

Book review

Policy Entrepreneurs and Strategies for Change: The Case of Water Management in the Netherlands. By Stijn Brouwer, Amsterdam, VU University, 2013, 338 pp., ISBN 9789461823625.

Stijn Brouwer's study of policy entrepreneurs in the Dutch water sector is an excellent example of how an investigation into these political actors needs to be conducted. In this investigation the author was very thoughtful in how he defined policy entrepreneurs (pp. 3–8). The treatment of the theoretical dimensions of policy entrepreneurs and the strategies they can employ were also well developed and presented. The fact that Stijn investigates a number of policy process theories was for me an indication that he had investigated the subject matter from a solid theoretical foundation. I particularly enjoyed reading the theoretical section, since I am interested in the theoretical side of water governance and management. Stijn investigates four policy process theories: process streams and windows of opportunity, policy images and policy venues, the advocacy coalition framework and the network approach (pp. 22–32). He then goes on to indicate the 'room for policy entrepreneurs' in the four theories (pp. 33–34). What I also found interesting and a useful learning experience is the way Stijn treats these theories after he had outlined them. He revisits the four theories and distils, so to speak, 10 strategies from the theories. The 10 strategies are Stijn's 'new typology' of policy entrepreneur strategies (pp. 54–64), under four categories: attention- and support-seeking strategies, linking strategies, relational management strategies and arena strategies (p. 64). I am not sure whether Stijn was mindful of the fact that he employed analytic eclecticism while elaborating on the 10 strategies that formed the foundation of his enquiry. Nevertheless, here the study scores top points in the application of analytic eclecticism in a well thought through and structured manner. Analytic eclecticism is not only the combination of theoretical frameworks, but the innovative integration of theoretical assumptions and helps us to understand complex social, political, environmental and psychological processes in governance (Katzenstein & Okawara, 2001–2002; Meissner, 2015) by avoiding the theoretical compartmentalisation of investigations into one theory (Sil & Katzenstein, 2010). The 10 strategies in Stijn's new typology is an indication of this integration.

Stijn furthermore combines qualitative and quantitative research methods to give a good picture and understanding of policy entrepreneurs (pp. 79–92). He also explains the methodology quite thoroughly and there is evidence that he had been innovative in the

development of the questionnaires he put to individual policy entrepreneurs and the focus group. In this regard Stijn notes that ‘Designing questions in a manner that all respondents understand them in a consistent way, and a way that is consistent with what the researcher expected it to mean, in other words, making sure that the questions mean the same thing to the respondents as they do to the researcher, is one of the most important, and at the same time most difficult standards to reach’ (p. 88). Stijn developed his questionnaire based on the research questions and the theories and the first round of the qualitative research (p. 88). While reading the methodology, I got the impression that Stijn left nothing to chance and that he had given the questionnaire design a lot of thought. The methodology section also shows that a lot of hard work had gone into the investigation.

In chapters 6 to 9, Stijn presents the results of his inquiry according to the four strategy categories and the qualitative and quantitative questionnaires he developed. I found these chapters enlightening and good examples of the interpretation of a qualitative investigation. What is more, I think that the study can also pass as a sort of ‘how to guide’ for those individuals that would like to influence policy at any stage of the policy process. Scientists often believe that their research results are enough to influence a policy in a certain issue domain. Stijn’s study shows that there is a lot more to influencing the policy process using science than scientists think. For instance, Stijn notes that ‘this study found that in their efforts to seek attention to problems, Dutch policy entrepreneurs consider it very important to *frame problems in such a manner that shared problem ownership is promoted*’ (emphasis mine) (p. 118). In addition, Stijn says that ‘they [policy entrepreneurs] believe that a search for new sets of involved participants through shifting the debate to *different institutional venues can contribute to new solutions and opportunities*’ (emphasis mine) (p. 223). In my view, and based on two decades of working as a researcher in the water sector, South African research scientists are not good at framing problems to share ownership of the problem among a particular constituency. South African scientists also have a tendency to engage with a particular ‘participant’, governmental institutions. The lessons from Stijn’s study are therefore self-evident.

Chapter 10 of the study (pp. 236–273) is in my opinion the crown jewel in Stijn’s investigation. What I mean by this is that Stijn’s conclusions give new insights into policy entrepreneurs, what they look like and the strategies they employ. I also found it very useful that Stijn also indicated the limitations of his study. This is encouraging, since it is rare for a researcher to acknowledge limitations. For instance, Stijn says that in the study there is ‘no way to verify the accuracy of [the policy entrepreneur’s] accounts [of their strategic behaviour]’ (p. 237). Nevertheless, Stijn’s conclusions are well presented and give a good picture of the role, responsibilities and functions of policy entrepreneurs. In this regard, he fills a huge gap in the knowledge of policy entrepreneurs in the Dutch water sector. The section of chapter 10 where I think Stijn makes a valuable contribution is when he presents his ‘theoretical reflection on policy change’ (pp. 265–268). He links back, so to speak, to the four policy process theories and highlights how his study confirmed some of the assumptions of those theories. Then he also highlights how his study adds new insights to the theories and strengthens the theories (p. 267). This takes, in my view, courage to take

on well-established theoretical perspectives and is a good example of science being practiced not as the dogmatic insistence on the certainty of its claims, but science practiced as a commitment to constant critique (Kurki & Wight, 2013).

All said and done, in my opinion the study is of a very high quality and the majority of chapters are excellent reads. This means that the study had been well written and I must commend Stijn on the use of English, which is, I presume, his second language. The only chapter that I found hard to read was chapter 3: Dutch Water Management (pp. 68–79). I would have expected a little more detail of the history of water management in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the investigation looks into policy entrepreneurs and not the history of water management in the Netherlands. Having said that, it would be interesting to see what the outcome would be if the study is replicated in the South African water sector.

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