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## State, context and correspondence. Contours of a historical-materialist policy analysis

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Keywords: Policy analysis, interpretive policy analysis, historical materialism, critical state theory, Gramscian hegemony theory, knowledge

This article outlines the contours of a historical-materialist policy analysis through a dual critique. First, historical-materialist approaches all too often conceptualize policy in a functionalist way as the “outcomes” of predominant social relations, especially of class relations. The contingencies and the internal logic of policy processes are often downplayed. However, the correspondence (or lack thereof) between societal reproduction – i.e. the complex societal relationships in which people and collectives reproduce themselves materially and symbolically, as well as societal nature relations – and policy needs to be conceptualized. It is proposed to understand the state as, among other things, a “knowledge apparatus” which attempts to create this correspondence. It constantly organizes or even produces knowledge about the objects it intends to steer, about societal and political issues, and about the possibilities of how to deal with problems. Secondly, policy analysis in general and interpretive policy analysis in particular have a simplified understanding of the state, due to their deficits in the field of state theory. From a perspective of a critical theory of the state and of hegemony, the state is understood to be a social relation with power-shaped selectivities, and is embedded in a context which likewise needs to be understood.

### **Staat, Kontext und Korrespondenzen. Konturen einer historisch-materialistischen Policy-Analyse**

Schlüsselwörter: Policy-Analyse, interpretative Policy-Analyse, historischer Materialismus, kritische Staatstheorie, gramscianische Hegemonietheorie, Wissen

Dieser Artikel skizziert die Konturen einer historisch-materialistischen Policy-Analyse ausgehend von einer doppelten Kritik. Erstens konzeptualisieren historisch-materialistische Ansätze Policy oft in einer funktionalistischen Weise als „Ergebnis“ dominanter sozialer Verhältnisse, insbesondere der Klassenverhältnisse. Die Kontingenzen wie auch die internen Logiken von Policy-Prozessen werden häufig unterschätzt. Demgegenüber sollte jedoch die (möglicherweise fehlende) Korrespondenz zwischen gesellschaftlicher Reproduktion – das heißt, die komplexen sozialen Verhältnisse, unter denen Menschen und Kollektive sich materiell und symbolisch reproduzieren, wie auch die gesellschaftlichen Naturverhältnisse – und Policy eigenständig begriffen werden. Diesbezüglich wird vorgeschlagen, den Staat unter anderem als „Wissensapparat“ zu verstehen, der eben versucht, diese Korrespondenz herzustellen. Er organisiert oder produziert das Wissen über die Objekte, die mittels Policies gesteuert werden sollen, über gesellschaftliche und politische Angelegenheiten sowie über die Möglichkeiten, Probleme zu bearbeiten. Zweitens verwenden die Policy-Analyse insgesamt und insbesondere die interpretative Policy-Analyse ein vereinfachtes Verständnis des Staates, was wiederum mit staatstheoretischen Defiziten zusammenhängt. Aus Sicht einer kritischen Staats- und Hegemonietheorie wird der Staat als soziales Verhältnis verstanden, dem durch Machtverhältnisse verursachte Selektivitäten innewohnen und dessen Einbettung in gesellschaftliche Kontexte ebenfalls begriffen werden muss.

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The intention to develop a historical-materialist policy analysis is at first sight a contradiction in terms. Recent theories and analyses of politics in this paradigm emerged during the 1970s precisely as a critique of Keynesian reform policies, with the intention of understanding the state not merely as a regulator or policy-maker, but rather in a broader economic and cultural context. Indeed, historical-materialist theory development and empirical analyses have rather focused on the dimension of *politics* (societal and political forces and their strategies, conflicts, and compromises) and on that of the *polity* (political institutions and governance structures, i.e. the state in its narrow and integral sense) rather than on *policy*, i.e. the concrete framework for the implementation of institutionalized politics. However, such analyses often have problems conceptualizing precisely the relationship between societal reproduction, the role of manifold actors, and politically constituted social forces, and related conflicts and compromises (which is the strength of such analyses), on the one hand, and concrete policies, which are constituted by those relations and more or less intervene in them, on the other.<sup>2</sup> All too often, concrete policies are understood in a functionalist way, by reducing them to their assumed contribution to their function for the stabilization of domination and societal reproduction, and of support for powerful interest groups and their actions. In that sense, policies are rather seen as a consequence of the polity and of politics.

However, and this is the point of departure of this article, it is necessary to understand policies in terms of their own relatively autonomous dynamics. This problem is not new. Some decades ago, Lenhardt and Offe (1977, 100) asked: “How does state policy [...] *emerge* out of specific problems of an economic and class structure based in private capital valorization and free wage-labour, and which *functions* does it assume with respect to this structure?” (emphasis in original, my translation). One challenge is, therefore, to conceptualize the *correspondence* of societal and political processes or, more precisely, the condensation of societal relationships and processes within the polity, politics and policies: This includes social forces, their interests and strategies, modes of economic and societal reproduction, generalized and specific discourses, “objective” problems and crises in the sense of societal dysfunctions, or politically produced problems and crises, including those of legitimacy, or those emerging in the context of changing norms and values.

At the same time, policy analysis can benefit from historical materialism, at least in the version which is presented here, first, in that it offers a more sophisticated understanding of the context and corridors of policy-making, as well as of the inertia of the objects of policy intervention and steering. Secondly, despite the fact that a certain amount of work has been done on the state, a certain state theoretical deficit of policy analysis could be counteracted by a better conceptualization of institutional and discursive governance structures, and, not least, of the “functions” – understood in a non-functionalist manner – that certain policies have for the reproduction of society.

In this article, I intend to develop some conceptual tools of a historical-materialist policy analysis (HMPA). I would like to introduce some theoretical perspectives and concepts which I believe could help develop an HMPA. I would like to do this by contrasting this concept with interpretive policy analysis. In the next section, I will outline the main components of policy analysis, including that version which seems closest to the proposed HMPA, interpretative policy analysis. Among other things, this has to do with my proposal to consider the problem of the correspondence between policies and societal reproduction in association with the concept of policy knowledge (Sum 2009; Brand 2010; Brand/Vadrot 2014). In the third section, I will introduce three dimensions and concepts which I believe to be crucial for an HMPA: An understanding of the state as a social relation and a respective conceptualization of policies; a sophisticated idea of the structured contexts and corridors of policy-making, and also the issues of the objects of steering and of policy failure. Finally, I will examine the idea of the correspondence – or lack thereof – between societal reproduction and policy. The concept of policy knowledge is key here in order to determine how the state and its heterogeneous apparatuses ascertain and address problems. In Section 3.4, I will emphasize the implications for a historical-materialist understanding of policies. The article closes with a brief outlook. I am not here applying the present ideas to any particular problem or policy field; I do, however, hope that this will be done in further studies (Buckel 2012; Forschungsgruppe “Staatsprojekt Europa” 2014; Kannankulam/Georgi 2014).

In this article, I would like to call attention to the fact that policy analysis needs to look beyond mere policies (Jessop 2010, 339). At the theoretical level, I refer to a specific form of historical-materialist state and social theory, i.e., a combination of elements of Antonio Gramsci’s theory of the state and hegemony, and Nicos Poulantzas’ understanding of the state as a social relation. Whereas Gramsci was interested in the concrete functioning of hegemony, Poulantzas theorized not only the constitution of the state, but also its manner of functioning and its apparatuses. I refer also to Michel Foucault’s understanding of the relationship between power and knowledge. He was not so much interested in the state as a materiality, but in the process of state-making/statization as a practice which itself is a condensation of manifold societal practices of power and their effects. The *dispositif* of power is a result of a long-standing historical process through which the state is able to asymmetrically structure the space of action of social actors (Foucault 1978; 2004, 479–519). More recent approaches are considered, especially that of *cultural political economy* developed by Bob Jessop and Ngai-Ling Sum (Sum 2009; Jessop 2010; Sum/Jessop 2013), which is in fact a combination of the approaches of the above-mentioned authors, and highlights the role of semiosis and discourse in the conceptualization of political economy and of society in general.

## 2. Strengths and weaknesses of policy analysis

Policy analysis became important during the 1960s, when state policy was no longer seen as a process of power and its distribution, or as an outcome of ideological struggles between political parties. It was rather oriented towards identifying societal problems and formulating respective solutions. The political design and effectiveness of political programmes as well as their political context became matters of interest. According to this approach, improving the effectiveness and efficiency of political programmes should lead to more legitimacy, and ulti-

mately to more democracy (Saretzki 2008, 40; Schneider/Janning 2006, 20–23, overviews in Farr et al. 1995; de Leon/Martell 2006; Torgerson 2007). The definition of problems, agenda-setting, and the formulation of programmes and policies and their implementation and subsequent evaluation were all areas of focus. Apart from this temporal view, policy analysis explores the components of and relations in a policy field. In this section I will give a brief sketch of some common denominators of policy analysis, and then turn to its most recent variant, interpretative policy analysis.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.1 *The rationalist paradigm*

As Thomas Dye (1972, 2) put it, public policy analysis means “finding out what governments do, why they do it and what difference it makes”. This includes the question of why goals and intentions sometimes remain pure claims and are not converted into policies (Schneider/Janning 2006, 17). Policy analysis was also developed in the field of quantitative and macro-policy-oriented “comparative studies of state activities” (Zohlnhöfer 2008; Saretzki 2006). At the centre is an analysis of public actors, i.e. the state and related institutions, as well as of the policy cycle of processes implemented to solve collective problems. Private actors play a role when they contribute to the fulfilment of public policies. The content of particular policies, i.e. the policy output, is a result of formal decision-making processes and the implementation of policies which might have short-term and/or long-term effects. The state is considered to be the institution where decisions are developed and taken in order to solve political and societal problems.

One important aspect – important, too, for a historical-materialist analysis of policy – is the acknowledgement of the following problem: There is limited knowledge about social patterns of interaction, and the objects of steering act consciously and reflexively against the background of specific policies. Moreover, knowledge about the state as the subject of policies is limited, given the varying actors and constellations of interest in various policy fields (Schneider 2008, 57–64). Policy networks are assumed to cluster knowledge, to balance interests, to bring together advocacy coalitions around certain core beliefs, or to create new sources of legitimacy (Marin/Mayntz 1991; Schneider/Janning 2006, 116–167).

Schneider and Janning (2006) distinguish three different currents in policy analysis: (1) quantitative-comparative approaches; (2) those which focus on actors and structures; and (3) those which emphasize interpretative dimensions, i.e. discourse-analytical, argumentative, deliberative, participatory, and knowledge-oriented political science. The first two approaches consider policies as rational action in order to solve problems, perceive power as a necessary resource, and tend to overlook the particular interests of political actors (Greven 2008, 27–28). Scientific knowledge is seen as superior to other forms of knowledge, due to its methodology and systematic character (Schneider 2008, 68). Modern societies are conceptualized as functionally differentiated, and the main task of the state – understood in the tradition of David Easton and Talcott Parsons – is to reproduce the overall system by means of a monopoly on taxation and on coercion (Schneider/Janning 2006, 16–17). Lenhardt/Offe (1977, 124) criticized early the “technocratic misunderstanding” of policy studies which defined “policy impact” in terms of the institutional and legal structures of “policy output”, thereby downplaying the fact that societal power relations do indeed determine the opportunities to pursue successfully interests, and that policies are rather part and a terrain of social struggles than a rational means for the state to deal with problems.

Greven (2008, 29) criticizes mainstream policy analysis for forgetting or downplaying questions of power. This reorientation circumvents the intent of the founding father of policy analysis, Harold Lasswell (1958; Lasswell/Kaplan 1950), as conveyed in his famous question “Who gets what, when and how?” (Torgerson 2007). In one German textbook, for instance, power is mentioned only briefly, and at the very end of the book (Janning/Schneider 2006, 217, 223; similarly, most chapters in Peters/Pierre 2006b). The policy cycle has been criticized as being too schematic (Hupe/Hill 2006; Jann/Wegrich 2007). Janning and Toens (2008b) identified as a problem the focus of policy analysis, and especially comparative policy analysis, on national development paths with no consideration for transnational networks. Moreover, according to Fischer’s critique (1990, 348–351), the privileging of “advocacy research” and the attempt to create knowledge from experts for elites have failed because they have developed into a technical and market-oriented form of expertise and advocacy (Fischer 2009, 17–47). Knowledge is equated with scientific knowledge, which is to lead to more rationalistic policies. In many approaches, knowledge and politics are seen as two different spheres (Çağlar 2009, 44–46).

Causal-analytical approaches were developed in response to the overly rationalist assumptions of most approaches to policy analysis and with the objective of understanding policy change in relation to shifting ideas or paradigms (Hall 1993), in which change was explained through such external factors as party politics. Another approach focuses on advocacy coalitions and the corresponding belief systems of actors in various institutions, such as the public administration or associations (Sabatier 1993).<sup>4</sup> These approaches often fail to recognize power structures, and tend to reproduce a top down-model of policy-making. Moreover, they do not reflect the overall context of formulated and implemented policies.

## 2.2 Interpretative policy analysis

In the context of the critique of the rationalist and positivist assumptions of policy analysis and the dichotomy of knowledge and policy, a broad current in policy analysis has been developing since the 1990s which focuses more on discourse and meaning, language, and argumentation and rhetoric as essential for the policy process and, therefore, too, for policy analysis.<sup>5</sup> In contrast to other approaches, which refer to the role of ideas and learning (e.g. Sabatier 1988; Hall 1993), “language is not only an instrument of communication, it is also constitutive of policy” (Gottweis 2006, 464). Knowledge creates meaning, social and political problems, reality and action, and the self-perception of actors and their evaluation of political constellations. In gender studies, the concept of gender knowledge has emerged in order to conceptualize this crucial assumption (Andresen/Dölling 2005; Young/Scherrer 2010). Similarly, policy analyses that dealt with questions of deliberation, participation, and democracy have been put forward (Hajer/Wagenaar 2003b; Saretzki 2008; overview in Orsini/Smith 2007; from a feminist perspective Sauer 2005).

Describing this kind of policy analysis as “interpretative” – Greven (2008, 31) calls it “critical” – is the lowest common denominator. A further important assumption of IPA is the radical uncertainty and complexity of the actual world. There is no fixed or stabilized world; rather, meanings are constantly changing via texts and conversation. IPA is based on the concept that different social groups conceive the world in different terms, that there is a growing awareness of interdependence, and hence the need for collaboration in networks, and that trust and identity play important roles in politics (Hajer/Wagenaar 2003b, 10–13; on research practices Durnová 2011).

Normatively, IPA considers a democratization of knowledge necessary, affirming the critique of the prominent status of expert knowledge in rationalist policy analysis approaches.

Within interpretative policy analysis, a quasi-Habermasian and a quasi-Foucauldian current can be distinguished (Gottweis 2006, 472–475). Post-structuralist approaches of interpretative policy analysis in the tradition of Foucault argue that knowledge and power are co-constituted, that they produce truth effects, and that subjects constitute themselves through those processes (*ibid.*). The focus of analysis is, therefore, on how meanings and reality are produced, and how they create certain regularities (the genealogical part of Foucault; one could add the archaeological dimension of the discourse constituting rules; Çağlar 2010, 65–67). Policies are performative processes which attempt to organize and to fix the meaning of political events and developments as well as of new or existing policy fields and the manner in which specific boundaries and story lines are established (Hajer 2008). Hierarchies and power are important, because they determine what can and what cannot be said. It is here that Gottweis identifies an element of tension in argumentative policy analysis, because there is “considerable influence of a Foucault-inspired understanding of discourse as far as epistemology goes, but great reluctance to deal with the underlying rather more pessimistic Foucauldian/structuralist critique of the idea of the human subject and the potential of humans for independent, domination-free interaction when it comes to normative-political positions” (Gottweis 2006, 473; see as well Greven 2008, 28–30). Therefore, these approaches are overly optimistic with respect to the possibilities and effects of participation. Interpretative policy analysis, and especially its Foucauldian version, is a good reference point for an HMPA. Neither conceives history as a linear process; rather, both consider contingencies and contestation, and both intend to formulate a critique of existing policy-making, its institutional settings, and its embeddedness into societal contexts and power relations. Therefore, the interest is not so much in the effectiveness of policies, but more in their power-shaped and contested structures. Both claim that the state or the institutions of public policy are not at the centre of control of modern societies, and both are sceptical with respect to the steering capacities of policies, because the “objects” of steering or policies, i.e. society in a general sense and its problems, tend to have their own logics and cannot be steered completely via certain programmes. Normatively, interpretative policy analysis and HMPA argue for the democratization of political and societal processes.

However, there are also differences. HMPA does not refer too exclusively to knowledge, meaning, arguments, and discourses; it asks how societal reproduction functions beyond the realm of debate. While IPA is more interested in micro-processes, HMPA intends to link them to macro-perspectives. Therefore, it develops a more sophisticated understanding of the state and of the very concept of “policy”, as well as of the context of policy-making and the role (“function”) of policy-making for society. And possibly, it may elucidate more accurately the role of knowledge in the creation of a correspondence between society and the state.

I would now like to turn to some central theoretical assumptions regarding HMPA.

### **3. Contours of a historical-materialist policy analysis**

One entry point for HMPA is the fact that historical-materialist theory considers the domination-shaped forms of societal reproduction as a whole, and of specific societal relationships. It looks at the structural conditions under which societal actors and forces are potentially able to act, and do in fact act. Capitalist societies are considered to have no steering centre – neither capital nor



the state – but to be steered by such structural conditions as the value form, the credit and the production of surplus value, competition and the accumulation imperative (Marx 1996, Sections 1.3, 5, 21, 23) and – related to this – the political form.<sup>6</sup> In that sense, historical-materialist theory does not focus primarily on practices of governing or governance in order to fulfil public tasks, to create or maintain public goods, or to solve social problems. Societal relations, such as class, gender or society's relationship with nature, are primarily, albeit far from exclusively, the results of the social division of labour, the commodity-form of societal production, and the private appropriation of surplus value, including forms of subjectivation and the appropriation of nature.

From a historical-materialist perspective, it is assumed that there do exist some “requirements” for the reproduction of the intrinsically insecure and improbable reproduction of societal relations.<sup>7</sup> First and foremost, the valorization of capital through the private appropriation of surplus value and related class relations must function. *How* this works, or does not, needs to be shown in concrete analyses against the background of theoretical assumptions and concepts.

To cite a prominent example: In order to study social policies and the reproduction of the contradictory wage relation, Claus Offe proposed to understand the latter as a structural problem of capitalism; the wage relation cannot be reproduced by itself. Policies in that sense can be explained out of the functions they provide for dealing with structural problems. However, the demands of wage-earners and their interest groups, as well as of other social actors, on the one hand, and the imperatives of capital accumulation on the other, do not lead per se to social policies, but are rather translated into inner-organizational problems of the state, parties and bureaucracies which employ various strategies, i.e. policies, to deal with these demands and requirements (Lenhardt/Offe 1977; Offe 2006).

Beyond the field of social policy, it becomes even clearer that manifold social phenomena in modern societies cannot be reduced to the imperative of capital accumulation or to class domination. Environmental problems and attempts to formulate and promote policies in response to them are, for instance, not mere expressions of capitalist relations, but have their own dynamics, such as the material degradation of living conditions or the outstanding epistemic role of modern science. However, capitalist relations are assumed to be important structuring moments in modern societies and, in our example, are also an element of environmental policy (Brand/Wissen 2012).

Another aspect is crucial for HMPA. Marx stated at the beginning of his *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1963, 1) “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.” Society reproduces itself not just through the contested processes that give certain aspects of reality meaning, but also through the functioning of unnamed and unrecognized mechanisms (Hay 2002, 194–216; Sayer 2000; Jessop 2004). The commodity form which is, from a historical-materialist perspective, crucial for the reproduction of capitalist societies, has no meaning as such; it is a theoretical category.

What needs to be considered in policy analysis are the complex and contingent political, socio-economic, socio-cultural, and subjective relations in which people and collectives reproduce themselves materially and symbolically, as well as how the societal division of labour is organized. Against this background, the concept of public policy needs to be developed in conjunction with other concepts, i.e. a sophisticated understanding of the state (Section 3.1), of the societal context of policies (3.2), and of the complex process of creating correspondences between the two (3.3).

### 3.1 State – Selectivity of policies

In policy analysis in general, the state is only recognized, but usually not accorded any theoretical definition. In general, the focus is on the policy-making process and related institutions or societal significance, respectively, and the state is more or less assumed as a given. In IPA in particular, the concept of the state is considered not very useful (Hajer/Wagenaar 2003b; also, but differently: cf. Wagner 2007).<sup>8</sup> HMPA, on the other hand, understands the state as a structural feature of modern societies that is reproduced through daily practice and acceptance. And its reproduction can fail. The state is not merely seen in the tradition of David Easton (1953) as an institution which intends to solve collective problems, to create collectively binding mechanisms, and to distribute resources.

The state is commonly conceptualized as institutionally separated from the rest of society, it has at its disposal specific and impersonal means of power, it fulfils certain functions, and it materializes itself in apparatuses and in discourse. In that respect, this conceptualization differs little from other approaches. From a historical-materialist perspective however, the state is not a neutral entity, but is, understood as a *social relation*. Therefore, its structures and actions cannot be explained in isolation, but only by considering social practices and forces, the social context, including its changing nature, and the contested functions or tasks of the state in the reproduction of capitalist societies.<sup>9</sup> A functionalistic perspective that tends to reduce politics to the needs of problem-solving, the stabilizing of societal relationships, and the requirements of capital accumulation can be avoided. Political strategies and projects are formulated and pursued by various actors or alliances throughout society, and addressed to different recipients.<sup>10</sup> The state also marks out the multiple terrains of struggle in the relations of production, through the education process, the assignment of the roles of individuals, etc. Therefore, it is a central site or “strategic field” (Poulantzas 1978, 168) on which to deal with manifold conflicts and to facilitate the creation of consensus and social cohesion, as well as to organize the power bloc through stabilized and shifting relations of forces and compromises, using its means of force, law and regulations, discourses and legitimacy, and material and immaterial resources (cf. also Poulantzas 1973).

Since the state, with its social forces, power relations, and discourses and, at the same time, a specific institutional and discursive ensemble, is considered part of society, be it at the global, national, local, or even translocal level it can be understood as “a relationship of forces, or more precisely the material condensation of such a relationship among classes and class factions, such as this is expressed in the state in a necessarily specific form” (Poulantzas 2002, 159). Struggles and compromises of the past are inscribed into the state as institutional practice, as the political orientation of state officials, and as laws. The state gives the relations of forces, such as the capital-labour relationship, a particular form, and is part of the struggles around the social division of labour and of capitalist as well as non-capitalist power, production, and reproduction relationships.

Poulantzas’ concept of “condensation” can help us to understand in a non-functionalist way how societal changes resonate in political institutions and shape policies. It helps us to understand how historically concrete societal power relations are inscribed into the state, and how they shape policy-making (Poulantzas 2002, 164). Condensation processes have different filters and mechanisms, and take place in the sectoralized state structures and processes. How they work is an empirical question.

Policies have asymmetrical consequences for social actors, and their formulation takes place asymmetrically as well, not only because of power relations or more and less legitimate dis-



courses and frameworks, but also because of the institutionalized and discursive selectivities of the polity – and therefore of policies. “The bias inscribed on the terrain of the state as a site of strategic action can only be understood as a bias relative to specific strategies pursued by specific forces to advance specific interests over a given time horizon in terms of a specific set of other forces each advancing their own interests through specific strategies” (Jessop 1990, 10; cf. Kannakulam/Georgi 2014). Specific historically concrete state forms privilege specific strategies, interests, alliances, forms of action, and discourses, and articulate with certain modes of action and power in the different state apparatuses (also Offe 2006, 95–126).

### 3.2 Context and corridors of policy-making

Given the heterogeneity of concrete policies, IPA suggests a “contextual mapping” which hints at the possible constraints of those policies (Saretzki 2008, 50). What exactly the “context” is depends on the concrete constellation in which certain events or policies occur. Strategic action takes place in the context of specific socio-historical discourses and institutional practices which can be investigated (Hajer 2008). For HMPA, the meaning given to context by particular actors or groups is important; however, the context is also reproduced independently of that meaning, and needs to be theorized in order to understand its effects in concrete constellations (Hay 2002).

At the beginning of this section, I outlined some crucial features of a historical-materialist ontology. According to Marx, modes of production correspond to the “relations of production – relations which human beings enter into during the process of social life, in the creation of their social life” (Marx 1998, Chapter 51).

Beyond a policy field and its concrete context, the more or less consented, albeit historically variable, patterns of domination need to be detected. What is of interest for HMPA with respect to “context” are those actions and possible strategic projects of actors which, through contest and compromise, and in light of previously existing patterns, have potentially universalizing effects, and which create “corridors” of viable and reasonable action, frameworks and thinking, as well as policy-making (Buckel 2012; Forschungsgruppe “Staatsprojekt Europa” 2014).

At this point, Gramsci’s concept of hegemony is useful, because it hints at the dimensions which shape concrete contexts and corridors of policy-making.

Following Demirović, in the process of constructing hegemony, it is not only important for dominant classes to secure their interests, but also “to produce a long-term durability of a certain power constellation, which makes it possible to settle ‘conflicts’ in a rule-guided manner among the parties to a compromise; which determines the conditions of possible polarizations; and which monopolizes power to define what might emerge as opposition and as a hostile force against the balance achieved by compromise; moreover, it consists of the ability to ensure rule-guided changes to solve newly emerging problems” (Demirović 2007, 121; my translation). One – albeit not the only – important instance of universalization is that particular interests, norms, and ideas, as well as forms of compromise, organization of power, etc., become state – and hence public – policy. Sum (2009, 185) refers to the “strategic-discursive moment in the ‘production of hegemony’” by exploring the making of subjectivities, identities, and also selective “economic imaginaries” by concrete actors and other social mechanisms.

For HMPA, the question arises as to which discourses and/or practices produce problems and *could* become political issues in the sense that they reinforce, shape, or create particular policies. Whether or not certain issues become the object of policies is an open question, but if

they do, concrete forms of hegemony will determine *how* they become policies, i.e. in which corridor of the reasonable and viable they are addressed. Under the Gramscian concept of hegemony, a specific historical situatedness of conflicts, discourses, and actors is indicated. Hegemony implies broadly accepted political, discursive, and economic constellations, and it is created through strategies and based on practices, in addition to shaping them.

I would now like to turn to an aspect which combines the reflections on the state (2.1) and context (2.2) by asking systematically how an HMPA can deal with the “translation” of context into policies.

### 3.3 *Correspondence and non-correspondence between societal reproduction and policies: The production of policy knowledge*

As stated above, it is widely acknowledged in policy analysis that successful policy intervention requires adequate knowledge about the object of steering – and even of the subject of steering, i.e. the policy structure and process or the state – and that it is not easy to obtain (Schneider 2008, 57–60).

Hajer and Wagenaar (2003b, 5) propose to investigate not so much the impact of “network society” on policy-making and politics, but rather to focus on the “concrete *manifestations* of policymaking and politics”. This is also an interesting path for an HMPA. The task is to link the analysis of concrete manifestations to the underlying societal grammar, or the causal mechanisms of hegemonic relations, without overlooking contingencies, concrete strategies, or the possibility that with particular policies implemented under specific conditions and power relations, a policy window could emerge; and that policies might be driven by muddling through, by non-decisions, or by competition among parties and politicians (on mechanisms of depoliticization, cf. Jessop 2014). However, HMPA explores the relationship between the object and the subject of steering from a different angle. The “functions” (or effects) of the state and its policies for societal reproduction need to be considered, i.e. specific requirements must be fulfilled and a certain correspondence between the social and the political produced – and that effort can fail. Those functions and effects can only be analysed by considering the form of the state, i.e. the fact that it is institutionally separated from the rest of society and performs its functions in the securing of existing social relations (see Section 3.1). Whether these functions are fulfilled, and how, is historically contingent. Policies are in that sense part of, and the product of, social struggles – struggles, too, to determine socially accepted definitions – and at the same time have to “fulfil” certain societal functionalities, i.e. the more or less successful regulation of contentious, contradictory, and potentially crisis-driven social relations. Even the failure of policies can have functional effects, while by the same token, the success of policies can prove to be dysfunctional for the reproduction of societal relationships.

However, a serious problem emerges in this type of analysis because the question of *how* “functional requirements” are translated into policies is often overlooked. Concrete state policies are often simply assumed to fulfil certain functions in the reproduction of social relations, especially those of class and capital (Stütze 2011; Griesser 2010). Also, the overall societal constellations are often assumed (Fordism, neoliberalism, or post-Fordism) before the effects are investigated. As I said in the introduction, policies appear as a function of politics and polity.

However, if we understand the state as a social relation and as a continuation of the practices of leadership and consensus developed within civil society (PN 10, 1267), we have a gen-

eral indication of the correspondence between society on the one hand and the state and public policy on the other. One possible operationalization here might be Jessop's concept of state projects as an expression of hegemonic societal projects. But this, too, is a rather general perspective.

Given the fact that certain requirements for societal reproduction need to be "fulfilled", and that policies play a role here – and that it is not clear what these requirements exactly are – my argument is as follows: Specific policies are not per se rational, but "rationality", in the sense of viability and acceptance, has to be created in a process of search. What are the adequate forms of labour market, environmental, or economic policies? This is not clear at all.

Knowledge is crucial for the establishment of a certain correspondence between complex societal processes and policies. IPA focuses on the important fact that the problems to be dealt with do not exist objectively, but are social constructions. However, recognition of the problem of social reproduction of capitalist societies and related structures, i.e. the fact that there are some "requirements" and social actors pursuing their interests who are stronger, might help provide an understanding of the corridors of problem constitution. For example, the ecological crisis and its particular problems will not be framed under capitalist conditions as policy problems in opposition to the general interests of capital, although they may be framed against, or in tension, with the interests of certain capital factions, depending on a variety of empirical factors. The question here is therefore: how does the state know what the requirements, and also the potential conflicts, are, which contradictions and tensions need to be dealt with, and which priorities are necessary?

In order to grasp this form of condensation empirically, one promising line of thought is to take a look at knowledge. Ingo Stütze (2011) and Markus Griesser (2010) propose, following upon Foucault, Gramsci, and Poulantzas, an understanding of the state as, among other things, a knowledge apparatus which in principle does not know much about the societal problems and demands which have to be addressed in the course of governance. Of course, there is a long trajectory of experience and knowledge production, certain forms of knowledge are more inscribed into particular apparatuses than others, and it is exactly these forms of knowledge that are part of the selectivities of the state.

The state needs to constantly create knowledge about the aspects of society that need to be governed, about the requirements of societal reproduction, about existing and potential problems, etc., through its own activities, lobbyists, thinks-tanks, the public, etc. Arguably, this is a central mode of governance. However, these activities and actors are themselves selectively constituted.

How this condensation and establishment of correspondence works is first of all an empirical question, but it of course needs concepts to guide empirical research. A look at existing scholarship may yield some hints for that purpose. Griesser (2010; cf. also 2012) shows in his study on the implementation of the recent welfare and labour market reform in Germany (the "Hartz IV" law of 2003) that there are important insights of materialist state theory with respect to the relationship between the state and the societal relations which constitute the state. The fact that the state itself depends on dynamic capital accumulation – a crisis of the latter usually induces a crisis of the state – that it performs or executes its policies through various mechanisms and personnel, and thus has "an interest in itself" (Offe 2006), and that it creates certain selectivities, or "filters", non-decisions, and rules of inclusion or exclusion, are all factors that do not, Griesser argues, show how the translation – in my words: condensation – concretely works. Rather, these mechanisms must be linked to the concrete practices of knowledge production, and the highly contested effects of these practices on the making of policy.

To sum up my argument: Indeed, there is uncertainty and complexity about the objects – and the subject – of steering, as IPA states. However, HMPA is interested in the processes of how these uncertainties and complexities are recognized and dealt with in selective, power-shaped, and not necessarily problem-adequate ways. This has to be seen against the background of certain requirements of social reproduction which are not necessarily known by the state and societal forces. However, for both approaches, the strategies performed by intellectuals and experts, organized lobbies and think tanks are of particular importance (Fischer 2009; Plehwe 2010).

### *3.4 Operationalizing the analysis of policies*

I have tried to show that the conceptualization of policies benefit from a sophisticated understanding of the state (2.1) and from a consideration of the hegemonic contexts and corridors of policy-making (2.2). Moreover, I have developed the idea that the fact or lack of correspondence between societal reproduction and policies leads to the necessity that the state and societal actors will produce different forms of policy knowledge in order to create a certain coherence (2.3).

What does that mean for an in-depth analysis of concrete policies? More reflection and research is required about how HMPA might be able to ground policy analysis in future. Part of this work is to apply this framework to concrete policy fields. A few remarks may suffice in this general outline:

Whatever the relations of forces, requirements, dominant framing of problems, or demands are, they need to be translated into the internal structure of the respective political system. The state usually carries out its policies relative autonomously, i.e. it has in its structure and performance a relative independence from social forces.

Specific policies can be understood as unstable compromises among social forces which are formulated through specific state apparatuses or even groups or alliances in particular apparatuses. The heterogeneity of the state apparatuses is one central element of policy, and is not due to any lack of coherence, but rather is the form in which the state operates. Since particular structures and power relations exist in different conflict or policy fields, their material condensations in state apparatuses are specific, which illustrates the reason for tensions among various political institutions.

A bureaucracy is not uniform, but consists of different groups, cliques, and centres which pursue many disparate micro-politics; and represents a relation of forces (Poulantzas 2002, 167; Demirović 2011, 43–47). It develops complex forms of techniques, actions, and capabilities and an awareness of problems. Furthermore, bureaucracies develop clienteles, which have certain resources, knowledge, and competencies. Policies result not only from rational bureaucratic action or institutional settings, but are also the result of, and form part of, societal and policy discourses, which may themselves differ (cf. Brand 2010).

A policy field is not just an analytical term, but also denotes the development and performance of a particular policy as a sectoralized cognitive and an institutionalized state practice that refers to and creates for itself a specific space of action in which problems should be dealt with. “The overall social context is constantly being subdivided by the power bloc into specialized policies to dis-identify societal interrelations and changes, and to individualize the problems of social groups” (Candeias 2011, 2).

Specific procedures are declared as necessary, and particular apparatuses as competent. The state claims competence for dealing with many societal conflicts and problems, and gives a

certain durability to the act of defining and dealing with problems, but at the same time, it is broken down into specific fields, with particular rules and knowledge, experiences and claims, and opaque or transparent power techniques and relationships. Societal actors are urged to formulate their demands, interests, and values in specific policy fields, e.g. a non-government organization like Greenpeace needs to present its claims in the policy field that concerns the regulation of chemicals; the Ministry of the Environment is the state apparatus responsible for that particular sphere, etc. In this sense, the policy cycle itself is a form by which to rationalize politics, i.e. conflicts and problems, and through which to deal with societal contradictions and tensions. These may not be resolved, but they can at least be stabilized, at least for a certain time.

The criticism is often raised that certain societal problems, such as the ecological crisis, cannot be dealt with through particular policies and apparatuses. However, the existence of different apparatuses can be interpreted as part of a search process seeking to make certain policies compatible with the requirements of reproduction and the existing relations of forces and orientations.

At the same time, sectoralization raises the issue of unity within the state, and the process of creating such unity. In order to secure or shape societal relations in controlled ways, a certain amount of unity within the state is needed in light of the multitude of contradictory and contentious policies that may potentially destabilize the broad processes of societal reproduction and the accompanying reproduction of more or less hegemonic relations. Jessop calls such policies “state projects”, the “essential theoretical function [of which] is to sensitize us to the inherent improbability of the existence of a unified state and to indicate the need to examine the structural and strategic factors which contribute to the existence of ‘state effects’” (1990, 9).

From a critical state theoretical perspective, the state, or public policy is not necessarily part of the solution; it neither seeks, per se, to fulfil the requirements of the general will, nor does it solve collective problems (Greven 2008, 26–27; Wissel/Wöhl 200). In many cases, the state is part of the social and political problem, and, at the same time, is urged to deal with it – symbolically or literally – in highly selective ways.

Against this background, empirical research needs to address such general questions as why and how specific policies are selected and how multiple policies could contribute to a more or less coherent orientation of state policy. Moreover, empirical research can assist in linking these major issues to concrete research on specific policies and their discursive framing, or the interests behind them, on micro-technology and the state personnel, the role of particular events for policy-making, etc., and respective designs. However, this is another dimension to be considered.

## 5. Outlook

The intention of this article was to develop some conceptual tools of an HMPA. Their further operationalization in concrete research, and their methodological implications are beyond the scope of this article (see Buckel 2012; Kannankulam/Georgi 2014). More reflection is needed with respect to an analytically fruitful combination of discourse analysis and *dispositif* analysis (Foucault 1978; Bührmann/Schneider 2010).

Since research designs need to be specific according to research interests and questions, the starting points of policy analysis may differ: the beginning of a research process could be the structure of a policy field and its historical transformation; or the making and design of policies, their implementation, and the manifold intended and non-intended effects on various social rela-

tions; or the concrete actors and their room for manoeuvre; or the stabilization or shaping of the relationships of actors themselves; or the concrete conflicts which might elucidate how different interests and strategies could become policy – to name just a few. From a cultural political economy perspective, with its interest in semiotic and discursive aspects of political economy, questions that might be raised include: Where do policy ideas come from, which actors promote them, which ideas are selected, how do they enter policy discourses and practice, what is their contribution to social discipline and governmentality, how do they become part of hegemonic logics, and how are they challenged (Sum 2009, 186; Sum/Jessop 2013, Chapter 5)? It is quite obvious that precise knowledge of the research subject is still the prerequisite for attaining plausible results (this is still a major difference to quantitatively oriented social research).

I would like to conclude by highlighting the merits of an HMPA as compared to the IPA.

There is quite a bit of common ground upon which both methods stand. For both, history is not a linear process, and is not driven by any cause or essence. In this respect, IPA focuses on discourses, while HMPA analyses manifold social relations and the material and symbolic reproduction of social life. Both the IPA and HMPA approaches combine policy analysis with a critique of existing policies and of mainstream policy analysis, which they see as positivistic and rationalistic. Both are less interested in the development of scientific methods and techniques, or in how to solve social and political problems within the existing institutional setting. They share the assumption that modern societies have no centre of control – such as the state – but rather that social relations reproduce themselves through a myriad of actions which are more or less plausible to the actors, or because they have no alternative. State or public policy should be seen less as a problem-solving instrument, and primarily as a mechanism for ordering and structuring policy. Both approaches are not primarily interested in an effective design of policy, but rather in its contested constitution and its role in the reproduction of societal domination. IPA and HMPA are both interested in the constitution of – knowledgeable – subjects, and do not take them for granted, or as pre-existing.

However, there are also important differences. It became clear throughout the text that the more macro-oriented perspective of HMPA requires such concepts as state, hegemony, and societal reproduction, and assumes forms of domination and reproduction beyond discourse, meaning, and argumentation. The very concept of policy has been an attempt to relate to such an understanding. I have emphasized that there are various interpretations of what complexity in modern societies signifies, and what the role of policy is in such societies.

Since historical-materialist approaches focus more on social forces, they are also interested in political and social forms which question power and domination practically. Counter-hegemonic social movements and intellectual currents are at stake here. Even Foucault, one of the reference authors of IPA, was more explicit on resistance than current IPA protagonists are, with their emphasis on deliberation and participation.

With respect to the shared concern of democratization, IPA seems to focus on the functioning or at least the improvement of political deliberation and participation, as well as on the democratization of knowledge, in the sense that expert knowledge needs to be questioned practically (cf. overview and discussion of limits in Warren 2009). HMPA agrees e.g. that expertise and knowledge are powerful tools in the undemocratic reproduction of society (Fischer 2003; 2009). However, it goes a step further by exploring the existing *societal* conditions and modes of liberal democracy, the forces – not only the citizens – interested in its reproduction, and the structural restrictions upon it. It focuses on the material and symbolic production of life which is considered as highly power-shaped by discourses and knowledge, but also the private owner-



ship of the means of production, the dominant forms of the societal division of labour, and the political passivation of the masses as one mechanism for the production and reproduction of hegemonic relations. The new modes of governance are not seen per se a productive condition for more participation and transparency, but are rather a power-shaped process in the context of the restructuring of the state and of politics. Actual developments in Western societies tend more to be analysed as de-democratization processes or – to use another concept originally introduced by Poulantzas – as “authoritarian statism” (Kannankulam 2007).

Despite these differences, I am convinced that the acknowledgement of both the similarities and differences may help develop the respective and not at all homogeneous approaches further, and sharpen them for fruitful analyses. In addition, other strands of policy analysis could benefit from the proposed analytical tools in order to strengthen their conceptual and empirical grounding.

#### NOTES

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- 2 I use the term actor in a broad sense and that of forces as socially and politically constituted actors which attempt to effect, prevent, or reverse change. My understanding of “political forces” is close to what in other approaches is often called “organized interests”.
- 3 I prefer the term “interpretative policy analysis”, since “critical policy analysis” is understood in a broader sense and, indeed, the approach presented here claims to be part of it.
- 4 Gülay Çağlar (2010, 63) argues that these approaches conceptualize knowledge in policy processes as influencing policies (and reality in general), rather than constituting them. Knowledge is understood as somehow external to power and policy processes, and more or less a resource of information and legitimation. Change is seen as being caused by external shocks.
- 5 Hajer/Wagenaar 2003a; Fischer 2003, 73–94; 2009, 272–294; Nullmeier 1993; Gottweis 2006; Wodak 2009; Çağlar 2010, 62–67; Wagenaar 2011; Pülzl/Wydra 2011; Gottweis/Fischer 2012; I am aware of the fact that this critical path does not develop in a linear way in the sense that it is clearly identifiable alongside the mainstream path. I would like to thank the reviewer who insisted on that.
- 6 Marx had no explicit theory of the state or of the political sphere. His understanding of the state shifted between that of “a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie” (Marx 1967: p. 482) and that of a social relation (Marx 1963).
- 7 Where IPA presupposes instability as a general tendency, HMPA asks how these instabilities could be overcome.
- 8 Within IPA, some work has been done on the role of the state. Turnbull introduced the concept of the rhetorical state (Turnbull 2006, Rhodes/Turnbull 2010) and Bevir links reflections on the modern state with public policy (Bevir 2010, ch. 2 & 8). However, the theory of the state developed in the present article is different.
- 9 Cf. Poulantzas 1978; Jessop 1990; 2007; Aronowitz/Bratsis 2006; Hirsch 2005; Sauer 2001; Demirović et al. 2010; Bretthauer et al. 2011.
- 10 Gramsci and Poulantzas focused on the class character of the state, but their conceptualization can be enhanced to other relations, such as gender (Ludwig et al. 2009), or the societal nature relations (Brand et al. 2008; Brand/Wissen 2012; from an intersectional perspective, cf. Buckel 2012).

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