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## **Interpreting policy change - the role of paradigm shifts, side effects and crises in agricultural policies**

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### Abstract

Peter Hall's concept of paradigm shift has been used to characterize changes in agricultural policies in OECD countries over the last two decades. Other scholars have explained these changes through the series of food crises, especially BSE and FMD, which are interpreted as instances of meta-change toward reflexive modernity in a risk society, while studies using a political economy approach tend to see not much farm policy change but considerable path dependence. In this paper, I will first clarify the different notions of change and the interdependence between the applied analytical framework and the degree of policy change observed. In the second part, I will discuss the occurrence of a paradigm shift in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), arguing that the CAP has incorporated idea elements from several competing agricultural policy paradigms. Path dependence can account for the obstinacy of the old paradigm. The notion that CAP decision-making has always been marked by crisis that tended to impact on other and broader policy arenas leads to an interpretation of the change as a move toward institutional pluralisation, drawing on Beck's side effect theorem. In the third part, I link the notion of crisis to the concepts of policy windows, shifting institutional frameworks and policy arena overflow. I suggest that the pluralisation of the CAP's ideational foundations reflect increasing policy interlinkages as well as ideational and institutional tensions of the CAP's multiple constituency.

## 1 Introduction

The study of policy change has gained considerable attention over the last two decades, coming along with an interest in dynamic policy analysis. Underlying this interest are two seemingly contradictory starting points. On the one side, many researchers are interested in the impacts of a changing policy environment. Policy change is expected from three sources. First, a changing institutional landscape, especially marked by Europeanisation and multilateralism, is seen as changing the opportunity structures of policymakers at all levels from local to national and international; research on policy convergence has become particularly prominent in this field (Holzinger/Knill 2005; Knill 2005). Second, globalizing economic and societal networks and flows (Castells 1996; Mol et al. 2006) are expected to shift the balance of power, the opportunity structure, the patterns of awareness and the cost benefit rationales for policymakers. Third, discursive shifts, especially the ascent of neo-liberalism with its agenda of liberalisation and privatisation, are another aspect and potentially driving force of policy change (Kiely 2005; Potter/Tilzey 2005; Slaughter 2005). On the other side, many researchers start from an observation of a lack, a far more limited scope, or a slower pace of change than they would expect to see for either normative or theoretical reasons. Core concepts in this field are path dependence, policy feedback and lock-in (Wilsford 1994; Pierson 2000; Greener 2002; Kay 2005; Howlett/Rayner 2006), transferring these concepts from technology studies (David 1985), economics (Arthur 1994; Arrow 2000) and historical sociology (Goldstone 1998). This research resonates with widespread public opinion about the difficulty of reform of entrenched policies backed by powerful vested interests.

A sector that has often been regarded as particularly resistant to policy change is agriculture policies in OECD countries. Since the 1960s, these policies have an air of conflict and crisis. The high degree of protectionism and state intervention, along with rising budget costs, increasing concerns about environmental impacts of intensive farming and complaints about rural decline have added to the image of an inefficient and ineffective policy. Agriculture has been discussed as an outstanding example of an entrenched policy (Sheingate 2000) and of difficult to achieve reform strategies (Orden et al. 1999). Especially in a literature grounded in agricultural economics, a normative call for policy change (i.e. reform) is matched by diagnosis of lock-in and path dependence (Moyer/Josling 1990, 2002; Harvey 2004)). At the same time, a continuous stream of scholarship treats agriculture as an example for policy change or address changes in these policies (Coleman et al. 1997; Coleman 1998; Daugbjerg 1999; Daugbjerg/Swinbank 2007). Here, broad empirical evidence can be found that agriculture policies in OECD countries have seen a shift of policy instruments used and ideational foundations (Coleman et al. 2004). It can also be shown that the policy impact on farmers' income has undergone significant change (Feindt 2007). Even in this part of the literature, the element of continuity and path dependence and policy feedback is broadly considered (Daugbjerg 2003; Daugbjerg/Swinbank 2004).

The co-occurrence of change and continuity gives room for different interpretations, depending on the perspective. While this can be attributed to the usual constructive link between conceptual foundations and the type of entities observed that is inherent to all scientific research, if policy change is the topic, there is another reason to focus on the interpretive side of analysis. A remarkable share of the research on policy change includes instances of learning as part of their framework, adding an ideational dimension to the power dimension of politics (Bennett/Howlett 1992). This is also true for the path dependency literature where the difficulty to unlearn established ideational frameworks and practical routines forms part of the argument of some scholars (e.g. Moynihan 2008). Considering learning as part or as cause of

policy change, however, is to embark on interpretation as an indispensable part of policy analysis, for two reasons: If learning is conceptualised as change of knowledge, its observation requires the researcher to take into regard the schemes of observation and evaluation that are in operation in the policy arena (as employed by individuals, or embodied in routines and patterns of communication of organisations or networks). To do so, the researcher needs to reconstruct the relevant patterns of meaning in the field, i.e. s/he has to engage in interpretation. If, on the other hand, learning is interpreted as change of behaviour, the relevance of such a change, if observed, to a policy still cannot be determined without taking recourse to the patterns of interpretation that are embodied in that policy (while these need not be the reference for the researcher to determine the occurrence of change). This becomes even more obvious if one seeks to determine the degree and pace of change. If a change of behaviour is considered minor or major cannot be decided without recourse to a set of relevance criteria and a scheme of observation along with an effort to subsume the observed behaviour before and after the change under the categories provided by these schemes and criteria.

In agriculture policy, the occurrence of both change and continuity can be stated as a puzzle. Change is surprising because of the entrenched nature of the policy, and continuity is surprising because of the policy's poor effectiveness and efficiency. Findings of either change or continuity are informed by, and part of, competing narratives (Yanow 2000; Yanow/Schwartz-Shea 2006; Yanow 2007). In both narratives, the notion of crisis is crucial. In the policy change narrative, change is made possible through the exploitation of crisis. In the path dependence narrative, the historically evolved entrenchment constrains policy choice even in the face of crises that are witness to the need for reform.

In the remaining parts of this paper, to avoid the additional complexities of comparative analysis, I will confine the argument to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union. I will first discuss the most prominent line of research that finds considerable change in agriculture policy and which draws on Peter Hall's notion of paradigm shift through processes of social learning. In section 2.1 I will argue that while evidently the old paradigm of state-assisted agriculture has partly given way to ideas about a competitive or multifunctional agriculture (Coleman et al. 1997; Skogstad 1998) or globalised production (Josling 2002; Coleman et al. 2004), the notion of a completed shift to one of the emerging and competing paradigms would be premature. Rather, the direction of the policy shift is quite ambivalent. What we see after 2003 is a mix of idea elements that have emanated from seemingly competing agriculture policy paradigms (section 2.1). While in Peter Hall's concept of social learning, widespread perception of policy failure sets the stage for paradigm shift, the path dependence approach finds that it can be seemingly small elements of a policy that later constrain policy choice or trigger pressure to reform (Kay 2003, 2005). It is often only in retrospect that "critical junctures" can be identified (section 2.2). However, crises help to identify periods in which critical junctures can possibly appear. A third interpretation of agricultural policy change follows Ulrich Beck's concept of risk society (Beck 1992) and focuses on the iterative crises in agricultural policy-making. Against the risk society framework these crises can be interpreted as consequences of the 'side effects' that agriculture policies have on other sectors and policy arenas. Section 2.3 will discuss to what degree the changes in the CAP can be interpreted as a move from first to second modernity, that is from a logic of either/or and clear demarcations to a logic of both/and and coexistence and plurality (Beck/Lau 2005).

From a political science perspective, such a diagnosis – if correct – definitely calls for an explanation. In the third part, I will therefore focus on the role of policy networks (Richardson

2000) and of institutional and ideational tensions (Lieberman 2002) for explaining policy change. Both are important aspects of the increasing policy interlinkages of the CAP. Both perspectives offer additional insights into the role of crisis as a ‘policy window’ in the sense of John Kingdon’s policy stream approach (Kingdon 1995). But while Kingdon’s policy window concept is helpful as a framework to identify and structure the choice situations that bring about change (or could bring it about), it cannot explain the apparent directedness of change on the CAP. The CAP crises have an important feature in common in that the sense of urgency is usually introduced from outside pressure. Hence these crises offer opportunities for the entry of new actors from other policy arenas, and to what Richardson (2000) calls “overcrowding” of policy arenas from other policy arenas into terrain of established policy communities. These actors can then join with reform minded insiders to exploit institutional and ideational tensions that stem from the multiple constitution of the CAP.

## **2 Notions of Change**

### **2.1 Paradigm shift**

The literature on policy change in the CAP draws heavily on Peter Hall’s notion of “policy paradigms” (Hall 1993), which is based on Thomas Kuhn’s work on “scientific revolutions” (Kuhn 1962). According to Hall, a policy paradigm is an “interpretive frame” for the formulation and implementation of a policy. It includes normative and cognitive idea elements and encompasses ideas about policy goals as well as theories about the world and preferable policy instruments and practices. Hall uses the concept to assess the scope of policy change and to link policy change to processes of social learning. For this purpose he distinguishes three components of a policy: “the overarching goals that guide policy in a particular field”, e.g. stabilising agricultural markets, “the specific techniques or instruments used to attain these goals”, e.g. target prices for certain commodities, “and the precise settings of these instruments”, e.g. the specific target price set at a given point of time” (Hall 1993, p. 278). Corresponding are three kinds of policy change. First order change is confined to the levels or the settings of the policy instruments. Here the policy process remains in the realm of “incrementalism, satisficing and routinised decision making” (Hall 1993: 280). Second order change appears if new policy instruments are introduced or old ones abandoned while the overarching goals of a policy remain unaltered. It belongs to the realm of strategic action (Hall 1993: 280). Both first and second order change take place within relatively closed and stable policy networks (Hall 1993: 291). Third order change encompasses „shifts in the locus of authority over policy” (Hall 1993: 280). It occurs when dominant ideas about policy goals, the nature of policy problems or the adequate instruments are altered. Such a change of the ideational framework of a policy is what Hall calls a political paradigm shift.

The literature on paradigm shift in agricultural policy focuses on the period since the mid 1980s (Coleman et al. 1997). As a baseline, several authors identify a ‘developmental or state-assisted paradigm’ (Coleman/Grant 1998: 636), ‘state assistance paradigm’ (Skogstad 1998) or ‘dependent agriculture paradigm’ (Moyer/Josling 2002) that shaped agriculture policy in all Western countries from the 1930s to the 1980s. This paradigm is based on the assumption that agriculture provides an indispensable national good – food security – that is threatened by market failure, especially volatile markets and ruinous prices in years of good harvest. It holds that sector income is low and that agricultural producers can compete neither with other sectors for scarce resources nor with foreign competitors for markets. Hence the state must help to stabilise markets and control supply. This is to be achieved through import controls, surplus buying, state trade and aids for export (Moyer/Josling 2002: 33). This kind of policies

was established in Germany, France and Italy since the 1880s, in the USA and the United Kingdom since the 1930s (Tracy 1989). They were then carried over from national to European market orders during the founding years of the European Community. Often this paradigm was interwoven with an ideology of 'agricultural exceptionalism', i.e. the idea that agriculture is fundamentally different from other sectors (Grant 1995; Skogstad 1998; Daugbjerg/Swinbank 2006), or based on 'agricultural myths' that established taboo-like fences around certain assumptions underlying agriculture and sector related policies (Browne et al. 1992).

According to Coleman (1998), during the 1980s the United States moved toward a market liberal or 'competitive agriculture paradigm' (Moyer/Josling 2002: 33f.) which holds that farmers can earn average incomes and compete with other sectors and other countries. Hence policies should unleash market forces and tear down supply controls that impede competitive farmers. Market signals rather than politically set prices should guide producers and consumers. Commodity programmes might still provide a safety net against excessive price decline. For a transition period, direct payments can be granted to producers but they should be decoupled from production. The state can support risk management schemes, but support should be no longer target products but producers and their income (Moyer/Josling 2002: 33f.). While the Reagan administration proposed liberalising farm policies, due to resistance in Congress only the 1996 Farm Bill brought about moves toward market liberalism. With higher commodity prices expected, price support was decreased and partially substituted with direct payments (Orden et al. 1999).

While the market liberal paradigm found support in Europe, the dominant feeling was not only that market signals should be given more weight but that agriculture is important for the environmental and the rural space (e.g. Commission of the European Communities 1985). The "European model of agriculture" (Cardwell 2004) became the token of the 'multifunctional agriculture paradigm' (Coleman 1998), according to which farmers produce public goods, especially through maintaining the 'cultural landscape', the rural space and natural resources, but are insufficiently rewarded by the market for their sellable goods. Due to this market failure, sector income is inadequately low. The state, in order to ensure the viability of the cultural landscape and the family farm, should provide programmes that remunerate farmers for the environmental benefits they produce and prevent any dominance of a 'mono-functional' agriculture (Moyer/Josling 2002: 34-36). As in the dependent agriculture paradigm, multifunctionalists believe that agricultural markets, if left alone, fail to provide the welfare optimum. But while farmers still receive state support, the reason is no longer the neediness of farmers but the social and ecological functions of agriculture. Problem analysis and policy goals differ fundamentally.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, globalising markets for food, feed and agricultural raw materials (Morgan et al. 2006) create new opportunities and vulnerabilities that also inform the policy agenda. An emerging 'globalised production paradigm' (Josling 2002: 94-99; Coleman et al. 2004: 98-110) holds that agriculture increasingly becomes part of internationalised and complex production networks. In many sectors, farmers become integrated into vertical food chains. Markets are increasingly driven by demand and are being differentiated. Hence the state would better promote differentiated quality rather than quantity production. The state also becomes the guarantor of transparency and consumer safety, introduces quality and safety standards and makes sure that labelling and control schemes are effective and efficient (for example labelling of genetically modified organisms, organic products and regional origin or traceability rules). Where in a globalised marketplace farmers' income increasingly depend on bargaining power, oligopolies become a major concern and

the state is needed to guarantee fairness in contracts (Moyer/Josling 2002: 38) through effective competition policy (Harl 2003). The protection of intellectual property becomes another government responsibility. Moreover, in a globalised marketplace standards and legal protection need to be harmonised.

The reforms of the CAP since the mid 1980 are usually interpreted as a stepwise move toward the multifunctional agriculture paradigm, a paradigm shift through a cumulative succession of small incremental measures (cf. Coleman et al. 1997; Greer 2005). The introduction of mandatory set-aside programmes in 1989, while driven by a need to lower production and pressure on producers' prices, was justified as helping to protect the environment – the first time that the EC justified an agricultural policy with regard to the public goods connected to agricultural activities. The 1992 MacSharry reform is widely seen as a watershed since it introduced agro-environmental programmes that remunerated farmers that use environmental benign methods of production, and direct payments. The latter were justified in terms of the state assistance paradigm as compensation for price cuts (Swinbank 1993). At the same time they partly decoupled state support from production, giving more weight to market signals, in consonance with the market liberal paradigm. Agenda 2000, apart from further increase of direct payments as compensation for further price cuts, established an Integrated Rural Development Policy as 'second pillar' of the CAP. Its elements partly resonate with the multifunctionality paradigm (agro-environmental programmes, rural development measures), partly with the competitive agriculture paradigm (agro-structural programmes). Member states were now allowed to cut premiums paid to farmers and re-use the saved monies for rural development ('modulation'), and to couple payments to environmental and health requirements ('cross compliance'). The Fischler reform of June 2003 and later reforms of the market orders for sugar, bananas, tobacco and wine discarded market intervention (apart from a safety net) and most acreage and animal unit premiums and replaced them with a direct payment. For this purpose all payments received by a farmer during a base period (2000-2002) were turned into a 'Single Farm Payment'. Modulation and cross compliance became mandatory to member states.

The different elements of the 2003 and reforms and their later counterparts in other sectors correspond to ideas from different agricultural policy paradigms:

- Substitution of market price policies for direct payments and the following decoupling of these payments from production are in accordance with the market liberal paradigm. The decoupling ends state incentives to increase production and specialise on the subsidised products. State programs no longer inhibit differentiation. Production decisions will increasingly follow market signals and be driven by demand.
- Agro-environmental programmes are in line with the multifunctionality paradigm. Farmers are compensated for the higher costs they incur from providing public goods (environmental benefits).
- Coupling all payments to farmers' compliance with environmental, consumer protection and animal welfare standards (cross compliance) is in line with the multifunctional paradigm.
- Where a regional premium has been introduced instead of the farm related historical payments, more extensive farms will benefit, again in line with the multifunctional agriculture paradigm.
- Modulation, that is reducing payments above 5000 Euro by up to seven percent and redirection of the saved funds to rural development, structural policies and agro-environmental policies, diminishes the concentration of payments to large and

productive farms (for the distribution of payments see European Commission 2006: 3). This again resonates with the multifunctional paradigm, as well as the reuse of these monies for rural development. However, these funds can also be funnelled into investment support programmes for agricultural producers, rather following the competitive agriculture paradigm.

- The increasing prominence of standards resonates with the global agricultural production paradigm. The introduction of cross compliance rules turn financial resources into a leverage to push quality standards, identification and traceability systems and at the same time to strengthen competitiveness of European production chains in the global marketplace. Most of these standards have been introduced since the 1990s. They are increasingly complemented by obligatory traceability systems. Furthermore the EU tries to anchor these systems and rules in the WTO system or even to make them the global standard (Vincent 2007), especially in the context of the Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) and Codex Alimentarius.
- However, justification and outcome of the 2003 CAP reform are still in line with the state dependent agriculture paradigm. In a certain sense, cross compliance rules state that farmers are paid for obeying existing law, which constitutes an exemption when compared to other economic sectors. Agricultural exceptionalism still seems to be vital.
- Furthermore, payments were calculated on the base of historical income (2000-2002) to ensure only modest redistribution. However, member states were allowed to put all payments in a region into a pot and distribute the collected amount on an equal per acreage basis, thereby introducing a unitary regional premium in lieu of the historical farm payment. Where taken, this move has typically resulted in redistributive effects, diverting money from intensive animal holdings and highly productive arable land to extensive grassland. Supporters find this to be an acknowledgement of the environmental value of extensive grassland.

Altogether the CAP after the Fischler reform embodies a mix of idea elements from different policy paradigms. Compared to 1985 certainly a paradigm shift has taken place, but if the new direction is toward multifunctionalism is not as clear as it appeared to some scholars during the 1990s (Coleman et al. 1997). On the one hand the continuation of many old CAP programmes looks like the state dependent agriculture paradigm still being effective. The direct payments for example that were introduced as compensation for price cuts will probably be continued until 2020, much longer than necessary to avoid hardship in the transition to a market liberal agriculture. The income political character of the CAP becomes more visible with the direct payments than it had been with market price policies. Market intervention and safety nets are not completely abandoned. Cross compliance rules do barely exceed what had been legally required before. Supposed that laws had already been kept before 2003, these payments make a difference only on acreage that is taken out of production. In all other cases farmers receive public money for obeying the law, what is not the custom in other economic sectors and constitutes an exceptional position for agricultural production. Measured against the actual costs from nature and environment protection farmers are probably heavily over-compensated.

In the next section I will discuss if the lasting vividness of the state assisted agriculture paradigm can be attributed to path dependence.

## **2.2 Path dependence**

Observers who judge policy change from the distribution of costs and benefits tend to stress the continuity in agriculture policy. Even after several rounds of reform, agriculture programs



still help to increase the income of a small and shrinking group of agricultural producers through subsidies, state aid, market intervention and border protection (Moyer/Josling 1990; Ackrill 2000; Moyer/Josling 2002; Ackrill 2005). According to OECD (2007), in 2004 still almost a third of the income of agricultural producers in OECD countries could be attributed to state policies. That this number had been above 40 percent in the mid 1980s leaves room for interpretation of the degree of policy change.

With regard to the CAP, Ackrill (2005) finds path dependence particularly with regard to the distribution of payments among member states which has remained almost constant through all reforms including 2003. This finding can be explained by the organisation of the decision-making process in Brussels. While the conceptual work is left to the Commission with its agenda-setting monopoly the member states in the Council concentrate on distributive bargaining (Gehring 2000) where they are mainly concerned about their net payer position (Grant 1997; Ackrill 2005). This arrangement works to constrain the policy choices the Commission and the member states have. It is strong enough to explain the continuation of high levels of support even in the wake of declining economic and political importance of the farm lobby. However, it can be argued the distributive nature of farm policies which gave incentives to farmers to organise around their defence generated 'policy feedback' – a self-reinforcing mechanism. The construction of the CAP around market orders with important input from farm organisations helped to build a close network of policy-makers and lobbyists that had a common interest in maintaining the policy (Daugbjerg 1999), bringing about the possibility of a lock-in in policies that from a wider perspective appear inefficient and ineffective (Daugbjerg/Swinbank 2004).

Kay (2003; 2005) uses the path dependence approach with a different focus. He is interested in identifying 'critical junctures' in the policy process, apparently minor changes that later help to trigger major policy shifts. He identifies the introduction of stabilisers in 1988, usually seen as emanation from the state assisted agriculture paradigm, as such a critical juncture. In 1992 the stabiliser system threatened to precipitate in a double digit price decrease which helped the Commission to overcome member state resistance against price cuts and the introduction of 'compensatory' direct payments. In a similar undertaking, Daugbjerg (2003) focuses on the MacSharry reform. He argues that the introduction of direct payments laid the foundation for later more radical reforms which through decoupling and cross compliance changed the rationale underlying the instrument. Ackrill (2005) points to the importance of the new EU budget procedures introduced through the Single European Act 1987 and the Inter-Institutional Agreements between European Parliament, Commission and Council on budgetary discipline and budgetary procedure since 1988. These institutional amendments changed the dynamics of the budget process from an annual bargaining over support prices to the design of agricultural programmes over a period of five, later seven years, in tune with the EU budget period (Laffan 1997). Under the new procedures finance ministers and heads of state agree on the spending limits, while agricultural ministers have to come up with programmes within the financial confines. These arrangements worked in favour of the direct payments which allow to calculate projected budgets without the uncertainties of market projections that tended to underestimate the costs of price support policies.

To sum up, while path dependence constrains policy choices (rather than determining policies to a degree that is suggested by the term 'lock-in'), minor innovations can turn into critical junctures in hindsight and can help to open opportunities for major policy change later. However, change in the CAP cannot be explained without pressure from outside the policy arena. In the next section I turn to the role of the 'side effects' of the CAP.

### 2.3 Side effects

Already the institutionalisation of the CAP during the 1960s (Tracy 1989) and the introduction of milk quota in 1984 (Petit et al. 1987) had been surrounded by an atmosphere of crisis. The same holds true for all major CAP reform (Greer 2005). However, different from the 1960s, the CAP crises since the 1980s have been triggered by pressure from outside the agricultural policy community: budget pressure, environmental concerns, trade conflicts and food crises. In all these cases, inter-linkages between the CAP and other policy arenas were not very well anticipated in the policy design, producing what Ulrich Beck (1992) calls 'side-effects'. According to Beck's theory of reflexive modernisation their politicization (Beck et al. 2003) is an important mechanism through which institutions and practices of 'first modernity' are transformed. In this perspective, the CAP belongs to this set of institutions which typically work toward the standardisation of agents and objects (Beck et al. 2003). This is exactly one of the widely criticised long-term effects of commodity programmes – that they induce farmers to grow a very limited number of crops and work with a limited number of plant varieties and animal races in order to maximise mass production, embarking on a Fordist system of production (Potter/Tilzey 2005). The theorem of second modernity states that the institutions of first modernity are weakened and questioned as a result of their own success. According to this pattern of diagnosis, in agriculture the success of the productivist paradigm undercuts the ecological and communal foundations of production. In the transition to second modernity the environmental side-effects are no longer accepted and rural communities become more and more vulnerable. Food safety crises shatter public trust that modernist farming has the expertise to provide safe and healthy food (Wilkinson et al. 2007).

In the wake of crisis, the carefully crafted institutional and epistemological isolation of the sector comes under attack, institutional borders and conceptual distinctions are questioned. Particularly during the animal disease crises – most prominently BSE – borders between knowledge and non-knowledge, nature and society were blurred (Dressel 2002; Böschen et al. 2004). Productivist and industrial agriculture lost its dominance, opening space for alternative models (Sonnino/Marsden 2006). According to Beck's recent interpretation of the concept, the move from first to second modernity is defined as a shift from either/or to both/and principle (Beck/Lau 2005: 527). Elaborating the concept, John Grin (2006) argues that the institutions of first or simple modernity (parliaments, agricultural research centres, farmers' organisations) are increasingly complemented by institutions of reflexive modernity. Model projects, participatory arrangements, stakeholder bodies, research programmes for system transition management or trans-disciplinary advisory boards are expected to bring new ideas to established practices. To achieve effectiveness, they need to take into account the plurality of actors' logics. They open up hybrid places where for example farmers, consumers and environmentalists meet and create new approaches and solutions. To gain legitimacy under conditions of network governance, they turn to reflexive arrangements that do not prescribe certain outcomes but make sure that different views are taken into consideration.

The indecisive direction of the paradigm shift – away from the productivist and state-assisted agriculture paradigm, without abandoning it completely, and simultaneously toward a more multifunctional, more competitive and more globalised agriculture – appears to fit into this pattern of diagnosis – a move toward more pluralist arrangements. The growing financial and regulatory support for organic farming and regional and traditional products fits into this pattern of explanation. Also the language used in regulation of one of the major long-standing issues in agriculture policy appears to support this view: the 'co-existence' of genetically modified, conventional and organic farming.

From a political science perspective, the move from a closed and ignorant to a more pluralist and reflexive policy arena calls for an explanation. In the next part, I will therefore turn to a discussion of the role of policy networks and institutions

#### **4 Interpreting crises: The role of policy windows, policy interlinkage and institutional tensions**

The role of crisis for CAP reform that triggered the side effect interpretation needs to be explained with regard to the political process. Building on John Kingdon's concept of multiple stream analysis, we can understand crises as 'policy windows' (Kingdon 1995). Policy windows are temporarily limited choice opportunities. They appear if three independent streams correspond: the stream of problems that enter the agenda; the stream of policy ideas that could be proposed to solve diverse problems; and the political stream of actor constellations. Political entrepreneurs constantly try to highlight 'their' problems and ideas and to 'couple' the three streams. Crises can open policy windows since they help to set problems on the agenda. However, while the budget crises of the 1980s helped to hold the high costs of the CAP on the agenda, the institutional constellation prevented a paradigm shift. With its 1985 Green Book on the CAP (Commission of the European Communities 1985) the Commission strategically started to shape the ideational environment of the CAP. This document already contained language for problem description that later informed the 2003 Fischler reform.

It has been noted that since the 1980s the agriculture policy network in Brussels has been considerably opened up. Inside the European Commission, when preparing major reform proposals, DG Agri has to work closely with members of other General Directions, particularly DG Trade, DG Environment, DG Ecofin and DG Budget (Feindt 2008). Lobbyists from the environmental, health, trade and consumer arena make their voices heard about CAP issues. As Richardson (2000) has noted, interest groups adjust to and exploit the opportunities presented by multi-arena policy-making. The interlinkage of policies induces 'overcrowding' of policy arenas from other policy arenas into terrain of established policy communities. This creates new choice opportunities for interest groups like challenging images of issues and venue shift (e.g. through protest, cf. GMO). Richardson portrays EU politics as a multi-level, multi-arena, multi venue game with a multitude of access points. The commission encourages Europeanisation of interest groups, who develop their own Europeanisation strategies because even strong national players like France become weakened. This strengthens the role of transnational communities of experts (epistemic communities in the sense of Haas).

The 2003 reform was carefully crafted by a small group of six or so civil servants with commissioner Fischler over a period of almost two years. The draft reform can be seen as a skilful integration of the concerns of several relevant epistemic communities, especially agricultural economists and environmentalists. The Commission's problem description integrated concerns about income in the sector, rural development, trade talks, costs of the CAP, the 2004 enlargement, and the environment. This helped to build public support, and to avoid resistance by member states on other grounds than distributional reasons. Member states' comments on the reform proposal did not include any alternative conceptual approach. Hence the Commission had carefully coupled the problem and the policy stream and held a monopoly in the latter. Using a 'Midterm Review' of the 2000-2006 financial period to surprisingly launch its proposal, with a view to the supposedly final agriculture trade talks at the WTO ministerial conference in Cancún 2003, the Commission created a political constellation where interests and consideration from the trade arena gained considerable

influence in the member states' decision process, thereby further widening the relevant policy network. Doing so, the Commission finally managed to convince all member states but France about the reform's advantages. Only after threatening veto, French President Jacques Chirac finally gave in (Greer 2005).

It has often been noted that both the 1992 and the 2003 CAP reform can hardly be explained without recourse to the trade policy arena. In 1986 negotiations on integrating trade in agriculture to the GATT as part of the so called Uruguay round which almost collapsed in 1990 when at the Brussels summit the EC could not convince that its CAP could be brought in line with the trade principles envisioned by its trading partners. The 1992 MacSharry reform was tailored to satisfy the needs at the GATT negotiations (Swinbank/Tanner 1996; Coleman/Tangermann 1999). The Marrakesh Treaty of 1994 institutionalised the WTO and in its Agriculture Agreement (AA) established enforceable rules for market access, export subsidies and domestic support for agriculture. These rules soon became relevant for the CAP. Agenda 2000 became necessary to comply with these rules (Swinbank 1999). Integration to the WTO has influenced the domestic agricultural policy agenda of member states (Tangermann 2004). The 2003 CAP reform was intended to improve the chances for a swift agreement during the next round of trade talks (Swinbank 2005; Swinbank/Daugbjerg 2006), the so called Doha Development Round, launched in 2001, scheduled to be finalised by 2004, but agonising since 2003 until the present day.

Most accounts of the WTO' influence on CAP reform have either taken a game theoretical perspective, focussing on strategic interdependence between several bargaining arena (Paarlberg 1997; Patterson 1997) or analysed the influence in terms of the CAP policy community accommodating pressure (Swinbank/Daugbjerg 2006). Following the general argument made by Lieberman (2002), I will focus on the institutional and ideational tensions that arise from the multiple constitution of the CAP that have become even more ambivalent as a result of several institutional changes over the last 15 years.

The aims of the CAP as established in the Rome Treaty of 1957 have been contradictory from its very beginning. The EC is required to stabilise agricultural markets and sector income, supposedly through improving productivity, and also to ensure low food prices for consumers. As it turned out, increasing productivity drove down market prices. However, the CAP was never institutionally isolated. Agriculture was meant to be part of the common market. With volatile exchange rates, during the 1970s a single market with common prices could be reconciled with guaranteed prices only through a complicated system of 'green exchange rates' (Grant 1997). The Byzantine nature of this system and its exploitability by criminal traders helped to build a reputation of the CAP as being contradictory and harmful to the liberal project of a Single European Market.

The Single European Act of 1987, the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 and the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997 established the principles of environmental policy integration and sustainable development as aims for all Community policies. The negative environmental impact of intensive farming that the public became increasingly concerned about revealed an ideational tension between the productivist agriculture paradigm and the EU's commitment to sustainable development. Since 1992, the CAP and its reforms are increasingly justified in terms of sustainable development, with sustainable agriculture now being the lead concept for the CAP (cf. DG Agri Website, visited 8 February 2008).

The CAP before the 2003 reform was also in tension with important strategic EU documents like the Lisbon strategy of 2000 (several times renewed) and the Sustainability strategy of

2001 (renewed 2006). While the first one stressed competitiveness and market orientation, the latter one gives weight to policy coherence. A CAP that isolated farmers from market signals and interfered with community policies on trade, development, environment and human health displayed obvious ideational tensions with the wider policy framework that could be exploited by a Commission that felt the need to rebalance the costs and benefits of the CAP (or saw efficiency gains that a policy community, entrenched in the status quo, would not acknowledge).

On the member state level, the implicit social contract between rural and urban areas has experienced considerable re-interpretation in the light of a diminishing farm population, fewer and fewer direct interaction between producers and consumers of food, and a shift of economic and political weight of the farm population. Due its institutional Europeanisation, agriculture policy in Europe has developed an inherent tension between its still strong stance in Brussels and its increasingly marginal role in many member states' policy portfolio (apart from distributional bargaining in Brussels). As a caveat it needs to be mentioned that with rising prices for agricultural products and the growing interest in biomass production the relevance of agriculture policy seems to be on the rise again.

Beyond the EU, the WTO Agriculture Agreement now adds another layer to the constitution of EU agricultural policy. The WTO principles of free trade based on agreed rules and only circumscribed discretion for domestic policies can – depending on market structures and conditions – be easily at odds with the Rome Treaty commitment to stabilising agricultural markets and securing sector income. The 2003 reform tried to minimise these tensions, based on an interpretation of WTO rules according to which the Single Farm Payment would shift almost all domestic support into the so called Green Box of not trade distorting measures which are not subject to any limitations. However, this interpretation is contested by some of the trade partners. It does therefore not eliminate the tensions but only shifts them to another venue (where the EU might have less control about the interpretation of the ideational foundations).

Through the WTO rules, governments of important trade partners like Brazil become as well part of the wider CAP actor network as do European and member state actors with an interest in liberalisation. These actors can then join with reform minded insiders to exploit institutional and ideational tensions that stem from the multiple constitution of the CAP. Under crisis, these tensions not only become visible – they create choice opportunities. While in the routine mode of policy-making ambivalent ideational foundations and inconclusive structures of agency are bearable or even help to pacify conflict, under crisis there is a sense of urgency that requires decisions that will lead to a rebalancing of institutions and ideas.

## **5 Conclusions**

Since the mid 1980s the Common Agricultural Policy has undergone considerable policy change with regard to policy instruments and the ideational framework. But while something like a paradigm shift has obviously taken place, the direction of change appears quite ambivalent (or multivalent). The CAP after the major reforms of 1992 and 2003 embraces idea elements of several competing policy paradigms: multifunctionality, market liberalism, globalism and still the old state assisted productivist agriculture paradigm. While the obstinacy of the old paradigm can be explained through path dependence, arising from policy feedback and entrenched policy networks, which constrains later choice options, the chain of policy innovations and their specific mix can not. The mixed ideational basis of the reformed CAP resonates with Ulrich Beck's notion of a second modernity where institutions and

practices become more plural and ambivalent. Such a plurality can be found in the sectorally and spatially expanding policy networks, where more and more non-farm and non-EU actors strive to influence the CAP. This multitude of actors can try to exploit ideational and institutional tensions that arise from the multiple constituency of the CAP in the Rome Treaty, other EU treaties and policies, the WTO Agriculture Agreement and the implicit social contracts of the diverse member states' societies. While under routine conditions these tensions stay latent, under certain circumstances they can be exploited by powerful and skilled policy entrepreneurs to impose a sense of urgency on the policy system to make wide reaching decisions. Hence, these tensions offer opportunities to launch crisis and thereby to create or shape choice opportunities. During the last two decades, these opportunities have worked to further pluralise both the ideational and the institutional foundations of the CAP. The Commission's 1992 and 2003 reform proposals bridged as well as they exploited ideational tensions in the wider policy framework. It remains to be seen if under a changing policy environment – with a strong increase in agricultural commodity prices since the years 2006 and 2007, triggered by increased demand from developing countries (OECD/FAO 2006, 2007) and a massive biomass and bioenergy boom – the concern about production and food security will override other concerns and lead to a return to the productivist paradigm.

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