The Impact and Ongoing Development of
Deliberative Policy Analysis

Background

In this roundtable, Selen Ercan talks to Hendrik Wagenaar and Carolyn M. Hendriks to re-examine the legacies and unfinished business of *Deliberative Policy Analysis* – an influential book edited by Maarten Hajer, Hendrik Wagenaar in 2003. The discussion was recorded on 13 March 2019 at the Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance at the University of Canberra.

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Note

This transcript is edited for clarity.

SELEN ERCAN: Welcome Carolyn and Henk to the University of Canberra. Today, I would like to talk with you about Deliberative Policy Analysis (DPA) focusing on what it is and what it is not, what it can offer to the scholars and practitioners of democracy. I also have some questions around the recent developments in the field of deliberative democracy and their relevance for the deliberative policy analysis. So, to start with, Henk can you tell us about the historical origins of DPA?

HENDRIK WAGENAAR: Maarten Hajer and I around 2001 were working in the field of policy analysis and were increasingly unhappy with what policy analysis had to offer. When I talk about policy analysis, what I have in mind is a very rationalistic and conventional approach to policy analysis, such as cost benefit analysis and future modelling. These approaches felt irrelevant in the face of the way that we began to see the world.

So how did we see the world? Maarten had come back from a period of working with Ulrich Beck in Munich where he was steeped in this kind of thinking that Ulrich Beck had developed about a risk society. Meanwhile, I had just returned from MIT where I did my graduate work. I worked with the early generation of interpretive policy analysts like Martin Rein, Frank Fischer, Doug Torgerson who were also unhappy with the state of the field. And so we organized a workshop, which still ranks in my memory as one of the best workshops I've ever been to, where we tried a different way of doing policy analysis. Basically all the people in the book *Deliberative Policy Analysis* were in the workshop. And that includes Patsy Healey for example from the planning field. So, the next step was why don't we turn this into a book? And that's the book we are now talking about, and that a bit to our surprise to be honest, took off in a major way and became quite popular.

So, what is the argument we make? We have a big introductory essay where we develop this new understanding of policy analysis. And the argument is we cannot think of policy analysis without an image of the world that policy is meant for. All these conventional methods of policy analysis were sort of generalist, universalist methods that were just dropped anywhere across the world. There was a lot of economistic thinking that also drove this. So, we said, we need to have an image of the world that policy is for.

So, what is that world? And we, in the introductory essay, say, well, the world is characterized by the fact that, first, policymaking no longer happens only in the halls of

parliamentary procedure or the big government agencies. It happens almost everywhere at the moment in society. We call that the new spaces of politics. Just a simple example. The #MeToo movement, we would call a new space of politics because it reformulates a very pressing social issue in society, which often begins to lead to new regulatory measures or new habits. I just signed up for a pledge that I will no longer participate in manels and if these practices then spread, the we have a new kind of politics, new spaces of politics, the first one.

Second, it is also a world that is beset by radical uncertainty. In many, *many* policy areas, we simply don't have the data. We don't have the knowledge. We cannot even expect to get the data and the knowledge. For example, I did a lot of work in prostitution policy. There is simply no way that I can get a clear understanding of the extent of trafficking. How many victims are there? We will never know. It's impossible to count yet we have to make policy, right? So, isn't that radical uncertainty and radical unpredictability that policymakers need to navigate?

Third, it's a world that is deeply *deeply* pluralistic. It was the case in 2003 when we published the book, and now even more pluralistic in a religious sense, in an ethnic sense, in a lifestyle sense. Policymakers have to walk a tightrope and find ways in dealing with such plurality, pluralism and conflict. Yet, all these groups are interdependent for certain policy areas. For example, in the Netherlands, for twenty-five years, we have been talking about expanding the airport which is in a densely populated area near Amsterdam. And all the actors are around the table – it's literally a big table. And they realize they cannot move forward without talking with each other and even when they talk to each other, bridging different interests and finding solutions that are acceptable to most still proves to be difficult.

So, this is the world we are dealing with, and then we ask the question: what kind of policy analysis might be relevant to understanding governance in this world? We called it the emerging network society. And our argument in the introductory essay is it's a kind of policy analysis that rests on three pillars.

First, it should be interpretive, which means that a lot of the work we do in policy analysis and the knowledge we gain should be about how people who are affected by and implementing the policies experience the process and outcomes of policy. That gives us a

different understanding of what that the policy amounts to and what its unintended consequences are. So that's one, it should be interpretive.

Second, it should be deliberative. It should no longer be the analyst who should be the expert who sits behind his or her desk and collects quantitative data and turns it into like a Cost Benefit Analysis. No, we should talk to the different actors and try to move this policy in a certain direction.

Third, it should be practice-oriented. It should focus on what people are doing, not necessarily always on what they are saying. That means, for example, that there will be a lot of emphasis on policy implementation and not always on how to get the policy through parliament. This leads to a restatement of the professional role of the policy analyst. They are no longer advisors who are selling ideas to policy elites but instead they are, you could call them deliberative analysts. They attempt to assist and mediate between relevant policy actors. They try to help them to articulate their views particularly of the underlying parties, of the weaker parties, the more peripheral actors. They try to deal with disputes and develop and implement possible collaborative actions. So, we assigned a couple of terms to this. We call them knowledge brokers, or change agents, or designer-facilitator. I think that in the end was sort of our most succinct statement of what's this kind of new policy analysis should look like.

SELEN ERCAN: When you are talking about the new world and the role of DPA in this world, I wonder whether you see it mainly as a method of policymaking in a complex world, or is there a broader political normative agenda that comes with DPA? In other words, does DPA have a political goal, such as challenging and transforming the problematic aspects of this new world?

HENDRIK WAGENAAR: Yeah, that is a very good question. To be honest, when we wrote the book we didn't think about that so much. It was implicit. Obviously, there's a whole normative theory behind it but its implicit and I think the reason was that we were also tainted with our backgrounds or at least our understanding of conventional policy analysis at the time that we didn't want to shove it in people's faces. There is really an ethical theory at work here. Nowadays, I would say yes, and it should be even further developed. Implicit was the understanding that there would be a strong value of equality and inclusiveness. So, we

wanted to bring peripheral groups back into the fold of policymaking. It is citizen-oriented. They are often not included in policymaking. I would say there's an element of solidarity, of understanding mutual dependency and how to work that into our deliberative policy analysis approaches. But that's about as far as it went at that time. Nowadays, I am writing again about it and one of the things I'm doing is to develop an ethical theory much further.

SELEN ERCAN: What is the difference between the DPA and other similar methods of doing or analyzing policy? Some might say today they're also co-designed and co-production programs that bring a group of people together and seek to include those who are directly affected by those policies. What difference do you see between those kinds of collective policy making and the DPA?

HENDRIK WAGENAAR: Well, there's a lot of overlap between these terms, co-production, collaborative governance, deliberative policy analysis and probably we shouldn't belabor the differences too much. At the time when we edited the book and wrote the introduction, we saw it as a different way of grounding and legitimating knowledge and what that meant for political decision makers. We had this hope that if we create knowledge in an interpretive, deliberative and practice-oriented way, then the decision makers would find it much easier to accept that knowledge. That was a miscalculation and nowadays, more than fifteen years on, we've moved on. And now, we're living in the age of fake news and fabricated data. It's a reality so I can give you many examples of politicians who go on television and just lie, blatantly lie. And I find this still shocking when I encounter it, but it happens.

SELEN ERCAN: So, do you think the image of the world has changed?

HENDRIK WAGENAAR: Massively, I would say. 2003. It was a more innocent time.

SELEN ERCAN: Since you first published this book, there have been important developments in the interpretive, deliberative and practice pillars of DPA. Let's talk about these developments. Carolyn, you've been working in the fields of deliberative democracy and interpretive policy analysis, what are your thoughts on this? Do you think the 2003 book on the deliberative policy analysis is still relevant to make sense of today's world and complexity? What are the key changes in the field of deliberative democracy since the

publication of this book? And how do these changes speak to the ideas of deliberation communicated in this book?

CAROLYN M. HENDRIKS: I think deliberative policy analysis is still highly relevant and it speaks to students and practitioners of public policy. So certainly, since this book was written, there's been greater recognition that policy decisions have to take values into account. We have to accept that the knowledge base is uncertain and that we have a growing need for processes that enable those different forms of knowledge to come to the table and also processes for reaching collective judgment. And so, I think deliberative policy analysis is an important analytic approach for students and practitioners of public policy to wrestle with that complexity and the value context of public policy. It's more than just a deliberative method and a deliberative forum. It's offering policy practitioners a way of dealing with the plurality and complexity of everyday decision-making in public policy.

In terms of deliberative democracy, there's a lot of emphasis on institutional design and Henk talked about the deliberative analyst being a facilitator, a designer. But I think there's also an analytic or procedural task that the analyst takes on which is the task of collective learning. That's where I see the world of deliberative democracy and deliberative policy analysis as overlapping to some extent. But there's a differentiation in there because I think one is orientated around a practical project of decision-making in public policy and moving forward through a collective learning process. Whereas, deliberative democracy and those focused around design have been interested in creating spaces or moments where public deliberation can be enriched. And a lot of the focus in the deliberative democracy literature since this book has been written has been on so-called democratic innovations that might emphasize things like random selection, or specific kinds of deliberative forums. Whereas, my understanding of DPA is that it can include a whole range of broader meanings of public deliberation, including collaborative planning and collective learning processes. In my view DPA takes a broader understanding of the way public deliberation might be organized and conducted.

SELEN ERCAN: What is the ultimate purpose of this type of collective learning process? Are we aiming that participants reach consensus as a result of a deliberative policy analysis? If this is the aim, there are of course certain difficulties especially if we assume that people

coming from different worldviews bring different kinds of value sets to the deliberative process. So, what can we expect from this kind of process?

HENDRIK WAGENAAR: I want to pick up on what Carolyn said very, very eloquently and then try to answer your question. I don't think it's about consensus at all, actually. And I really like the term collective learning because deliberative policy analysis is engaged in problem solving or helping people to solve problems. We could say it is a pragmatist approach to collective decision-making and learning. And so, we create situations where a varied group of people that struggle with a particular issue be it health care or migrants and refugees, or prostitution and then try to find solutions that work and that are acceptable. There are no blueprints for such solutions. That's what our little sociology of the policy world was all about. So, the best we can hope for is to work together in a concrete problem-oriented fashion to try to find solutions and/or improvements sometimes. That's all we can do. Interestingly enough, I was a bit caustic about the lying politicians a moment ago but there's also developments at least in the advanced democracies that I have experienced in Northwestern Europe. We see that administrators, at various levels, street-level, mid-level and also certainly at the higher reaches of big government agencies, have an enormous interest in working with different groups in society, with citizens. That is where deliberative policy analysts come in. They can help these people to create these situations, these spaces, these fora and begin to develop ways of better understanding the problem and find some practical solutions to them. So, that is the goal and not necessarily consensus because we can arrive at a solution and not always agree about every aspect of the problem.

SELEN ERCAN: Where do we set the boundaries of inclusion in collective learning? When I think about policy issues in a problem-oriented way, I can think of so many groups being affected by certain policies. How does inclusion work in a deliberative policy analysis?

CAROLYN M. HENDRIKS: I'll have a go here. Originally, the book was orientated around this idea of the network society so there's quite a lot of emphasis on the core networks within a given problem. When I came to use the work of DPA in my original studies on minipublics, I didn't see a lot of overlap because a lot of the emphasis in deliberative policy analysis is around bringing in key stakeholders and core actors in the networks that surround policy issues as opposed to bringing in the deeply marginalized voices through a randomly selected process. Now, almost twenty years later, there has been a lot of evolution both in deliberative

design and network governance, but I think there is a potential danger with deliberative policy analysis being understood very narrowly as a project for collecting the various epistemic issues or arguments around a particular policy problem and seeing it as technocratic or epistemic exercise as opposed to a process of collective learning with democratic aspirations as well.

HENDRIK WAGENAAR: Oh, I completely agree. In fact, this is how it's been interpreted by a Chinese colleague of mine, Ya Li, and I don't mean this in any way critical because he works in within a specific context of Chinese authoritarian political system. But this is exactly what he does because he invites citizens and other affected parties, collects their understandings and opinions and the knowledge they have about a particular policy issue, writes a report about it and proceeds to present that to the Party. And I think that it's not bad to do that in China because it taps into Confucian traditions of providing wise advice to the rulers. I don't think it works in our part of the world that way. And there are many different ways to do it. One of the missed opportunities in the past years is that we never took the effort to develop deliberative policy analysis in a more methodical way, a more operational way because there's a lot of interest in it and it shows because the book is still selling well. But I heard now from several sites, and actually Ya Li was one of my sternest critics here, and he says, you never made an effort to develop it as a method. People are really interested but don't know what to do and he has a point. He has a point so I'm working hard now to rectify that.

SELEN ERCAN: To wrap up, you started out with an image of the world, the way you saw the world say over 15 years ago and now this image is changing. Our democracies face new types of challenges; they suffer from political polarization, we have a digital transformation which affects the way politics is done and received. And there are some really contentious policy areas where generating a common ground is a major challenge. Carolyn and I have been doing some work on some of those contested policy issues in Australia, and it is really difficult to bring the collective together and move it forward.

HENDRIK WAGENAAR: What makes it difficult? If I may now ask you a question.

SELEN ERCAN: Like the deep divides, that people have different value sets, different opinions and it's now common to talk about the so called 'echo chambers' where we only

talk and listen to the like-minded people. This, I think is a big challenge for democracies today. What do you see as challenges? What kind of challenges do deliberative policy analysts face today?

CAROLYN M. HENDRIKS: I think there's a lot of promise but some areas of work need to be advanced particularly the interpretive angle. We talked earlier about there being three major pillars. On the deliberative pillar much has been written since the book has been published; today there's no shortage of participatory designs for how to bring people together to deliberate. But on the interpretive angle (which is making sure that the experiences and perspectives of those potentially affected by decisions), here I think much more methodological work need to be done. How do we bring those interpretations into the deliberative spaces and who interprets these, and who decides what perspectives enter the deliberations? We need to think a bit more about these practical issues. These issues also relate to the inclusion issue discussed earlier; often those that deliberate or speak on behalf of others aren't necessarily the ones that are directly affected particularly in networks. So, we tend to find elites or the representatives of those affected doing the speaking. So how do we ensure that the voices of those marginalized publics that will be affected are brought into the forum or the deliberative space in ways that are authentic to those populations and not just…

SELEN ERCAN: an exercise of box ticking?

CAROLYN M. HENDRIKS: Yeah, box ticking or talking on behalf of constituents that aren't being effectively consulted.

HENDRIK WAGENAAR: I think the challenge that you sketch is very real. There are a few answers from deliberative policy analysis. One is we have to think more and better in terms of interdependencies of all these different issues and that's actually going back to a much older tradition of policymaking that we're beginning to see more and more. I live in Vienna and I'm studying a period in public administration called Red Vienna, that's *das Rotes Wien* in German, and it's an absolutely amazing form of policymaking that the, at the time socialist administration around 1919, literally a century ago, incrementally created. What was so amazing about it is that it had a very keen sense how the different policies in the different areas were affecting each other. So, they dealt with the housing crisis. They also dealt with the refugee crisis. But compared to that, our refugee crises are really not that serious yet.

They dealt with appalling poverty, with enormous public health issues. They designed policies, housing policies that spoke to these other areas too. They did it in such a phenomenal way that the fact that Vienna always pops up in the top three of the most livable cities can be traced back to what happened in this *Rotes Wien* in 1919, from 1919 to 1933, when there was a right-wing coup. So, I think we should be much more savvy and understand our history better in designing integrated policies. One element of it is to bring in other groups as we are already doing. But I would broaden it even further and try to enhance the deliberative capacity of a whole policy system. That means that we don't always have to talk with each other. But we can also, for example, support a particularly eloquent, forceful statement about an issue and see if we can get accepted in the public sphere. This [enhancing the deliberative capacity of the policy system] is by the way a phrase of John Dryzek who wrote a very nice little chapter on deliberative policy analysis. And he says, well, it should not be only about creating fora and small groups that manage to arrive at some sort of consensus, but he says in the end, we need to advance the deliberative capacity of the whole system, the policy system. I cannot agree more actually so for me those are two big challenges. Can we do this and can we also think much more in terms of integrated policymaking, integrated public administration which is in the end a design issue, right? We become aware of how things hang together. We try to do it before we make the policy.

SELEN ERCAN: Carolyn, do you have any final comments in terms of the challenges and prospects for deliberative policy analysis?

CAROLYN M. HENDRIKS: I think there's a lot of potential in advancing deliberative policy analysis thinking by bringing in some of the communities of practice around deliberative design into these discussions. So, there's a growing industry of practitioners that design and convene deliberative processes. They have a rich knowledge of not only how to run and design deliberative techniques but also the contexts within which they don't work. So I think there's a lot of potential to use those learnings to enrich understandings of where DPA might work best and where its limits lie.

SELEN ERCAN: Okay, great. Thank you very much to both of you for your valuable insights. Let me finish with a full reference of the book we have talked about today for our listeners. The book is entitled Deliberative Policy Analysis: Understanding Governance in a

Network Society edited by Maarten Hajer and Hendrik Wagenaar, and published by Cambridge University Press in 2003.

This roundtable was recorded on 13 March 2019 at the Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance at the University of Canberra.

About the speakers

Selen Ercan is associate professor at the Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance, University of Canberra. Selen's work sits at the intersection of normative democratic theory and empirical political research, and examines a wide range of topics including the politics of inclusion and exclusion in multicultural societies, the prospects for public deliberation in the face of polarised public debates, and the potential of new forms of political participation in reviving democratic practice.

Carolyn M. Hendriks is a Professor at the Crawford School of Public Policy at the Australian National University. Carolyn undertakes engaged interpretive social research that brings democratic practice into dialogue with political theory. Her work has advanced knowledge on the application and politics of participatory, deliberative and networked modes of governing. Carolyn has published widely on democratic aspects of contemporary governance, including participation, deliberation, inclusion, listening and representation. Her current research is exploring how citizens themselves are leading collective problem-solving efforts to address governance voids and to repair dysfunctional institutions.

Hendrik Wagenaar is fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Vienna, senior academic advisor to the International School for Government at King's College London, and adjunct professor at the University of Canberra. He publishes in the areas of participatory democracy, interpretive policy analysis, deliberative policy analysis, prostitution policy and practice theory. He is author of *Meaning in Action: Interpretation and Dialogue in Policy Analysis* (M.E. Sharpe, 2011), and editor of *Deliberative Policy Analysis* (Cambridge, 2003, with M. Hajer) In the area of prostitution research he published *Designing Prostitution Policy: Intention and Reality in Regulating the Sex Trade* (with Helga Amesberger and Sietske Altink, Policy Press, 2017). Visit his website at: https://hendrikwagenaar.com