and Enlargement

The uncertainty facing a radically enlarged EU of 25 or more member states is vast. The immediate future of European integration is perhaps hazier now than it ever has been before. As such, it suffices to make just three points about how policy network analysis might help us to shed light on the EU after its next enlargement, and the ones subsequent to it.

First, the EU-25 that should arrive by 2004 is likely to be fundamentally different from the old EU-15. But a number of patterns are so well-established that they will persist far into future. One is that all new member states take time to adjust to the EU's unique brand of deciding by subterfuge, or 'escaping from deadlock' (see Heritier 1999); that is, essentially ignoring or subverting the formal rules and advancing the policy agenda through bargaining within informal policy networks. As such, formal accession to the EU does *not* make new Member States full, 'equal' members of the European Union (see Peterson and Jones 1999). Rather, new officials, and private and non-governmental actors from new Member States must learn the rules of the game that apply to policy-specific networks, and get used to bargaining within them.

Second, there is no question that the states lined up to join in 2004 or afterwards have far less mature, proficient or professional civil services compared to the EU norm. Most are relatively inexperienced participants in international organizations, and many have never encountered a western-style lobbying system. A central issue is thus whether policy networks within an enlarged EU will be able to perform the function of disseminating norms of compliance with EU rules, despite vast disparities in levels of economic modernisation (and thus economic interests) and public sector leverage in the face of private sector power.

Third and finally, it is going to become far more difficult to reform the EU of the future. The 2004 intergovernmental conference (IGC) was considered by many member governments as Europe's last shot at embracing truly meaningful reform of the Union's institutions, before an EU-25 emerged with far too many veto players to make it possible to change anything very important.[10] Olsen (2002: 593–4), one of the most clever of all students of institutional change, offers a final word on networks and enlargement:

In the European Union governance takes place in polycentric, multilevel policy networks of public and private actors…Reformers are not omnipotent. There is no single sovereign centre with the authority and power to change fundamentally the policy order while many factors other than reformers' choices influence change. Furthermore, reform capabilities

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10 Arguably, the decision in 2002 to give the (then) 10 applicant states closest to membership full right of participation in the 2004 IGC meant that there were already too many veto players to make meaningful reform likely.

often have to be developed as an inherent part of the reform process, a key issue in many applicant countries…Comprehensive reforms tend to be highly divisive and European reformers face enduring differences that cannot be hidden behind apolitical rhetoric.

4. Challenges and Prospects of Policy Network Analysis

4.1 The Contribution of Policy Network Analysis

The impact of policy network analysis on European integration theory has been significant. Yet, for the most part its significance arises from the way in which it has given theorists a language to describe and perhaps sometimes to explain – more rarely to predict – what European integration has wrought in terms of a governance system. The EU has, over time, become more eclectic as a polity as its policy competence has expanded, and more 'polycentric' (Peterson and Bomberg 2000). For example, contrast the new, highly centralised system for monetary policy with the new, highly decentralised system of regulating food safety or medicinal products via new European agencies (McNamara 2002; Majone 2002). Then, consider the notion that states may develop a distinct 'policy style' (Richardson 1982), depending on how proactive or reactive, and how consensual or autocratic policy-making is. One important rationale for studying the EU using policy network analysis is that it is futile to try to characterise its policy-making process as reflecting one policy style when it incorporates so many different ones across its full range of policies. The policy network perspective reveals a repertoire of adaptable network systems at the EU level rather than a single pattern.

To take the point further, it might be argued that there is great variety between EU policy networks for good reason: because a very diverse set of arrangements are needed for the EU to surmount different obstacles to cooperation in different areas of policy. Of course, governance by policy network is not without its pathologies, particularly the problem of networks being 'captured' and transformed into insular policy communities, dominated by vested interests and lacking transparency. But policy network analysis can help us explain both continuity in EU policy outcomes, *and* the Union's (occasional, at least) capacity for policy innovation.

It also can be argued that policy network analysis of the EU has 'grown up' considerably in recent years. Gradually, in the wake of the earliest applications of the policy network concept to EU governance (most of which were concerned with MLG), it has become clear that the policy networks that matter most in EU decision-making are more *horizontal* in structure – that is, dominated by actors representing the core EU institutions, representatives of EU member states, and powerful, Brussels-based lobbyists – as much or more than they are

'vertical', or knitting together mutually dependent actors representing multiple levels of governance. To be clear, EU policy networks are invariably linked to national networks in the same sectors. But the extent to which the former 'stand apart' from control by national capitals may be taken as another sign of the coming of age of the European Union as a polity in its own right.

The main contribution of EU policy network analysis to theorizing about European integration is its emphasis on the Union's inescapable diversity and complexity. A dizzying array of different kinds of actor can claim to be a policy stakeholder in a continent-sized polity of 370 million people, which incorporates a rich variety of national systems of interest representation. Transnational networks of the kind that preside over the policy agenda in the EU and other international organizations are usually seen generally to be looser and less tightly integrated than their counterparts at the national level. But the more single-minded amongst them clearly can exploit the 'space' between the EU and its member states in pursuit of their own interests (see Josselin and Wallace 2001).

4.2 The Future Development of Policy Network Analysis

The future of policy network analysis is dependent to a considerable extent on its relative success in performing three functions.

Can it effectively describe, explain and even predict outcomes arising from the use of new EU policy methods and modes?

In recent years, a number of new alternatives to the traditional 'Community method' of legislating have emerged, including the Open Method (Hodson and Maher 2001; Atkinson 2002), 'co-regulation' by private actors acting voluntarily with public regulators, and rule-making by new European regulatory agencies (see Majone 2002; Dehousse 1997). Most involve less EU legislation *per se* or less stringent or detailed legislation, and depend more on coordination between national officials and ministries. A crucial question for future researchers is precisely what sort of interaction and overlap, with what effects, occur between domestic policy networks at the national level and Brussels-based EU networks (for an exception, see Nunan 1999).

Can policy network analysis generate clearer and more rigorous hypotheses about what constitutes 'success' for different kinds of network?

Long-established policy communities for whom EU policy brings benefits, and traditionally has done, might be considered successful when they are able to veto policy change. Alternatively, more recently established or emerging networks might measure their success by the extent to which they are able to force new issues onto the EU policy agenda. In any

event, we need clearer theoretical propositions about what sort of interests are empowered by which type of policy network structures, and which find themselves disadvantaged by certain types of network, and why.

Is it possible to develop normative propositions about how EU policy networks can be structured and managed in order to serve the greater European good?

Thus far, most policy network analyses have generated thick description of the EU policy process, while eschewing normative propositions or prescriptions. Especially in a radically enlarged EU, future research could usefully develop overtly normative analyses of how policy networks can be constructed to help solve problems of compliance (Haas 1999), management, (Metcalfe 2000), and legitimacy (Peterson and O'Toole Jr. 2001).

Conclusion

We have reviewed the (disputed) origins of policy network analysis as a tool for studying the policy consequences of European integration. The most basic assumptions of policy network analysis – including *the* basic assumption that network structure partially determines outcomes – have been examined critically, along with its main arguments. More generally, we have reviewed the main criticisms of a model that has never been short of critics, and found much to criticise. In particular, far more work needs to be done before policy network analysis can be considered truly to be a 'theory', as opposed to a mere metaphor.

It may seem somewhat facile and predictable to conclude by calling for more theoretical development and empirical research. Yet, it is worth reminding ourselves of something quite remarkable about the study of the EU: how little we know about the internal workings of the EU (as well as most other IOs), as opposed to European integration as a broad political process. As Barnett and Finnemore (1999) argue, the theoretical lenses used to understand international cooperation between states tend to be rigidly economistic, and focused on assessing supply and demand for cooperation. Cooperation is, of course, an anomaly in an international world that is still viewed as anarchic by most international relations scholars. 'Consequently, our research tends to focus on the bargains states strike to make or reshape IOs. Scholars pay very little attention to what goes on subsequently in their day-to-day operations or even the larger effects they have on the world' (Barnett and Finnemore 1999: 726). If nothing else, the rise of policy network analysis represents a sincere effort to understand how the EU works, day-by-day, and with what effects on the wider world. Arguably, policy network analysts are the least preachy of all types of scholar concerned with European integration because they are most willing to admit that there is much about the EU that we still do not understand very well.

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Guide to further reading

Keck, M.E. and Sikkink, K., *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1998) is one of the most impressive studies of how international politics has been transformed by the rise of transnational networks generally.

Marsh, D. (ed) *Comparing Policy Networks* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1998) is a recent edited collection of essays using policy network analysis, including several that are preoccupied with the EU.

Peterson, J. and Bomberg, E., *Decision-Making in the European Union* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 1999) uses policy network analysis to probe decision-making in a diverse range of EU policy sectors.

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