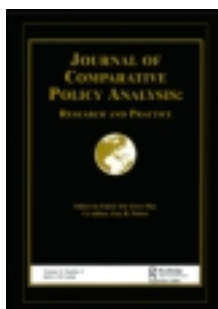


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Michael Howlett^a & Jeremy Rayner^b

^a Department of Political Science, Simon Fraser University, Canada

^b Department of Political Science, University of Regina, Canada

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Third Generation Policy Diffusion Studies and the Analysis of Policy Mixes: Two Steps Forward and One Step Back?

MICHAEL HOWLETT* and JEREMY RAYNER**

*Department of Political Science, Simon Fraser University, Canada; **Department of Political Science, University of Regina, Canada

ABSTRACT *Three features of Gilardi and Meseguer's recent announcement of the start of a "third generation" of diffusion research in Europe require evaluation. First, conceptualization of policy diffusion is considered a task completed by the first two "generations". Second, the work of the second generation is located against the background of globalization, democratization and the trend towards the adoption of market instruments. And, third, methodological sophistication is equated with the development of large-n empirical methodologies. Each of these features is discussed in turn. We argue that diffusion studies remain seriously hindered by a lack of clarity about the dependent variable under examination; second, that the peculiar interest of the second generation in measuring the impact of large scale diffusion mechanisms such as democratization, globalization and market orientation has led to an unfortunate focus on the adoption of particular instruments and "settings" as the sole indicators of diffusion; and third, that when we expand "what" is being diffused to include policy goals and objectives, advancing beyond the second generation requires a more plural methodological framework sensitive to context, including both the thick descriptions and the comparative small-n case studies which were a feature of earlier "first" and "second" generation studies. These points are illustrated with contemporary examples involving the development and diffusion of new "integrated" and "coherent" mixes of regulatory and market instruments in the form of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) in Europe.*

Michael Howlett is the Burnaby Mountain Professor in the Department of Political Science at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, Canada. His research on various aspects of public policy, and administration, environmental and natural resource policy and other topics has been published in many journals. He has written or edited 20 books, most recently (with Keith Brownsey) *Canada's Resource Economy in Transition* (Toronto: Emonds Montgomery, 2008). He received his PhD from Queen's University at Kingston, Canada.

Jeremy Rayner is Associate Professor of Political Science and Department Head at the University of Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. He has published widely on resource and environmental issues and is currently involved with several large scale research projects related to Integrated Land Management in Western Canada sponsored by the Sustainable Forest Management National Centre of Excellence at the University of Alberta. He received his PhD from the University of British Columbia.

Correspondence Address: Michael Howlett, Department of Political Science, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby BC, Canada V5A 1S6. Email: howlett@sfu.ca; Jeremy Rayner, Department of Political Science, Malaspina University College, Nanaimo BC Canada V9R 5S5. Email: rayner@mala.bc.ca

Introduction

Gilardi and Meseguer, in a series of recent works on the state of policy diffusion studies in Europe (Gilardi 2005, Gilardi *et al.* 2005, Meseguer 2005, 2006), have proposed a genealogical metaphor for the evolution of these studies, starting with first generation efforts at conceptualization, proceeding through the second generation's project to empirically test various hypothetical diffusion mechanisms, and arriving at a third generation attempting to come to terms with the rather messy picture of uneven diffusion and complex diffusion mechanisms bequeathed by their (metaphorical) predecessors. Like similar accounts in other areas of policy studies (Goggin *et al.* 1990), this metaphor has some advantages in pointing out advances in the field, but also serious disadvantages in suggesting that the earlier work has now been surpassed and may safely be ignored.

Three features of the Gilardi/Meseguer account of the challenges facing third generation diffusion research stand out. First, conceptualization of policy diffusion is considered a task completed by the first generation in work undertaken prior to 1980, studies that grappled with the idea of "policy learning" and "policy transfer" as real empirical phenomena (Walker 1969, Wilensky 1975, DeLeon 1979). Second, the work of the second generation in the period 1980–2000 is thought to have identified many of the basic mechanisms through which diffusion occurs – policy emulation, harmonization, lesson drawing and others (Rose 1991, 1993, Bennett 1991, Wolman 1992, Stone 1994, Dobbin *et al.* 2007). Finally, third generation studies are equated with sophisticated quantitative methodologies and large-n empirical studies which are proposed as the most productive way forward for diffusion research (Gilardi 2005, Meseguer 2005).

This paper discusses each of these features in turn. We argue, first, that the development of diffusion studies continues to be seriously hindered by a lack of clarity about the dependent variable; "what" is being diffused is sometimes lost in the concern for "how" diffusion takes place. Adequate conceptualization of the dependent variable in diffusion studies was by no means completed by the first generation and remains as important as ever. Second, we argue that the emphasis of the third generation on specific individual policy elements tends to obscure the fact that much policy development involves not so much the development of new policy instruments and revised instrument settings but new instrument "mixes" and policy styles which combine state and market-based procedural and substantive instruments in new ways. Thirdly, we argue that when we expand "what" is being diffused to include policy goals and objectives as well as instruments and settings, a more pluralistic approach to methods is called for, an approach that is sensitive to the role that the larger context plays in determining the meaning of the adoption or non-adoption of particular policy elements. These methods will include both thick descriptions and comparative case studies as well as large-n quantitative studies.

To illustrate these points we connect third generation diffusion studies with contemporary developments in politics and policy, notably the emergence and diffusion of new ideas and plans for "integrated" mixes of regulatory and market instruments such as those featured in many novel new governance arrangements (Evers and Wintersberger 1990, Evers 2005, Pierre and Peters 2005). To provide examples of the kinds of conceptual and methodological challenges that are posed to diffusion studies by the rise of these new policy mixes, we look specifically at the diffusion of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) in Europe (Howlett and Rayner 2006a, 2006b).

Understanding the development and diffusion of these “new governance arrangements”, we argue, illustrates the need to include a place for alternate methodologies to large-n studies of policy components or “settings” in “third generation” diffusion studies.

The Limits of Third Generation Diffusion Studies

A key problem that has affected third generation diffusion studies is a continuing confusion about the dependent variable or what is changing and/or diffusing in these studies. Sometimes the ambition is to track very large scale changes in policy regimes or a “new regulatory order” directly and sometimes to study components of these regimes, such as privatization policies, or key institutions such as independent regulatory agencies or independent central banks that may be used as indicators of the spread of a new policy regime (Eisner 1994, Coleman 1996, King 2005). Other studies look at associated “policy styles” such as adversarial legalism or the accountability movement (Vogel 1986, Kagan 1991, Howlett 2000). Still other studies look at the adoption of specific policy instruments such as the “new environmental policy instruments” (NEPIs) that have been so closely observed in the European context, or even instrument settings like tax rates (Zito *et al.* 2003, Knill and Lenschow 2005). All are described as “elements” of something called policy and, sometimes, as “policy” itself. Whatever the subject of study, “it” is assumed to be the kind of phenomenon that is both subject to change but also capable of preserving its essential identity both in the face of change and across different contexts, such that its dispersal across these contexts could usefully be characterized as the “diffusion” of a policy or policy element.

This confusion of units or levels of analysis, however, makes it very difficult to develop a clear and coherent theory of policy diffusion. Some clarification of the nature of the dependent variable is still in order.

Conceptualizing the Dependent Variable: Enduring Lessons of the First Generation

Peter Hall’s (1993) widely cited discussion of social learning was important to the literature on policy change and policy dynamics for a number of reasons, not least the distinctions it drew between the means and ends of policy making and between the more abstract and the more concrete aspects of policy outputs (Daugbjerg 1997, Campbell 1998, Daugbjerg and Marsh 1998). As is well known, Hall identified three types or “orders” of change: first order change in which only the *settings* or calibrations of policy instruments vary; second order change in which the *types of instruments* used to effect policy are changed; and third order change in which the *goals of policy* are altered.¹

Hall’s approach was rightly hailed as a significant development in policy theory because it focused attention on better defining what had been a conflated dependent variable (“policy”) in most previous discussions of policy dynamics (Heclo 1976, Hogwood and Peters 1983). It became possible to link theories of policy change to different orders or levels of policy dynamics, revealing that dynamics at different levels could have very different causal explanations. Indeed, Hall argued that third-order change could only be triggered by broad scale societal learning, while first and second order change could occur endogenously through policy learning.

However, Hall’s early model was inductively constructed and did not set out a logic for understanding the range of different policy components that are likely to be

found. Building on Hall, and drawing largely on resource policy examples, Howlett (2001), Howlett and Ramesh (2003), Cashore and Howlett (2006), and Rayner *et al.* (2001) have developed a slightly more complex set of levels or measures of policy components but one with a clearer logic of means and ends.

As Hernes (1976) has pointed out in the context of a general discussion of sociological change processes, change can involve not only changes in outputs (policy specifications) but also changes in inputs (goals). Table 1 identifies three aspects of substantive policy ends or goals and three aspects of policy means which can now be distinguished from each other and analysed independently with respect to change.

These levels of policy outputs vary according to their degree of abstraction, ranging from the most abstract conceptual ideas, to programme operationalization, and finally to the concrete specifics of policy implementation. Hence, both policy foci (“ends” and “means”) contain distinct conceptual ideas, operational objectives and policy specifications. Howlett (2001) calls the latter, instrument “components”, while Hall (1993) refers to them as “calibrations” or “settings”. Means change must be distinguished from ends change because the same types of instruments can be used at either level. In other words, a change in instrument will sometimes be evidence of a change in goals and at other times not. Far from signalling the abandonment of a policy goal, for example, instrument change may sometimes be evidence for a determination to pursue the same goal more vigorously by replacing an instrument judged to have been a failure. Similarly it is important to disentangle policy specifications at the level of ends, such as a change in taxation rate, which can

Table 1. A modified taxonomy of policy measures following Hall (1993; cells contain examples of each measure)

		Policy Inputs and Output		
		Conceptual Ideas	Operationalized Objectives	Implementation Targets
Policy Focus	Ends	Overall Policy Goals (e.g. Environmental protection, Economic development)	Policy Objectives (e.g. saving fish; increase harvesting)	Policy Level Specification (e.g. size of riparian no harvesting zone, level of speed limit)
	Means	Overall Approach to Policy Implementation (e.g. choice between use of coercive-suasion)	Policy Instruments (e.g. Voluntary Market-based Command and Control Based)	Implementation Level Specifications (e.g. posting speed limit signs and police enforcement/signs or published written down requirements or guidelines regulations, inspections, fines)

Source: Cashore and Howlett (2006).

sometimes reflect a major shift in policy goals and objectives (as occurs, for instance, when high marginal tax rates are reduced in response to a perceived “brain drain” or to a desire to increase earnings differentials on ideological grounds) versus a relatively unimportant change in the means implementation-level specifications, such as altering the date when your tax return might be due (Linder and Peters 1989, Majone 1989). Distinguishing policy ends from means and, most importantly, the three aspects of each, is key to analyzing policy change and stability (Smith 2000).

Thus our first challenge to the third generation of diffusion studies is to demonstrate an improved awareness of these general problems of policy dynamics (Baumgartner and Jones 1993, Sabatier and Jenkins Smith 1993). Diffusion studies must carefully distinguish between these types of change (and not simply elide them) because there is ample evidence that suggests that the processes of change, and hence any diffusion mechanisms, are distinct for each type (Scruse and Sheate 2002, Lafferty and Hovden 2003, Bressers *et al.* 2004).

The Consequences of a Focus on Individual Policy Elements

Even more seriously for the theory of policy diffusion, however, these examples also suggest that the diffusion of a new instrument or setting may have diametrically opposed meanings in different contexts. Thus, the third generation aspiration to build and test models of policy diffusion using large-n studies has had the unfortunate effect of creating pressure to simplify the relationship between elements of a policy style and even the elements themselves. Again, this deliberate simplification of the interrelated elements of a complex reality is deeply ironic, since the field of diffusion studies itself is built on the recognition that policy regimes do not develop in isolation from one another but display a kind of interdependence over time across national and sub-national levels (Elkins and Simmons 2005).

Of course it is true that all model building involves simplification of a more complex reality. The key concern is to determine when this simplification reduces the usefulness of the model in helping to understand the underlying relationships that are under examination. The very elements that Meseguer and Gilardi (2009) find interesting in second generation studies and propose to use as the foundation for third generation developments, unfortunately, are those that tend to emphasize this oversimplified picture of “policy” and its constituents.

As an example of what is at stake here, consider the opening arguments of a typical large-n diffusion study, Gilardi *et al.* (2005) on health care reforms in OECD countries. The authors begin by noting the embeddedness of health policy and health care reform in the broader context of literature on the welfare state and its changes. They refer to the argument of Jacob Hacker (2004a) that changes in the complex of policies and institutions that we call “the welfare state” are complicated by patterns of decisions and non-decisions that create policy change – *and are often intended to create change* – even when policy elements remain the same. However, the authors immediately drop this insight in favour of a discussion of the issues around the diffusion of health care reforms. These are generally understood as the adoption of similar new policies and institutions in different countries and the subject of the paper turns out, in fact, to be the diffusion of four specific policy adoptions: increased cost sharing, a greater role for private health insurance, new methods of hospital financing and the introduction of

reference pricing for drugs. All of these are policy instrument “settings” or calibrations, the fine-grained aspects of the implementation targets listed in Table 1.

Our point here is a simple one. While it might be possible to study decisions, using a large-n framework in cases of observable policy adoptions of instruments and settings at the level of policy means, the interesting dependent variable in this case is policy change on a larger scale, involving not just implementation targets but also operationalized objectives. More significantly still, the real interest of the research is whether the pattern of adoptions is evidence of a change in the goals and dominant ideas in health care policy. So, while Gilardi *et al.* (2005) acknowledge the general direction of the welfare state literature and the larger questions of health care reform, what we actually learn from their paper is limited to the pattern of the adoption of some new instruments and some changed settings in a number of countries. Whether this limited focus reveals anything of significance about policy diffusion in the larger and more interesting sense depends completely on the contextual features of their adoption in the various jurisdictions studied – if they are linked to or symptomatic of large scale change, then they are more interesting than if they (merely) represent very limited, marginal micro-level alterations in policy trajectories (Gilardi 2005).

The Need to Bring the Policy Mix Back In

For us, then, a critical conclusion of the second generation focus on diffusion mechanisms and the foundation for a productive third generation of diffusion studies is that many policy areas, if not all, feature the use of multiple policy tools or policy instruments combined into a larger unit, be it a “regulatory regime”, “policy style”, or other similar effort at articulating an overall policy “strategy” or design. The question and direction of policy change and the understanding of policy dynamics such as lesson drawing or diffusion depend on the specific combinations of these instruments and upon contextual features of their employment. As Hacker and others have shown, these policy regimes or mixes have typically been developed haphazardly through a process in which new tools and objectives have been piled on top of older ones, creating a palimpsest-like mixture of policy elements. Complex policy mixes based on historical accretion are very common and have often been examined in the policy literature (Evers and Wintersberger 1990, Hacker 2004a, 2004b, Evers 2005). They often serve as the empirical basis for the popular model of policy dynamics based on notions of path dependence – that is, policy as the outcome of a series of more or less random conditions that combine over time to produce a locked-in trajectory of events (in this case, policy making) which, although very often suboptimal, can be exceptionally difficult to change (Pierson 2000, Greener 2002, Howlett and Rayner 2006c).

These are not new insights and there has been plenty of time for them to be reflexively incorporated into policy making itself. For example, in an effort to break out of path dependency, policy makers have increasingly turning to complex policy mixes that have been designed, rather than incrementally developed (Meijers and Stead 2004, Stead and Meijers 2004, Briassoulis 2005). The explicit goal of these new designs – which can be termed “integrated policy strategies” – is optimization and the avoidance of contradictory or conflicting mixes of policy tools (Gunningham *et al.* 1998, Gunningham and Sinclair 1999).²

A common theme in this literature is the pervasive presence of institutional obstacles to making a new start and the difficulty of preventing integrative strategies from simply adding new layers of complexity, duplication and ambiguity to often suboptimal mixes of goals and instruments. The ambition of third generation diffusion studies to contribute to better policy design in complex, historically entrenched policy areas such as health care, pension reform, international trade regimes and financial regulation can only be achieved if diffusion studies are capable of linking the adoption of policy elements to the larger context of the policy mix.

Elements of a High Level Analysis of the Role of Policy Mixes in Diffusion Studies

Thus, the real challenge for a new generation of diffusion studies is to develop not only the conceptual clarity and the methodological sophistication needed to identify changes in policy settings, but also the techniques for understanding the influences of diffusion on other elements of policy and, more importantly, on the diagnosis of the origins and ills of existing policy mixes and the design and development of new ones and of governance strategies in general (Eliadis *et al.* 2004).

Overall, there are four basic types of policy mixes (see Table 2). They differ in terms of whether or not their main components (ends and means) are internally consistent and mutually reinforcing, or not (Scrase and Sheate 2002, Lafferty and Hovden 2003, Thomas 2003, May *et al.* 2005a, 2005b).

These four types (see Table 3) correspond very closely to four processes identified in the literature for how mixes arise (Hacker 2005). These processes are:

- *Layering* – in which new ends and means are simply added to existing ones, without abandoning the previous ones, a process which has been linked to both incoherence amongst the policy ends and inconsistency with respect to policy means (Howlett and Rayner 1995, Rayner *et al.* 2001).
- *Drift* – in which policy ends change while policy means remain unchanged, a process through which means become inconsistent with respect to changed ends and most likely ineffective in achieving them (Torenvlied and Akkerman 2004).

Table 2. Typology of policy mixes

		Policy Means are	
		Consistent	Inconsistent
Policy Ends are	Coherent	Optimal	Ineffective
	Incoherent	Misdirected	Failed or Sub-Optimal

Table 3. Typology of policy mix processes and outcomes

		Policy Means are	
		Consistent	Inconsistent
Policy Ends are	Coherent	Replacement (Optimal)	Drift (Ineffective)
	Incoherent	Conversion (Misdirected)	Layering (Failed or Sub-Optimal)

- *Conversion* – in which there is an attempt to change the mix of policy means in order to meet additional new goals which have (self)-evolved, often resulting in misdirected policy efforts (Falkenmark 2004, Hacker 2004a).
- *Replacement/Design* – in which there is a conscious effort made to create or fundamentally restructure both the means and ends of policy so that they are consistent and coherent in terms of their goals and means orientations (Gunningham and Sinclair 1999, Eliadis *et al.* 2004).

Understanding how policy mixes arise and change will mean abandoning the attempt to disaggregate policy change into the study of the adoption or rejection of isolated policy components and doing justice to the contextual features that turn a collection of goals and implementation preferences, instruments and objectives, and targets and settings into a “policy”. This is a challenge for all studies of policy dynamics, including those which focus on the diffusion of policy innovations and changes across jurisdictional and other borders.

Just as is the case with instruments and settings, both the substance of integrated strategies (IS) and the means of its design or achievement can be transferred across governments, sectors or borders. The possibilities for policy change via diffusion or any other means in each case varies and depends on a number of well understood processes underlying policy dynamics in each area: such as increasing returns and other kinds of positive feedback; sunk costs; the level of institutionalization of an existing mix (Pierson 2000, 2004), as well as involvement and activities of different kinds of organized interests (Baumgartner and Jones 1993, May *et al.* 2005a, 2005b). Such factors affect the ability of any policy innovation or change to affect a policy mix (Howlett and Ramesh 2002, Knill and Lehmkuhl 2002, Lutz 2003).

Awareness of the complexity and interrelatedness of policy making was a hallmark of many second generation studies (Underdal 1980). Thus, a key challenge for a new generation of studies of policy diffusion is to preserve that awareness, resisting the temptation to always decompose the dependent variable into only isolated sets of instruments and a multitude of possible “settings”.

Any account of the diffusion of policy mixes must take into account a complex set of relationships beyond the decisions to adopt or not to adopt various policy instruments or characteristic settings. Different historical trajectories will create distinctive challenges based on the extent to which a mix is effectively a new policy design or the integration of existing policy elements with varying degrees of existing coherence and consistency (see for example the set of case studies contained in Sadler 2005). Complex issues of network management and institutional co-ordination must at least be recognized and addressed by third generation diffusion studies if the mechanisms and propensities for change in policy mixes is to be understood (Metcalf 2000, Klijn and Koppenjan 2006).

The following short case study of integrated coastal zone management is intended to illustrate the problems posed in tracking the diffusion of such complex policy changes and the need for traditional process tracing and small-n studies to supplement large-n studies if their dynamics are to be revealed. It is not intended to be a diffusion study but rather a demonstration of the problems inherent in the third generation attempt to track diffusion through the adoption of particular instruments and settings without regard to key features of the context of their adoption or non-adoption.

Case Study: Integrated Coastal Zone Management in Europe and North America

Efforts to (re)design existing policy mixes are enjoying a certain currency in contemporary resource and environmental policy making. Governments and resource industries often see the benefits of improved integration in terms of improved efficiencies that provide some new room to resolve resource-use conflicts. Environmentalists have also converged on designing or redesigning existing policy mixes as a way of operationalizing (and optimizing) some of the insights of ecology with respect to connectivity in ecosystems, for example with respect to issues such as the identification and mitigation of cumulative impacts. Integrative strategies that operate in resource and environmental policy areas have been termed, “Natural Resource New Governance Arrangement” (NRNGAs) (Howlett and Rayner 2006b).

While NRNGAs hold out great promise, they are difficult to implement effectively. Policy integration in these cases faces all the challenges discussed in the preceding sections. Poorly designed NRNGAs will only compound the problems of layering, drift and conversion that already characterize so many resource regimes, problems that have the potential to impose extra costs on industry, damaging competitiveness without mitigating environmental impacts. Poor emulation or diffusion, for example, may impose “cookie cutter” procedures across a diverse range of contexts and circumstances, encouraging merely formal compliance and hindering innovation (Scheraga and Furlow 2001). Whether or not the strategies and the lessons learned in their implementation can be successfully diffused across jurisdictions and sectors, therefore, is a key question for diffusion studies, but one which is very ill suited to exploration via large-n study techniques.

What is being diffused in the case of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM)?

In the case of coastal zone management construction of a new policy object, “the coastal zone” was made with the help of a typical international epistemic community of a kind found in many similar policy areas, their efforts ultimately bearing fruit in the Noordwijk guidelines (Hovik and Stokke 2007). Developed under the aegis of the World Bank, the guidelines identified a series of key principles that have remained the cornerstone of contemporary ICZM. They include a focus on intersectoral co-ordination rather than traditional sector-by-sector management; holistic, multi-disciplinary ecosystem-based planning; a dynamic, continuous, evolutionary and iterative attempt to solve complex problems; and the creation of new governance structures to accommodate meaningful stakeholder participation and conflict resolution (Post and Lundin 1996).

The progress of ICZM initiatives is a particularly useful example of the difficulties of applying the idea of “diffusion” to a policy mix. At a conceptual level, the spread of ICZM is difficult to track because of continuing expert disagreement about what constitutes having an *integrated* CZM policy in the first place. Many jurisdictions have engaged in coastal zone planning and management for decades without necessarily reaching the degree of integration that would identify their efforts as an example of a NGA. While this familiar process of borrowing instruments and

settings may well be amenable to investigation using “third generation” techniques, it is not at all clear whether the diffusion of these techniques amounts to ICZM.

Thus, the apparently clear-cut situation in the US, where 34 out of 35 eligible states and territories are currently in compliance with the 1972 federal Coastal Zone Management Act and receiving federal funding for CZM programmes, for example, could certainly be the subject of a third generation large-n study. It would be relatively simple to conduct a classic diffusion analysis of the passage of CZM legislation in the states and territories and the subsequent recognition of the states’ CZM programmes as conforming to the 1972 Act by the federal authorities, starting with Washington State in 1976. With a little more effort, it would be possible to analyse the diffusion of particular elements of these programmes, such as Nonpoint Pollution Management plans, Marine Protected Areas and Watershed Management. However, none of these elements by themselves address the issue of overall policy design or strategy and these techniques do not aid in the understanding of the general differences found in the ideas and practices underlying ICZM in different states (or countries). In fact, the third generation studies in themselves would not be able to discern the difference between the layering of instrument elements one on top of the other over the years, attempts to focus on particular practices of CZM while the risks to coastal zones change (policy drift), or attempts to address these risks by the conversion of other policies, such as water quality standards, towards CZM goals (Pew Oceans Commission 2003, McKenna and Cooper 2006).

Studying the diffusion of ICZM in Europe raises similar problems with third generation methods. In many countries, there was experimentation with new instrument mixes on the one hand and strategic approaches on the other, before the two were combined into something recognizable as an NRNGA (Stead and McGlashan 2006). This creates a considerable initial difficulty in tracking policy convergence. Like the US states, many European jurisdictions engaged in coastal zone planning and management for decades before reaching the degree of integration that would identify their efforts as an example of a NGA. In short, the meaning of the adoption of particular policy elements, including general statements of policy goals, for the character of the policy regime as a whole, remains unclear.

As an attempt at crafting a NRNGA, rather than as a local planning tool, ICZM in Europe dates from the latter half of the 1990s, after the Oceans chapter of Agenda 21 had given new direction to existing coastal management efforts (Cicin Sain and Knecht 1998). Significant progress had already been made in the plans put in place under the aegis of the UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan. Others were created or revitalized by an EU Demonstration Programme that provided funding for a number of projects and, equally important, for evaluation of the outputs (Humphrey and Burbridge 1999). Still others were the outcome of regional co-operation in shared coastal waters such as the Baltic, the Wadden Sea and the North Sea (Anker *et al.* 2004, Burbridge 2004, Schernewski 2002). In the Netherlands, for obvious reasons a leader in the field, an interdepartmental discussion paper in 1999 produced policy commitments in 2000. In the UK, another leader, the 2002 *Seas of Change* consultation was followed in 2004 by the EU’s first ICZM “stocktaking” and a commitment to provide legislative authority for ICZM in the next parliament. Ireland produced a Draft Policy on CZM in 1997 but the Bantry Bay process, though generally agreed to be one of the more successful products of the EU

Demonstration Programme, remains a relatively isolated example (DGENV 2005, King 2003).

Exactly when countries developed such plans, however, remains difficult to pinpoint. A 1999 study of EU coastal states plus Norway found an uneven pattern of ICZM implementation (Table 4); distinguishing between plans that were fully implemented, those merely formulated, and those under development in the pre-formulation stage. This can be contrasted with the completely different pattern found in a 2005 European Commission study which asked countries when they began their ICZM efforts (see Table 5).

The stubborn persistence of what many countries want to call ICZM but what amounts to little more than a local planning tool rather than a true NGA has not gone unnoticed: “[the] characterization of ICZM in Europe, whereby ICZM is seen as emerging in rather isolated pockets as a response to local situations and in the absence of or without connection to institutional arrangements at more central levels of government has much in common with community based coastal management scenarios described for tropical developing countries” (Humphrey and Burbridge 2003: 160). Yet determining exactly when a policy innovation occurred is an essential prerequisite for any further study of diffusion of particular instruments and settings.

Uncovering the starting point for ICZM initiatives in Europe is simply not possible using purely large-n instrument adoption studies. Such a study would have to begin by examining the development of the sets of ideas which lay behind these initiatives, much as has been done in the past in many first and second generation diffusion studies. It would reveal that, in the European context, there were three broad movements of ideas during the 1990s that are relevant to understanding the kinds of instrument mixes that are found in ICZM. The first, *reflexive regulation*, was a response to the widely canvassed belief that the increasing complexity of the goals towards which governments aim has rendered the old kind of prescriptive “rule following” regulation obsolete. Even if policy makers know enough to prescribe rules – and scientific uncertainty often means that they do not – they ought to encourage the subjects of regulation to engage in strategic thinking rather than rule-following behaviour. Policy mixes that focus on managing risk through the use of process standards like EMS are an example of this approach to regulation, as are

Table 4. State of ICZM in European coastal regions, 1999

Countries with at least one coastal region where ICZM was Under development	Formulated	Fully implemented
Belgium	France	Netherlands
Denmark	Greece	United Kingdom
Finland	Italy	
Germany		
Ireland		
Norway		
Poland		
Spain		
Sweden		

Source: Van Elburg-Velinova *et al.* (1999: 15).

Table 5. Self-reported start of strategic ICZM activity (EC DGENV 2005)

1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Lithuania*	Belgium*			Malta		Latvia*	Cyprus Germany Greece Romania Spain United Kingdom	Finland France Sweden*

*Countries not intending to meet the 2006 target for a national ICZM strategy.
Source: ECDGENV 2005.

reporting requirements that aim to generate information to which the subjects of regulation can respond.

A second set of ideas falls under the heading of *regulatory pluralism*, and includes the “smart regulation” movement. Regulatory pluralists believe that, in most circumstances, a mix of complementary policy instruments and a broad array of government and non-government “regulators” will produce better outcomes than the old single instrument, government/industry regulatory relationship. The focus here is often on using informal mechanisms of social control, such as “social license” from affected communities, certification by international standards organizations, oversight by commercial third parties like financial institutions, and self-regulation. Where more traditional forms of regulation are deemed necessary, they often involve “backstopping” the informal mechanisms with performance and process standards that are less prescriptive than those used in the past but still function to prevent the laggards falling below minimum levels of sustainable management (Jorgensen and Larsen 1997, Gunningham *et al.* 1998, Gunningham and Sinclair 2002).

Finally, the idea of new governance involves *regulatory reconfiguration* affecting the roles played by the engagement of actors from outside traditional government and business regulatory nexus, including new kinds of partnerships (Kernaghan 1993, Dahlberg 2005) and looser modes of co-ordination through networks. Specifically, these partnerships usually embrace more than just government and industry and sometimes do not involve governments at all, such as “green alliances” with NGOs and communities or supply-chain partnerships between businesses. In the latter case, governments may still play critical roles in facilitating, supporting and rewarding partners. Voluntary agreements between governments and businesses are, of course, widely used in many European countries especially as a way of encouraging companies to do more than regulations may require (Jordan *et al.* 2003).

Studying the diffusion of ICZM or other such policy mixes by tracking the diffusion of distinctive policy instruments or settings would not pick up on the significance of any of these ideas and objectives. To do so would require a great deal of “scene setting” of the kind provided by traditional policy narratives and small-n comparative studies of similarly situated states before we can be sure that we have captured the diffusion of anything of real interest.

Conclusion

In one sense, the story of ICZM is a familiar one. A group of international scientific experts, with many of the features of an epistemic community, converge on the idea of the need for more integrated planning and management for a new policy object, in this case the “coastal zone” (Ladi 2000, Stone 2001). The integrated strategy design that they propose is a complex mixture of old and new policy instruments tied to ambitious new goals, such as ecosystem management. Some of the traditional instruments of CZM are still in place but redirected towards these new goals. For example, protected areas, both terrestrial and marine, have new goals, such as providing connectivity between land and sea. Some equally familiar procedural instruments such as mechanisms enabling participatory deliberation and conflict resolution are intended to provide principled access for the variety of interests in the coastal zone. Others, such as new mechanisms for intersectoral co-ordination and policy learning, are attempts to provide steering mechanisms based on information rather than hierarchy (Bridge and Salman 2000, King 2003). Most of these instruments are familiar from other contexts. It is their consistent combination in the service of coherent new goals that creates an integrated strategy that becomes the dependent variable in a study of the diffusion of ICZM. And the obstacles to diffusion are the tendencies towards incoherent goals and inconsistent policy mixes provided by the policies that ICZM is trying to displace.

In our introduction, we noted that the ambition of third generation diffusion studies to track large scale movements of policy change over time – such as the development of complex policy mixes – poses many methodological challenges. As our example of ICZM shows, dealing with the issues surrounding the conceptualization of “policy” and “policy change” resists third generation efforts at systematization and theory testing unless careful attention is paid to questions of method that are sensitive to context. The simplest diffusion studies, focusing on instrument adoption or setting changes and ignoring the more complex relationships between policy means and ends, are conducted on the assumption that diffusion takes place through an ordered sequence of events: there are patterns of early adoption, followed by the diffusion of the setting or instrument as a result of processes of learning and emulation that are central to the causal story being told. However, as our example of ICZM suggest, once we move beyond such simple patterns of adoption, those techniques in themselves are not suited to answering the really interesting questions of the diffusion of policy mixes and the contemporary policy regimes that they create.

Hence we would argue that, if diffusion studies are truly going to move ahead beyond the “first” and “second” generations, practitioners must resist the temptation to “throw the baby out with the bathwater” in attempting to move beyond those studies. That is, any new generation has to build on the foundations set by earlier first and second generation studies and not simply dispense with them. Third generation scholars and studies must:

- (1) recognize that the dependent variable “policy” is composed of many different elements;
- (2) accommodate the interplay between policy elements, whether their interactions are engineered or a product of happenstance; and

- (3) develop and employ a plurality of methods, from thick descriptions and policy narrative case studies, to small- n and large-n studies, if these interrelationships and their impact on policy diffusion are to be properly understood.

Notes

1. Examples of first order changes would include increasing the safety requirements automobile manufacturers must follow or altering the level of allowable emissions from a factory. In these examples, second order changes might involve such actions as adding or substituting financial incentives for regulation in the traffic safety field or changing the type of instrument used in pollution control, such as moving from an administered emission standard to the imposition of a tax on emissions. Third order changes would involve a shift in policy goals, such as moving away from a focus on private vehicles to one on public transit in the traffic safety area or, in the pollution case, a shift from a focus upon *ex post* end-of-pipe regulation to a focus upon *ex ante* preventative production process design.
2. The identification and study of integrated policy strategies is at an early stage of development in the policy sciences but research projects are under way in several countries involving strategic interventions that range from the integration of sustainability or innovation objectives into policy on a broad scale (Sadler 2005), to more focused integrative efforts such as health assessments, disaster planning, safety cultures, integrated coastal zone management, rural development, wildlife management and more (Power and McCarty 2002, Wescott 2002, Finer *et al.* 2005, Lehoux *et al.* 2005, Foster *et al.* 2005, Keysar 2005, Johannesen 2006, Lee 2006).

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