Institutional politics and the power to define
The role of aspects of discourse in policy practices

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Introduction
For long, anthropological fieldwork has mostly taken place in exotic and far-away places where remote, rural communities were studied. Nowadays, anthropologists increasingly develop an interest in western norms and institutions, ideology and consciousness, knowledge and power, rhetoric and discourse, meaning and interpretation, and thus the social institutions and political processes that organize the public sphere in our own societies. In this article I will study policy as it leads straight into the heart of anthropology (Shore and Wright 1997: 4).

As many authors have pointed out, in policy making the bureaucracy does not act in a functionalist way, instead there is a continuous struggle for power over the policy process between the actors within this organization (Shore and Wright 1997; Mosse 2004; Quarles van Ufford, Krijt et al 1988; Reed 1992). In studying the struggles and debates around the writing of a policy document, I will show how aspects of discourse play a crucial role in this institutional politics. In the first place, policy making is a process of continuous discursive argumentation, in which people organize around discourses to struggle for the power to define. Secondly, in the process of mobilization and maintenance of support the use of linguistic devices such as mobilizing metaphors and vague concepts is a potent strategy. Whereas discursive argumentation creates fragmentation, key concepts are used to mobilize and unite the fragments in the policy process. So, we see how discourses create webs of power between actors.

Functionalist views on policy processes
When it concerns policy issues in development studies two approaches appear to dominate the debate. On the one hand, there is an interventionist approach, also known as a positivist or neo-positivist paradigm, in which policy making is conceived of as a rational, objective and action-oriented, problem-solving process. Objective, rational-scientific knowledge and functional organization play a crucial role in this process.

In this approach knowledge is treated as a neutral instrument by which development problems can be analysed in terms of causal relationships and context free generalizations and solutions can be drawn. Although, interventionists often believe that knowledge can never be totally comprehensive because of flawed human intellectual capability, it does not discourage them from their quest for universal truth.

To accomplish the highest degree of efficiency in problem-solving many scholars and practitioners have interpreted Weber’s analytical model of bureaucracy as a blueprint for efficient rational organization. Weber argued that in modern society the bureaucracy is an indispensable instrument to organize collective goals.

However much people may complain about ‘the evils of bureaucracy’, it would be sheer illusion to think for a moment that continuous administrative work can be carried out in any field except by means of officials working in offices ...For bureaucratic administration is,

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1 This model of the bureaucracy is developed by Weber as an analytical tool to measure the extent of modernity of societies on the basis of rationality in organization.
other things being equal, always from a formal, technical point of view, the most rational type. For the needs of mass administration to-day, it is completely indispensable. The choice is only that between bureaucracy and dilletantism in the field of administration’ (Weber 1964: 337)

In this model, the bureaucracy was functionally compartmentalized by mechanic divisions between different hierarchical levels, functions, roles and people (Morgan 1997; Reed 1992) so to accomplish organizational goals. Specialization, a hierarchy of authority, a system of rules, and impersonality are viewed as key aspects to make this formal organizational structure function most effectively (Blau 1956). Thus, organization in this approach is viewed as ‘a technical necessity (to co-ordinate the subdivided tasks) [and] as a rational organizational arrangement for the accomplishment of collective ends’ (Urban 1982: 23-24).

Based on this structural-functionalist organizational structure, Weber has made a clear distinction between the official and the politician (Beetham and Weber 1985: 68, 76). Although the official may express disagreement, and in important matters he should do so, he argued, once a policy is decided upon, his duty is to carry out regardless of his own views. Thus, this perspective links legitimacy to procedural correctness, meaning there can only be legitimacy when the formal, written rules and procedures were followed. This view on formal organization is refined by the separation of planning and design, the task of managers and designers, from implementation and execution for which the employees were responsible. Following from that, discrepancy between formulation and implementation is blamed on a lack of knowledge that caused an imperfect policy model and/or procedural incorrectness as implementation did not follow policy prescriptions. Therefore to increase efficiency and effectiveness, attention is both given to monitoring and evaluation of projects and programs to distract rational knowledge in the form of “lessons learned” and “best practices” to develop new policy models, and organizational reform to create clearer and better formal steering and accountability structures so to enforce procedural correctness. Thus, from this point of view, the role of policy analysis is mainly ‘to inform a ‘rational model’ of decision-making’ (Fischer 2003: 4).

This approach can be criticised on several grounds. In the first place, this perspective tries to mould actors as subjects into the rational design of the bureaucracy. Morgan (1998: 30) points out that collective action is an illusion, since functional specialization, which is supposed to create a system of co-operation, often ends up creating a system of competition as public officers and divisions compete for scarce resources or job positions higher up the hierarchy. Furthermore, the practice of organizational decision-making is not only limited by imperfect information, partial technical knowledge and cognitive capacities, these practices are even more so pervaded by political and ideological considerations that determine both the course and the outcome of collective deliberations (Reed 1992: 43; see also Shore and Wright 1997). Secondly, this structural-functionalist approach to policy and organization ignores the important role of inconsistencies and ambiguities in the policy process. Whereas the interventionist approach is mainly concerned with theoretical rationality of policy and organization, the practitioner acts on of his ‘practical rationality’, which is at times inconsistent and ambiguous. In the eyes of the interventionist, the ‘practical rationality of the practitioner’ (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003: 19) is problematic in the policy process.

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2 It should be noted that unlike Weber’s argument for technical superiority of the bureaucracy in Economy and Society (1947), his political writings discussed the bureaucracy’s inherent tendency to exceed its instrumental function and become a separate power group within society (see also Beetham and Weber 1985). However, this latter, political argument of Weber is absent in the interventionist approach.
The other dominant approach on development policy radically criticises the interventionist approach (Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1990). An influential study on development policy that breathes this approach is The Anti-Politics Machine by Ferguson (1990). In this study of World Bank policy on Lesotho, Ferguson has shown the importance of policy discourses and the depoliticization of development problems. He argues that policy depoliticizes the development problem into a technical problem that can be solved by the development business. This approach conceives of policy texts and statements as static instruments of the hegemonic, homogeneous bureaucracy to effectively and mechanically dominate the underdeveloped.

Furthermore, the critical approach analyses policy processes by categorizing in terms of dominators and dominated. This approach is a reformulation of the dependency theory (Grillo and Stirrat 1997; Gardner and Lewis 2000). In doing so, they ignore the agency of the “dominated” since they are simply treated as passive victims of the development business instead of showing how these ‘victims’ have developed ways of dealing with the development business.

Contrary to the action-oriented view of the interventionist approach and the neo-marxist view of the critical approach, I argue the policy process is as much a political as an analytical or problem solving process (Shore and Wright 1997). Since both approaches focus their analysis on the official, hegemonic policy models, they portray policy and organization in a functionalist way. In doing so they neglect the role of institutional politics in the policy process: policy-making is neither the neutral, objective process that is portrayed by the interventionist approach, nor the hegemonic process of domination as the critical theorists claim it to be. To understand how policy works, we need to develop an approach that acknowledges the important role of institutional politics and reveals ‘the relationship between …public and hidden transcripts; between the “monotheistic privilege” of dominant policy models’ and the “polytheism” of scattered practices’ surviving below’ (De Certeau 1984: 48 in Mosse 2004: 645). Therefore, I propose to use a practice approach.

Institutional politics: A practice approach
Such a practice perspective needs to reveal how policy makers in the institutional context of the bureaucracy come to construct policy as ‘subjective knowers’ (Fischer 2003: 38). This way, ideas and beliefs are integrated into a theoretical framework without subordinating them to the needs of instrumental rationality or strategic action (Fischer 2003).

Power is not statically concentrated in one place within the bureaucracy, as portrayed by the dominant views described above, instead there is a continuous struggle for power within the bureaucracy, the institutional politics. This article will focus on the role of aspects of discourse in the institutional politics. I focus my analysis on two aspects of institutional politics, namely argumentation analysis and the role of linguistic devices in gaining and exercising power in the policy process.

First, policymaking is a constant discursive struggle over the definitions and argumentation behind them. In the context of development aid, these definitions of problems and solutions will be analysed as development discourses. A development discourse is conceived of as a configuration of ideas, a normative construction of reality. Narratives or storylines are central structures in development discourses. These ‘storylines […] function to condense large amounts of factual information intermixed with the normative assumptions and value orientations that assign meaning to them’ (Fischer 2003: 87).

A discourse is a relatively unstable and often contradictory configuration that holds together the equilibria of political hegemony (Fairclough 1992: 93 in Fischer 2003: 79). However, as they are not fixed, hegemonic systems of rule, but rather socio-historic discursive formations, development discourses are constantly developed, negotiated, and
contested inside the institutional location of the bureaucracy (Nuijten and Van Gastel 2005; Gardner and Lewis 2000). The production and reproduction of orders of discourse is one stake in this hegemonic struggle for power and control over the policy process. In this struggle communicative skills and argumentative strategies are important resources as ‘it hold[s] out the possibility of making people see things differently, and in the process, shifting the course of political struggle’ (Fischer 2003: 88). In the development business, development specialists as the ‘agents of expert discourse … embody the techniques and practices that disperse power and social control away from the formal centres of governance’ (Fischer 2003: 40). These techniques and practices with which experts exercise power are not so much based on their possession of or access to information, as policy network theorists presume, instead, following discourse theorists, I argue that experts are part of a larger power-knowledge relationship who have, as such, the ability to constitute, control, and legitimise the very issues that we take to be the subjects of deliberation (Fischer 2003: 45). These power-knowledge relationships are constructed in power fields that evolve around policy issues.

In these power-knowledge relationships linguistic devices play a crucial role. As several authors have pointed out, policy is depoliticized by rephrasing what is actually a political problem into neutral, objective scientific language (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982; Fischer 2003; Shore and Wright 1997). Besides the apparent depoliticization of policy texts and speech other linguistic devices that are used to exercise power of the policy process can be distinguished. One such stylistic device is the use of key concepts or ‘mobilising metaphors’. A feature of influential concepts is that they are ambiguous of nature. This ambiguity of is not just an inconvenience, but rather serves an important political function, namely the mobilisation of support and the creation of unity. The various inconsistencies allow participants to read themselves into collective programmes and actions (Fischer 2003:63-64). These key concepts can, therefore, also be indicated as ‘mobilizing metaphors’ (Wright 1993 in Shore and Wright 1997: 17). Key concepts, as Foucault has argued, do not have a given meaning, instead their meaning shifts and changes, and besides that all are subject to conceptual revolutions (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982: 69). Changes in the meaning of keywords always engender a shift in the ‘habitual grouping’ of this term with associated terms (Shore and Wright 1997: 18-19). In this habitual grouping, ‘mobilizing metaphors become the centre of a cluster of keywords whose meaning extend and shift, while previous associations with other words are dropped’ (Shore and Wright 1997: 20). So, these keywords can mobilise people or groups that hang on to very different discourses.

In order to study these institutional politics within the Dutch ministry of Foreign Affairs, I propose to ‘study through’ (Reinhold 1994 in Shore and Wright 1997: 14), meaning to study the webs of power and relations between actors, institutions and discourse at different sites and levels across time that appear to be totally disconnected, instead of studying up (Nader 1974) focusing on elites and centres of power.

I chose to study the policy practices in the creation of an official policy document as interventionists attach great value to these texts. This case shows that the policy process is neither the rational, objective process focused on problem-solving by creation of a policy text as a procedural guide, as portrayed by the interventionist approach nor that the bureaucracy is the homogeneous organization that functions effectively and mechanistically to dominate the underdeveloped. Instead, it shows that institutional politics is a central issue in the policy process. Within the bureaucracy the struggle for ‘the power to define’ take place on the basis of diverging ideological views between groups within the bureaucracy. Furthermore, this case study reveals how government actors try to keep control over these institutional politics, and so maintain the institutional order, by their claim on legitimacy.

The case study
For my MSc thesis I wanted to gain insight into how policy works, so I obtained a position as student on work placement on microfinance at a division of the directorate-general of international co-operation of the ministry of Foreign Affairs. I noticed that good governance was a hot issue although it was still unclear to me what the meaning of the concept was. Therefore, I decided to analyze the processes of policy practices around good governance. I was not the only one who was puzzled by ‘good governance’. At that time, the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) published a report on good governance in Dutch development co-operation. The WRR argued that there was no clear ‘good governance policy framework’ as a comprehensive policy theory was lacking (WRR 2001). To my surprise I found out that there existed a comprehensive policy paper on good governance, however, this paper had not been sent to the Parliament and was therefore no official policy. Why didn’t this policy paper have that status? A public officer, who was about to be sent to an embassy to work on ‘good governance’, blamed this on the lack of management capability in the ministry. He argued that, on the one hand, the minister was not a good manager, as she only focused on politics, and on the other hand, the division responsible for the theme of good governance, the division for human rights, good governance and peace building (DMD), had incapable directors. In my opinion, this was a too easy explanation. I believed that the study of the policy practices in the development of ‘good governance’ could lead to a more profound answer. I couldn’t predict then that this would create such a stir in the ministry.

The rise of ‘governance’ as the new paradigm
As I started my research studying literature on ‘good governance’, it appeared that the thinking in terms of governance ‘is a product of as well thinking in terms of ‘the triumph of the Western democracy’, neo-liberalism, the human rights movement, the international legal order as the rediscovery of politics and science of the importance of institutions and contains as such ideological, idealistic and functionalist thinking’ (WRR 2001: 18 translated from Dutch). To find out how ‘good governance’ was conceptualised in Dutch development policy I made a genealogy of the concept based on official policy documents such as the Explanatory Memoranda of the National Budgets.

The first time the concept of ‘good governance’ was presented in Dutch development policy was in 1991 (ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken 1991). At that time, the minister of Development Co-operation was Jan Pronk. He had already been minister from 1973 until 1977 and appeared to be a visionary politician. Pronk, who argued to be neither zealous nor fanatical but just professional, was a firm believer in social engineering as instrument to fulfil one’s mission in life (Termeer 1996). The introduction of ‘good governance’ in 1991 was, therefore, not surprising.

Under Pronk ‘good governance’ was defined as ‘a government that limits itself to those tasks that can be done best by the government, and which will be fair, effective, and sustainably achieved; that does not waste means to non-productive purposes; that focuses attention on the human being and therefore promotes human rights and principles of the constitutional state’ (MFA 1992: 75, translated from Dutch).

Later on Pronk elaborated and redefined the concept of ‘good governance’ in a new policy text ‘A World of Dispute’ (1993) and included issues of public sector management and administration. He argued that good governance is ‘to some extent … an administrative matter and an extension of public sector management, for example as a necessary part of programs

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3 I will refer here to the ministry of Foreign Affairs, since there is no separate ministry for Development Co-operation. The minister for Development Co-operation uses the budget and organization of the ministry of Foreign Affairs. The policy fields of Development Co-operation are integrated with Foreign Affairs through the formal organization structure.
of structural adjustment to support the market economy in developing countries. But to a larger extent it is a politically much more sensitive issue, since it involves emphasis on human development, on the crucial value of the individual in a sustainable process of development. There has been a growing realization of the need for a style of government which does not reach out across the people but which instead meets their own needs, is accessible and predictable for them and which they themselves can influence. In general, governance of this kind is promoted by a political system based on the separation of powers and the democratic transition of power, by guarantees of an independent judiciary and the rule of law, and by respect for civil rights and freedoms. In addition, good governance means an absence of corruption and excessive military spending, which works to the detriment of the development process’ (ministry of Foreign Affairs ‘A World of Dispute’ 1993: 21-22).

Here we can see that indeed very different discourses around ‘good governance’, from focus on a political separation of powers to technocratic public sector management, were included in Pronk’s policy statements. However, it can be observed from these above stated definitions that some discourses or ‘terms of thinking’ were more dominant than others in the thinking on good governance. Both texts emphasise the role of the human individual in the development process and following from that discourses that focus on this element, such as human rights and the constitutional state, are dominant in these definitions. When we take a closer look at ‘habitual grouping’ (Shore and Wright 1997) in the various policy documents we see that ‘good governance’ is associated with ‘democracy’. In the Explanatory Memorandum of 1992 the policy concept of ‘good governance’ was simultaneously introduced with the idea of promotion of ‘democratisation’. Furthermore, it is argued in ‘A World in Difference’ that ‘donors are justified …. in reducing or even completely stopping the provision of aid in cases of flagrant or systematic violation of human rights, serious reductions in democracy and protracted and excessive military expenditure’ (ministry of Foreign Affairs 1993: 23). Again, Pronk draws attention to the focus on a ‘human’ approach towards development with attention for democratisation.

The main storylines that legitimised the ‘good governance’ discourse was the narrative of ‘the fall of the Berlin Wall’. This narrative was already explored in ‘A World of Difference’ (ministry of Foreign Affairs 1990). The narrative argued that before 1990, thus before ‘the fall of the Berlin Wall’, the world was divided into two socio-political alternatives, the socialist system and the capitalist system. It was argued that ‘the Soviet Union’s withdrawal signifies the end of a classical left-right paradigm in the world. The curtain seems to have fallen on the idea of the state as the only instrument of the ‘consciously moulding community’’ (ministry of Foreign Affairs 1990: 48). The disappointment of planned economies and failure of developing countries in using power and resources for balanced and sustainable support of welfare is believed to prove this western socio-economic model. It was the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 that showed that the socialist political and economic system was failing and that democracy and liberalism was the only solution to the problem of ‘bad governance’.

It was argued in ‘A World of Difference’ that ‘The bankrupt Soviet development model includes a specific view of the relationship between human rights and development. It says, in short, that the material conditions must be created before there can be real freedom and democracy. As only socialism offers the right political and social structure for the creation of these conditions, it is only the social system to point the way to true freedom. What passes for freedom, human rights and democracy in ‘bourgeois’ democracies is, according to this view, precisely the opposite of what they claim. By concealing the exploitation and social inequality inherent in the capital mode of production, they maintain the illusion of civil equality and freedom. In reality capitalism amounts at best to unequal freedom and unfree equality, at worst to the complete repudiation of these concepts... Freedom comes first, than food...A society that is not free leads to power being vested in the hands of the few, and this power is
inevitably used to deny others access to welfare. Democracy and classical human rights are therefore essential preconditions for sustainable and evenly distributed development’ (ministry of Foreign Affairs 1990: 55-56, 56-57).

When reconstructing the life history of the minister from secondary data and deconstructing the framing of Pronks development policy we can view how these discourses have been internalized in previous settings in which the minister acted. As was stated ‘within policy documents of international organizations a stronger emphasis is put on the central place that the human being occupies in the development process’ (ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken 1991: 75, translated from Dutch). Here, Pronk followed the line of the United Nations of the human being as the central focal point for development aid, as against the view of the World Bank as the state as central actor in development. From this, it becomes clear that Pronk focuses on human development and stresses the principles of human rights and democracy. Furthermore, the developments in the early nineties were also based on the ideas of the Stockholm Initiative in which Pronk had had a prominent role. This Initiative made a case for a ‘New World order’; a new principle based on the norms of justice and peace, democracy and development, human rights and international law (Stockholm Initiative 1991). Thus, these concepts of democracy, human rights, and human development have been orderly arranged in the discourse of ‘good governance’. It can be concluded that under minister Jan Pronk ‘good governance’ was framed in a ‘global-human centred,’ way.

As I said before, Pronk had feeling for politically hot issues and was well aware that ‘globally good governance and human rights increasingly got more attention,’ (ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken 1992: 75 translated from Dutch). It was not only major social changes in world politics that had given rise to the discourse of good governance. ‘Good governance’ was also raised to create political support for development co-operation. As the ministry itself stated in ‘A World of Difference’, ‘such matters also need to be raised if public support for the aid effort is to be maintained’ (ministry of Foreign Affairs 1993: 21-22). Research of the ministry of Foreign Affairs had shown that since the beginning of the 1980s many people had lost hope for any change for the better for developing countries (Nekkers and Malcontent 1999: 53). The introduction of ‘good governance’ on the policy agenda was also a symbol for the efforts of development co-operation to increase efficiency and effectiveness of aid.

Institutionalisation of ‘good governance’

Because of the increasing attention for ‘good governance’, in 1996, Pronk set up a division for Human rights, Good governance and Democratisation (DMD), thereby bureaucratically interlinking the three concepts in line with the way he framed good governance. The division was staffed with policymakers from the social sciences such as history, sociology or political science, who had to promote a strong and consistent bilateral and multilateral policy on the three themes. The plan of Formation (ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken 1996) prescribed that the aim of this division was to promote a strong and consistent bilateral and multilateral policy in the fields of human rights, good governance and democratisation.

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4 The Stockholm Initiative originated from four other commissions: the independent Commission on Disarmament and Security (also known as the Palme Commission). The World Commission on Environment and Development under Brundtland, the South Commission chaired by the former president of Tanzania Nyerere, and the Brandt Commission. In 1990, just after the historic changes of 1989, Willy Brandt assembled members of his own commission, among them Jan Pronk who was treasurer of the Brandt commission, together with several representatives of other commissions to meet. As a result, Minister Pronk was asked to form a working group which led to the Stockholm Initiative, consisting of people who held high positions in governments or international organizations all over the world. The political-ideological ideas of the Initiative were published in a booklet on governance called Common responsibility in the 1990’s: The Stockholm Initiative on Global Security and Governance.
A new Minister: Internal frictions and the struggle around a policy document

Apparently, the new minister of Development Co-operation Eveline Herfkens⁵, who took office in 1998, also recognized the need for ‘good governance’. This daughter of a Shell-director who spent part of her youth in Venezuela, had studied law in Leiden and began working in the ministry of Foreign Affairs immediately after her graduation in 1976. From 1981 until 1990 she was a Member of Parliament. However, the best years of her life (Lockhorn 1998: 36) were just before her ministership, as member of the board of directors of the World Bank for six years (1990-1996).

Herfkens declared in her first budget debate that Pronk wrote many policy documents and now it was time to put them into practice. She stated:

‘Mrs. Speaker! Already in 1990 it was stated in the memorandum “A World of Difference” that besides the need for aid expressed in the extent of poverty, the extent of agreement with recipient countries’ policy should be formulated as an important criterion in the selection of countries. According to the memorandum of Pronk, this agreement should concern both the economic policy as the socio-political policy, including human rights policy, policy aimed at women, social weaker communities and minorities, as well as environmental policy. With regard to the decrease of poverty, the goal of Dutch development policy, the memorandum ‘A World in Dispute’, three years later, already pointed out that it is important that governments in developing countries acknowledge and act upon the necessity of poverty alleviation. Thus, it is nothing new that we particularly want to help the countries that are willing to help themselves. The criteria good policy and good polity, and the need for aid that is the extent of poverty, do not appear out of the blue’

Although she said that Pronk’s documents appealed to her, Eveline Herfkens set her own agenda in the same budget debate. Under the heading of ‘good governance’, she put forward the view that efficiency in international aid is greatest where developing countries pursue good macro-economic policy and that therefore development co-operation will focus primarily on countries with good governance (Tweede Kamer 1998b). ‘I cannot emphasize the importance of good governance too often...We need to think of integrity of the government apparatus. Transparent management of public means, absence of corruption and adequate control on public finances are important. I attach great value to a well functioning Government audit office and an adequate parliamentary control on public expenditure. Also the development and implementation of policy in dialogue with the people involved – participation- is part of good governance. Separation of powers, independent constitutional state, legal security for all and a free and fair, functioning parliament are essential...Good governance is linked with human rights. If human rights are respected, there is lesser chance that the government raises impediments for a wide participation of the population in economy and politics’

From this, we can see that minister Herfkens emphasized the discourses of good public financial management and expenditure. Her preference for this neo-liberal thinking is obviously derived from her experiences at the World Bank. While she was working there World Bank policy causally linked economic development to ‘good governance’ (Benda-Beckmann 1993) and as part of this framework stressed administration and financial management (World Bank 1992). Influential publications such as ‘Assessing Aid: What works, what doesn’t and why’ and the World Development Report 1997, also known as ‘Rethinking the State’, were restatements of the World Bank discourse on development of state-economies and provided the main narratives for this discourse.

⁵ She was minister ‘without Portefeuille’, minister for Development Cooperation from 3 August 1998 until 22 July 2002
So, if we analyse the shifts in framing of ‘good governance’ under Pronk and Herfkens, we can conclude that under Pronk the dominant discourses were mainly ‘global-human centred’, while Herfkens tried to shift this balance towards the neo-liberal, ‘state-centred’ discourses.

**Institutional politics around a policy paper**

From the new policy statements in the budget debate it was understood by policymakers in the division of Human Rights, Democratization and Good Governance (DMD) that minister Herfkens attributed a central role to ‘good governance’ in development co-operation. Therefore, this division took it upon itself to try to turn ministerial statements into a policy paper on good governance. It was argued that there was a lack of knowledge and understanding about good governance and about how to translate this into practical initiatives. So, a number of exploratory workshops were organized focusing on governmental policy, civil initiatives and the private sector, and on the lessons learned from practical experiences with good governance. Many policymakers from different divisions took part in these workshops. In addition, in the first half of 1998, ten embassies were consulted on their perception and implementation of good governance and an inventory was made of activities undertaken. In the summer of 1998 the first draft of the good governance policy paper was developed by DMD with co-operation of the staff of other units, the embassies and a number of external consultants.

How could one explain this initiative of policy makers within the bureaucracy? There was a functional reason to write the policy paper. As it was one of the spearheads of the ‘new’ development policy of Herfkens, the policy makers argued that it was necessary to write a policy paper to make clear what the ministerial policy on good governance was. However, there was another, more important, reason for DMD to write a policy paper on good governance. To write a policy text on ‘good governance’ provided the ability to capture, consolidate and control a policy agenda and to synchronize diverse motivations, expectations, and values that had been widely dispersed by Pronk across other divisions (including those responsible for administrative matters, public sector management, and institutional development). Indeed, ‘good governance’ functioned as a mobilizing metaphor as it assembled many actors that held on to different views on what development aid should aim at. Remarkably, although project support for ‘good governance’ was the task of this division (DMD), responsibility for thematic policy work was with DMD and the Division for Social and Institutional development (DSI). To demarcate the activities related to ‘good governance’, DMD dealt with activities that concerned the wider protection of human rights by the government, while DSI focused on activities concerning the democratisation of public administration structures within recipient countries -with the exception of electoral support, which was a DMD task (Plan of formation, ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken 1996).

All the divisions involved agreed with the paper as it contained all elements of the diverse and scattered views on ‘good governance’ within the ministry. And so, it can be concluded that the metaphor of ‘good governance’ indeed successfully mobilized all people, divisions and embassies.

**Conflicting discourses**

The internal ‘good governance’-paper (draft dated on 7 September 1998) argued that ‘since the end of the eighties the importance of good governance has been emphasised. This range of ideas rose as a reaction to the problems in the centralist economies in Middle and Eastern-Europe and developing countries, notably in Latin-America and Sub-Saharan Africa. Insight was gained that in many situations governments had failed to utilise their power and means in such a way that economic growth and the distribution of welfare could be improved in a
balanced and sustainable manner... The importance of good governance increased by processes of globalisation that interfered with the economic situation of states... The contours become visible of a global market and a society in which the state borders lose meaning and in which shifts become visible between the economic and political components of the state power. In this power field the capacity of the individual state of autonomous regulation of national developments decreases’. Thus, the incompetent socialist political systems and increasing globalisation were the main reasons for the rise of issues of good governance. Then what was ‘good governance’ according to the policy makers within the ministry?

In the policy policy paper, the various views on ‘good governance’ were mentioned. However, it is notable that the position of the Dutch government, as a bilateral donor, differs distinctly from ‘good governance’ approaches of the World Bank or the IMF as can be seen in the following text:

‘The attention for good governance in the implementation of policy by above mentioned actors [IMF, World Bank, regional development banks, UNDP, bilateral donors (in OECD/DAC), national governments and non-governmental organizations] increases. This attention reflects existing differences in view on the function of good governance as means to bring closer policy goals. The flows of money that involve the advancement of good governance diverge extremely. The advancement of certain aspects of good governance involves a large stake of financial and technical means, while other aspects are less allocated. The IMF considers disentanglement of private and government finances, the constitutional state, accountability on the public sector and tackling of corruption as its fields of activity, because of the importance of these issues for macro-economic stability. The World Bank considers an efficient government apparatus, accountability, transparent decision-making and rules for economic traffic as aspects of good governance. Bilateral donors apply in OECD/DAC connection the broadest definition of good governance, in which participation of the people in governance as well as the reduction of military expenditures are admitted’

(ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken 1998: 3, translated from Dutch).

Thus, the Dutch approach towards good governance also included participation of the people. Thus, ‘good governance’ was defined as the transparent and accountable use of political authority and control of power to direct social developments in dialogue with the people’ (ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken 1998: 3, translated from Dutch). It was acknowledged that this definition ‘departs from utilitarian and normative assumptions’. The argumentation was rephrased as follows ‘in short: good governance is needed for economic growth and social justice. It is the basis for development. But public administration is also a product of forces (norms, institutions, power relations) in society. Policy should keep an eye for what is feasible and possible, next to what is desirable and needed’. It was believed that ‘globalisation and the dwindling power of the individual state make the promotion of good governance and social development on a strictly national basis a precarious case. National and internal aspects of good governance are closely linked. Border crossing aspects of bad governance (also from industrial countries), dwindling/decreasing ODA-budgets, growing international private capital, and the urgency of good governance for developing and transition countries give rise to of pursue a Dutch foreign policy that takes into account this connection. From this point of view the Netherlands can both stimulate supply of good governance (output of the state) and demand for good governance (output of the society)’

(ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken 1998: 3, translated from Dutch). Thus, the text clearly rejects an (individual) state-centred approach and restates Pronks ‘global-human centred’ approach.

From this it is clear that the ‘good governance’ policy paper used the ‘terms of thinking’ of Pronk’s three memoranda — A World of Difference, A World in Dispute, and Aid in Progress (as well as another on Human Rights) or as one interviewee said “it was framed in a
Pronkian way; it bore close resemblance to his ideological views’. The reproduction of this ‘global-human centred’ discourse on good governance can be clarified not by the structural-functional explanation of official policy making model or the critical description of the automaticy of the development bureaucracy, but by the agency of Pronk, he institutionalised his thinking in the organization, and agency of the policy makers as they reproduced his terms of thinking in their policy practices. As discussed above, DMD consisted of policy makers with a background in social sciences. For example, the policy maker responsible for the coordination of the writing of the ‘good governance’ policy paper had a degree in history and had working experience on human rights issues with Amnesty International, the University and the United Nations. This person was offered a job on issues of human rights in the second half of Pronks ministership. After Pronk this topic was marginalized, so he said and therefore he focused on ‘good governance’ as this was an important policy issue. Besides, at the ministry of Foreign Affairs only around 10 economists worked on issues of development co-operation (interview with economist at ministry, 4 September 2001).

The power to define: authority versus expertise
A political conflict developed around the DMD policy paper as minister Herfkens rejected it. She argued that there was too much emphasis on the ethical dimensions, while issues of technical polity were only barely touched upon. The public officers, who held the more ethical notion of ‘good governance’, drew on their power-knowledge relations to try to influence the minister’s view in another way. They invited a number of influential people from ECDPM, the World Bank, and the Van Vollenhoven Institute as well as a so-called ‘reference group’ representing almost all policy divisions within the ministry. A report with clear message from this workshop was sent to the minister. First, it was argued that governance was not only about governments, rather the quality of governance is established between demand by the people, the private sector and governmental tasks. Second, the report warned against a narrow financial, technocratic approach to good governance, and asked for attention to the economic benefit of participation. Thirdly, it said that the ethical dimension demands a supportive rather than a strictly normative approach, meaning that ‘good governance’ should rather be an aim of than condition for aid. The minister, however, maintained her position. She commented that although she agreed with the second point, she wanted (bilateral) good governance policy to focus on governments. With this statement she clearly distanced herself from her predecessor Pronk, and a section of her own staff. In reaction to this, the division suggested to write a short operational policy paper. The minister agreed but expressed concern that DMD paid little attention to economic and financial aspects. The short operational policy paper was never written. Instead, a second, third and finally fourth draft of the conceptual policy paper were produced.

After several months with no reply on the latest paper, an official of the division wrote the minister that her approval was urgent since, first, it was a spearhead of her policy and public officers in the ministry as well as other development co-operation organizations repeatedly asked for policy papers, and, second, the reorganization of the division depended on this response. Minister Herfkens agreed to authorize the text, but did not at all accept that this policy paper would be a basis for operationalization and certainly would not send it to the Parliament. The meeting to discuss this response never took place and the document never received an official status.

Claim on legitimacy
Anyone who had helped me in one way or another with my thesis received a copy of it, including the Director-General of Development Co-operation, and to the minister because the thesis to a large extent discussed her policy practices. The Director-General sent me an e-mail
to thank me for the report and congratulate me with the good result. After a couple of months-I had already left the ministry of Foreign Affairs-I received a telephone call from my former supervisor at the ministry. I immediately understood that there was something with my thesis, otherwise he would never have called me as we hadn’t had contact after I left the ministry. My presentiment was right. My former supervisor told me that he had ran into the minister at a reception drink where she told him that she wasn’t pleased at all with my thesis. In addition to this telephone call, I found a letter\textsuperscript{6} from the minister that same day on my doormat. Normally when a minister receives a thesis he or she asks the division concerned with the topic to write a response which she signs. In this case, the telephone call and the content of the missive indicated that this was not just a formal ‘thank you’-note.

Although I was just an MSc-student who had written a thesis on processes of policy development, she felt the urge to make clear that I had ‘unjustly not taken into account some aspects’ and that ‘it somewhat surprises … that your supervisors have not pointed out to you these omissions’\textsuperscript{vii} (letter from minister of development co-operation 10 april 2002). What was lacking in my analysis? The minister criticized my thesis for doing ‘insufficient justice to the specific character of the political context in which a minister and a ministry operate’. She argued that ‘comparisons between decision-making processes within more autonomous organizations are not relevant just like that. A minister does not function as a ‘management board’; if there is such a structure at all … than this board exists of the highest ranking public officers in a ministry. The minister is by definition no bureaucratic manager, the minister is, within the parameters of the coalition agreement, responsible for the formulation of policy. This responsibility is of a political nature, that is account needs to be given to the Parliament (n.b. thus not to its own machine). The bureaucratic machine does not have this responsibility, but assists the minister with the formulated policy. A bit more understanding for these realities would, in my opinion, have increased the quality of your research’\textsuperscript{viii} (ibid.).

So, she explained to me the organizational structure of the ministry and its formal role vis-à-vis the Parliament. In this line of reasoning she continued to point out to me the formal relationships between the minister and the public officers. She wrote ‘it astonishes that you systematically refer to the public officers in this ministry as ‘policy-makers’. It could be that this involves a semantic problem; nevertheless, although public officers act in many circumstances as policy advisors, ‘policy-making’ in our system is reserved to the minister, who is accountable to the Parliament’ (ibid.). Even more so, she assails her own public officers who do not respect the procedural rules of formal authority structure by argument that ‘it surprises that of all people those who fairly exclusively define ‘good governance’ as human rights and democracy show little appreciation for the organization of the democratic polity in the Netherlands’ (ibid.). The rules of authority are that ‘Dutch democracy is just like this that public officers should confine oneself to carrying out of policy that is decided upon by the government and should abstain from openly questioning this policy’\textsuperscript{ix} (ibid.). This statement is remarkable since policy makers have not openly questioned policy. In line with the structural-functionalist view, the minister legitimized her policies on the basis of the coalition agreement. She stated that ‘good governance implies – also according to the coalition agreement— that we aim at governments’\textsuperscript{x} (ibid.).\textsuperscript{7} Furthermore, she argued that ‘I was (and am) of the opinion that good governance by definition also need to focus on the quality of socio-economic policy. Expertise about that was and is not with DMD (currently

\textsuperscript{6} brief van het secretariaat van de minister voor ontwikkelingssamenwerking, 10 april 2002
\textsuperscript{7} However, this statement also noted that ‘provision of support as part of development cooperation through governments takes place under conditions of good governance, among which economic governance and good polity, on the basis of international criteria. Among them, the progress of democratisation and the respect for human rights occupy a central place’ (TK 1998 26024 nr 10). Obviously, the agreement is pervaded by Pronks terms of thinking as democratisation and human rights as aspects of good governance are stressed.
DMV), but is with other divisions. My aim has constantly been to come to an integral approach; monopolisation of the debate by DMD, with emphasis on the ‘political’ side of governance, was out of order” (ibid.).

So, the minister explicitly reformulated Webers view on procedural correctness; the public officers are only functional mechanisms in the bureaucratic machine, their rationale of existence is derived only from its rationalistic workings. The political context is portrayed as structure of centred, static, one-dimensional power relations; the bureaucratic machine and its public officers are subjected to the minister, while the minister is, for his or her part, subjected to the Parliament. At first I wondered whether the minister had understood my criticism on (post-)positivist or interventionist approaches towards policy and my claim for a view that provides insight into actual practices of policy making instead. Then, I understood that this structural-functionalist view on policy was used to claim legitimacy. As Benda-Beckman (1989: 31-32) rightly points out, although structuralist-functionalist assumptions have been eliminated from theoretical models, they do empirically exist and are of social significance in the policy process itself. So, he correctly argues that we must not only examine these assumptions in terms of their theoretical validity but also as social practice in the policy process (Benda-Beckmann 1989: 32). The use of the structuralist-functionalist image ‘becomes a symbol or icon to be mobilized or projected as a critical resource in the continuing struggle to legitimate certain sectional interests and values as the only proper basis for organized action and to deny that crucial aura of legitimacy to opposing ideologies’ (Reed 1992).

Conclusion

As argued above, the structuralist-functionalist -also known as functionalist- approach towards the policy process is increasingly criticized in contemporary literature. Indeed, several writers have argued that functionalism largely serves an ideology that masks elite’s political and bureaucratic interests (Fischer 2003; Shore and Nugent 2002). For example, Giddens (Giddens 1988 in Reed 1992: 44) argued that the idea of rational organization functions as a ‘ruling illusion’ or official philosophy that mystifies and obscures the realities and distortions of governing institutions. Because of this, there is a clear discrepancy between the existing institutional order and the actual practices of policy making (Shore and Wright 1997; Mosse 2004; Hajer 2004).

There is a growing body of literature that provides an alternative approach to critically analyse policy making practices. This article attempted to contribute to these insights with the analyses of policy making practices on the policy issue of ‘good governance’ in the ministry of foreign affairs. The article has focused on the institutional politics which pervades policy making processes. Furthermore, the case study shows the importance of two aspects of discourse in policy processes. In the first place, the analysis of policy formation on issues of good governance under the rule of two ministers has shown the importance of discursive argumentation. There is no such thing as a stable, static hegemonic discourse, on the contrary, this political hegemony is unstable and fragile. As discourses are derived from moral or ideological positions, and thus are inherently political, these views of the good society continuously compete (Fischer 2003). The often contradictory configuration of storylines is constantly negotiated and contested by other discourses. In discursive argumentation analysis, both the storylines that construct the discourse and its claim for legitimacy should be deconstructed. It is shown that although structural-functionalist assumptions on the policy process are increasingly criticized, these assumptions are still social practice in the struggle for legitimization and the maintenance of the existing institutional order. Secondly, the use of linguistic devices such as mobilizing metaphors and vague concepts functions to mobilise and maintain support and to create and keep unity and coalitions within the organization.
To conclude, this case study uncovered in the policy process. As policy making is a process of continuous discursive argumentation, the formation and negotiation of discourses and counter-discourses is a continuous process in institutional politics. However, all-encompassing concepts that are vague and ill-defined draws a veil over the struggle for the ‘power to define’. This makes it difficult to criticize policy practices as they are hidden behind legitimacy claims. More insight into policy practices can improve the debate on policy.

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Dutch translations

1 ‘Het is een product van zowel het denken in termen van ‘de triomf van de Westerse democratie’, het neo-liberalisme, de mensenrechtenbeweging, de internationale rechtsorde als de herontdekking van politiek en wetenschap van het belang van instituties en functionalistisch denken’ (WRR 2001: 18).

2 ‘Voorzitter! Al in 1990 werd in de nota “Een wereld van verschil” naast de behoefte aan hulp tot uitdrukking komend in de mate van armoede, de mate van overeenstemming met het beleid van de ontvangende landen als belangrijk criterium voor de keuze van landen geformuleerd. Die overeenstemming zou volgens de nota van Pronk zowel het economisch beleid als het sociaal-politieke beleid moeten betreffen, inclusief het mensenrechtenbeleid, het beleid gericht op vrouwen, sociaal zwakkere bevolkingsgroepen en minderheden, alsmede het milieubeleid. Wat de vermindering van armoede, het hoofddoel van het Nederlandse ontwikkelingsbeleid betreft, staat al in de nota “Een wereld van geschil”, van drie jaar later, hoe belangrijk het is dat overheden in ontwikkelingslanden zelf de noodzaak van armoedebestrijding onderkennen en dienovereenkomstig handelen. Niets nieuws dus dat wij vooral landen willen helpen die bereid zijn zichzelf te helpen. De criteria goed beleid, goed bestuur en behoefte aan hulp ofwel mate van armoede, komen dus niet zomaar uit de lucht vallen’ (TK 33, 1998: 2375-76).


4 ‘Sinds het einde van de jaren ’80 is veel nadruk gelegd op het belang van goed bestuur. Dit gedachtegoed kwam op als een reactie op problemen in de centraal geleide economieën in Midden- en Oost-Europa en ontwikkelingslanden, m.n. in Latijns-Amerika en Sub-Sahara Afrika. Het inzicht groeide dat in veel gevallen overheden hadden gefaald om hun macht en middelen zodanig aan te wenden dat economische groei en verdeling van de welvaart evenwichtig en duurzaam kon worden bevorderd…Het belang van goed bestuur nam voorts toe door processen van globalisering die ingrepen in de economische omgeving van staten…De contouren worden zichtbaar van een mondiale markt en een samenleving waarin staatsgrenzen aan betekenis inboeten en waarin verschuivingen zichtbaar worden tussen de economische en politieke componenten van de staatsmacht. In dit krachtenveld neemt het vermogen van de individuele staat tot zelfstandig reguleren van nationale ontwikkelingen steeds verder af’ (intern beleidsdocument versie 7 september 1998)


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8 ‘De aandacht voor goed bestuur in de uitvoering van beleid door bovengenoemde actoren neemt toe. Deze aandacht weerspiegelt bestaande verschillen in visie op de functie van goed bestuur als middel om uiteenlopende beleidsdoelennaderbij te brengen. De geldstroom die met de bevordering van goed bestuur zijn gemoed lopen zeer uiteen. De bevordering van bepaalde aspecten van goed bestuur gaat gepaard met een grote inzet van financiele en technische middelen, terwijl andere aspecten minder zijn bedoeld. Het IMF rekent de ontwikkeling van private en overheidsfinanciën, de rechtsstaat, het afleggen van rekenschap over de publieke sector en het aanpakken van corruptie tot zijn werkterrein, vanwege het belang van deze zaken voor macro-economische stabiliteit. De Wereldbank beschouwt een efficiënte overheidsapparaat, het afleggen van verantwoording, doorzichtige besluitvorming en spelregels voor het economisch verkeer als zaken van goed bestuur. Bilaterale donoren hanteren in OESO/DAC verband de breedste definitie van goed bestuur, waarin participatie van de bevolking in bestuur en beleidsvoorbereiding alsmede de reductie van militaire uitgaven zijn opgenomen’ (ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken 1998)

9 ‘Globalisering en de tanende macht van de individuele staat maken het bevorderen van goed bestuur en maatschappelijke ontwikkeling op een strikt nationale grondslag tot een hachelijke zaak. Nationale en internationale aspecten van goed bestuur hangen nauw met elkaar samen. Grensoverschrijdende gevolgen van slecht bestuur (ook vanuit industrielanden), slinkende ODA-budgetten, groeiend internationaal particulier kapitaal en de urgentie van goed bestuur voor ontwikkelings- en transitiegebieden geven aanleiding tot het voeren van een Nederlands buitenlands beleid dat rekening houdt met deze samenhang. Vanuit deze optiek kan Nederland zowel het aanbod van goed bestuur (output van de staat) als de vraag naar goed bestuur (output van de samenleving) stimuleren’ (ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken 1998: 3)

10 ‘het komt mij voor dat u enkele aspecten ten onrechte niet in uw analyse heeft betrokken, en het verbaast me enigszins dat u door uw begeleiders binnen het ministerie niet op deze omissies bent gewezen’ (brief van de minister voor ontwikkelingssamenwerking 10 april 2002).
onvoldoende recht is gedaan aan het specifieke karakter van de politieke context waarbinnen een minister en een ministerie functioneren. Vergelijkingen met besluitvormingsprocessen binnen meer autonome organisaties zijn niet zonder meer relevant. Een minister functioneert niet als ‘management board’; als er al sprake is van een dergelijke structuur (in uw woorden: the managers of the bureaucracy, who hold legitimate power) dan bestaat die board uit de hoogste ambtenaren binnen een ministerie. De minister is per definitie geen bureaucratisch manager de minister is, binnen de parameters van het regeerakkoord, verantwoordelijk voor het formuleren van beleid. Die verantwoordelijkheid is politiek van aard, d.w.z. verantwoording dient te worden afgelegd aan het parlement (nb. dus niet aan het eigen apparaat). Het ambtelijk apparaat draagt die verantwoordelijkheid niet, maar staat de minister ten dienste bij het uitvoeren van het geformuleerde beleid. Iets meer begrip voor deze realiteiten zou de kwaliteit van uw onderzoek m.i. nog hebben kunnen verhogen’ (brief van de minister voor ontwikkelingssamenwerking 10 april 2002).

Het wekt in dat kader enige verbazing dat u aan de ambtenaren van dit ministerie stelselmatig refereert als ‘policy-makers’. Het kan zijn dat het hier om een semantisch probleem gaat; niettemin is, hoewel ambtenaren in veel gevallen optreden als beleids-adviseurs, ‘policy-making’ in ons systeem voorbehouden aan de minister, die daarover verantwoording aflegt aan het parlement… ‘het bevreemdt dat juist degenen die good governance tamelijk exclusief definiëren als mensenrechten en democratie zo weinig begrip aan de dag leggen voor de inrichting van het democratisch bestel in Nederland’. (brief van het secretariaat van de minister voor ontwikkelingssamenwerking, 10 april 2002). De Nederlandse democratie zit nu eenmaal zo in elkaar dat ambtenaren zich dienen te beperken tot het uitvoeren van het door de regering vastgestelde beleid en zich dienen te onthouden van het openlijk vraagteken plaatsen bij dat beleid’ (brief van de minister voor ontwikkelingssamenwerking 10 april 2002)

‘Goed bestuur en goed beleid impliceert – ook volgens het regeerakkoord – dat we ons richten op regeringen’ Wel is het zo, dat ik van mening was (en blijf) dat good governance per definitie ook dient te zien op de kwaliteit van sociaal-economisch beleid. Expertise daaromtrent was en is niet aanwezig bij DMD (thans DMV), maar ligt bij andere directies. Mijn inzet is steeds geweest om tot een integrale benadering te komen; monopolisering van de discussie door DMD, met nadruk op ‘politieke’ kanten van governance, kon niet aan de orde zijn’ (brief van het secretariaat van de minister voor ontwikkelingssamenwerking, 10 april 2002)