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POWER AND POLICYMAKING

Annabel K. Kiernan

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Department of Politics and International Studies

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for Chris

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Declaration

Some of the arguments found in the Introduction and Chapter One have appeared in a different form, in ‘Technocratic Policy Partnerships: A new descriptor for public policy?’, *International Journal of Technology Management*, vol. 19, Nos. 3/4/5, 2000: 384-396.

Summary

This thesis is concerned with approaches to policymaking analysis. It argues that dominant neo-pluralist theories of policymaking have limited explanatory force. This arises from the method of inquiry, which necessarily limits the scope of analysis. The emphasis on inductive methods, coupled with a narrow focus on non-formalised sub-state networks, produces a model which is a useful way of identifying non-state policy actors, but which has no explanatory capacity outside such networks.

In particular two weaknesses in network analysis are highlighted as significant. The first is that neo-pluralism does not account for the possible constraint on meso-level activity by the state. The state's ability to constrain individual agency may arise either from its position as a distinct social actor, or from it being an aspect of structural constraint. As this latter point implies, the second key weakness with neo-pluralist network analysis is owing to its structural indeterminism.

The thesis argues that an adequate account of the policymaking process must recognise the possibility of limits to actor autonomy which arise from individual interaction with structure. Although the argument is made for a structural dimension to policymaking analysis, it concedes the dangers of functionalism and determinism which can arise from the application of structural frameworks. Consequently, the thesis argues for a duality of structure and agency as the core of political analysis. This argument is made on theoretical grounds, and via discussion of an empirical case study of the EU Task Force Environment: Water.

The argument then is for a dual approach to policymaking which utilises both inductive and deductive methods. It is argued (a) that a Marxist analysis of the state and the structural constraints of capitalism can be combined (although not integrated) with networks analysis in a dual approach, and (b) that this combination provides the best model of policymaking.

Introduction

This thesis is about policymaking. Political decisions have a significant impact on society, on the lives of people who comprise it and on the environment in which they interact. Given the importance political choice has, it has been considered important to understand the means by which political decisions are reached, or in other words to understand the policymaking process.

Political inquiry into the nature of policymaking has produced a variety of interpretations of the process of political decision making which have resulted in rather different conclusions about the transparency, legitimacy, accessibility and fairness of that process. Despite being directly concerned with the meso-level, investigations into policymaking necessarily involve judgements about the power of policy actors, and thus are concerned with the capacity of groups and individuals to affect political processes. This capacity for individuals to effect change may or may not be conditioned by the structure of the environment within which social action occurs. In other words, although policymaking analysis has a particular focus, the different interpretations of the nature of that process reflect a fundamental conflict within social science about the autonomy of social actors from the social system.

Contemporary explanations of the policymaking process have been dominated by a perspective in which the explanatory capacity focuses on the role of society-based groups as policy actors. These type of approaches, therefore,

emphasise the non-formalised interactions of core groups and individuals in policymaking. They propose that networks of interested and policy relevant groups, individuals and organisations are powerful policy actors such that political choices will ultimately reflect the concerns of the dominant policy network actors. In addition policy interaction is seen as relatively open and competitive, with dominant groups able to be challenged, for example by new cohorts of actors or by new expertise which may effect a policy change.

Network type theories are very much society-centred accounts which have their foundations in pluralism. Consequently, network approaches perceive social actors as being able act relatively unconstrained by formal political arrangements, and they also view the range of political possibilities as being open. Further, networks are policy specific and their composition will change over time. In other words, on this view, policymaking and politics in its broadest sense, is not dominated by an elite or a class, but instead reflects the changing and competing demands of groups and individuals in society.

Significantly this indicates that policy reflects something of the dynamics of society, fragmented by the sheer diversity of needs and preferences. Consequently each policy domain warrants its own investigation as at different moments, in different contexts, the policy outcomes in a given domain could reflect changed preferences. So there is no singularity of means, ends or purpose in this perspective on policy formation. This presents a reasonably democratic picture of the political process - only encumbered by some resourcing constraints on network actor capacity which may be economic, political, expertise-based or similar. This points

to a second important feature identified for this type of perspective, that political outcomes do not reflect the continued dominance of a single set of preferences (for example, a class interest).

The difficulty with this type of network formulation is twofold. Firstly, given that it is a society-based account, neo-pluralist network approaches do not recognise the potential constraint on network actor autonomy by the state. Constraints by the state may arise from either its importance as a key social actor, or as being identified as part of any structural constraints on network autonomy. The analysis of preference competition is limited to groups forged in society, with little or no attention paid to the potentially decisive role played by the state in determining political outcomes.¹ Two alternative interpretations of policy formulation are possible then, one which places the state (as a key social actor) at the centre of its analysis, and one which theorises structural context and thus locates the state as a part of potential structural constraints on actor autonomy.

Political inquiry which emphasises the state as a key actor – statism – has provided a counterweight to the dominance of society-centred accounts of

¹ In later chapters (Five and Six) I shall discuss several different theories of the state. There is a sense in which each of these theories defines the state differently, and I shall argue that we should adopt a version of Marxism in which class struggle is seen as central. However, for present purposes, we need a working definition of the state which does not presuppose this later conclusion. Hence I shall adopt Giddens's definition: 'A state can be defined as a political organization whose rule is territorially ordered and which is able to mobilize the means of violence to sustain that rule.' (Giddens, 1985: 20) Defined in this way the state is not identical to, but is partly constituted by, the government and the personnel of state institutions. For more on the state see chapters Five and Six.

policymaking, such as network theory. According to statist, although the state may be subject to countervailing social preferences expressed by dominant socio-economic groups, it has the capacity (autonomy) to implement its own, different, preferences in the face of such opposition. However, most statist analysis concedes that it is important to understand the state's capacity more in relational terms (vis-a-vis socio-economic groups) rather than in very strongly autonomous terms.

Statism gives a different interpretation of the political dynamic but retains the notion that the process is reasonably democratic in ways not dissimilar to pluralists. The definition of the state in terms of the officials of whom it is comprised, makes it possible to make claims of diversity of interest which, in addition, will change over time. Consequently state preferences do not conform to a single interest or reflect any socio-economic bias.

The emphasis on diversity of interests found in both pluralism and statism highlights a common difficulty in the application of both of these type of approaches. The notion of a fragmentation of needs and preferences within society or the state, any of which have potential to be converted into political reality through the political process, is important for emphasising that political outcomes do not necessarily reflect a dominant or sectional interest. This further provides a basis for broader claims about the democratic nature of political outcomes.

Although neither position reflects true democracy (there are resourcing constraints on interest groups within pluralism and within statism the possibility of state bureaucrats being powerful enough to convert their preferences despite

countervailing social pressures is hardly an indicator of democracy), they can still make claims that the process is more or less 'good for democracy'.

Part of the explanation for the claims of pluralism and statism about the multiplicity of interests which can be served by the political process, lies in the method each uses. In both cases the use of an inductive approach results in the omission of any analysis of the social organisation of the system, as a key variable. The suggestion that capitalism, as a particular mode of production, can place macro-level constraints on the autonomy of social actors – whether they be at the level of society or at the level of the state – cannot be explored. The strong belief that sectional – or class – interests are not being served in policy formation (to the exclusion of all other interests) is based on observations of the diversity of political outcomes, state formation and state actions which are found in contemporary capitalist societies. These differences in actually existing capitalist societies have fuelled an on-going critique of Marxism as a valid interpretation of political economy.

Despite this, it will be argued that Marxism provides a persuasive alternative perspective on the political process which, additionally, entails a useful critique of the limits of pluralism and statism. As an analysis of political economy which includes the use of deductive methods, the emphases within Marxism diverge from those of both pluralism and statism. In the particular case of public policy formation, Marxism has the potential to unfetter the analysis from the limited conclusions which can be made through a pluralist or a statist perspective. As already noted, the first area of weakness which can be identified within networks

approaches is the lack of an analysis of the state's role in policymaking. This can be partially solved by the statist perspective, which places the state at the centre of political analysis. However, statism, by definition, tends to overestimate state capacity *vis-à-vis* society. The application of both these models has shown that, in fact, the roles of both socio-economic groups and the state are important in policy analysis. Indeed the extent of the successful policy reach of either can, at least partly, be explained by the strength and organisation of the other. In other words, the key is to understand the relationship *between* the state and society.

It is possible through an integration of neo-pluralism and statism (in other words through introducing a theory of the state into network analysis) that this particular problem of network analysis can be successfully overcome. However, the second area of weakness, that of structural indeterminism, can be found in both pluralism and statism, and thus cannot be solved by the kind of integration of theory noted above. Structural indeterminism relates to the lack of analysis of any potential structural constraints to the autonomy of any and all social actors. The social organisation of the system, that is capitalism, is not considered as a relevant variable in shaping political outcomes in either the networks or the statist formulations.

This lack of investigation of the system stems from the purely inductive method used by both approaches. This creates problems for conceptualising structural constraints in two ways. Firstly an inductive approach generates theory from observation. This indicates that there is no prior theorisation of the social structure. However, a deductive approach is necessary as the type of claims we may

wish to make about the impact of the social organisation of capitalism on something like individual agency, may not be directly observable in the way required by inductive approaches. The second problem arises from the findings from the application of the inductive method. Direct observations of the policymaking process or of state activity highlight the variability of group dynamics and of state organisation and action. The discovery of such differences is taken as evidence that capitalism does not shape outcomes (as the assumption that they did, outcomes would be very similar in all capitalist economies) and thus indicates that a particularised elaboration of states, policymaking, network dynamics and so on, is needed. So application of the inductive method has the further consequence of reinforcing assumptions about the validity of that method. However, the existence of differences between contemporary capitalist societies is clearly not evidence in itself that capitalism is not important in understanding the nature of political outcomes in those societies. Specifically, the notion that capitalism, as a mode of production with a unique social relation which underpins it, may place macro level constraints on the autonomy of social actors, is not properly explored in either case. The claim is made then for the necessity of a theory of capitalism, within which to locate investigations of social actor autonomy.

On this basis, Marxism has distinct advantages as a method of inquiry. Not only can it provide an explanation of macro constraints on meso level autonomy, but it also provides a framework for understanding the state-society relationship which, it will be argued, holds the true explanatory force in policymaking analysis.

However, some caution is required, as Marxism has also encountered significant criticism, notably from pluralists and statist. In particular critics claim that the singularity of the explanation in sectional (class) terms (class struggle is the heart of Marxist analysis) creates a simplistic economic functionalism and/or determinism. Although it is possible for Marxism to fall into these traps, it is not inherent in the framework itself. It should be possible to make use of a Marxist analysis of capitalism without having simultaneously to assume that political outcomes are predetermined by some intangible force. This point will be pursued in this thesis.

Thus the central argument of this thesis, is that network theories of policymaking are of limited utility. This arises from the omission of two key areas of analysis: the state and structure. Although the strong society bias can be countered by introducing a theory of the state to network analysis, a theorisation of structure means stepping outside the inductive method. It is suggested that Marxism provides the most appropriate solution to these two problems as identified. Not only does Marxism have an historically-rooted analysis of structure (which lends weight to the claims it makes about capitalism as a particular mode of production) but, consequently, it can illuminate the possible constraints on agency which arise from the logic of capital accumulation. In addition, given Marxism's conceptualisation of the social relations of production, this perspective can also give substance to both the state and state-society relations. In other words, Marxism can overcome both weaknesses identified in the networks approach.

Marxism has exhibited some difficulties in releasing itself from the charges of functionalism and determinism. It is important that these tendencies are avoided

and, it is argued, that this can be achieved by highlighting the necessity of empirical investigations as providing substance for the claims made about the significance of the structural context of the social system. It is claimed, therefore, that in order to fully understand the nature of political outcomes, both an assessment of the roles of all social actors as well as an understanding of the macro context within which social activity takes place is essential. In other words, a dual approach to policymaking is desirable: one which harnesses the benefits of network type approaches which uncover the detailed interactions of the meso-level; with the necessity of a prior theorisation of capitalism which provides the context of policymaking.

It may be helpful to locate this contribution within the broader debate about the validity of Marxist and pluralist assumptions in political science, the argument for a dual approach reflects some of the more contemporary assessments of the state of the discipline. It has been argued (see Marsh and Stoker, 1995) that most recent contributions to political analysis represent something of a convergence between what have ordinarily been understood as the opposing camps of pluralism and Marxism. Within neo-pluralism, the application of network type approaches to policymaking, has presented a picture of a much more hierarchical and regularised policy terrain than the vision found in classic pluralism. Neo-Marxism, by contrast, has begun to introduce non-class social divisions into its analysis, removing what should be an essential focus of Marxist analysis – the social relations of production, or class struggle.

It would seem then that pluralists are increasingly factoring rigidities into their analysis whilst Marxists are casting off their distinctly economic analysis in the face of a perceived fragmentation of classes around gender, race and nationality issues. However, it is argued here that in spite of these developments it is unlikely that a true convergence between pluralism and Marxism is possible. As discussed in the opening section of this Introduction, the method, and thus the ensuing assumptions about (the power capacity) of structure and agency, indicate that the convergence implied by Marsh cannot occur. Rather, political science is finding ways to conceptualise seemingly new social divisions and social relationships, which are thought to be difficult to account for within the established elitist, pluralist and Marxist frameworks. This additional dimension to political science is concerned to reflect the apparent (increasing) fracture of social and political life and the complex variability of structures and outcomes as between capitalist societies and within societies over time. In attempting to make sense of such difference, the conclusions inevitably shift away from unidimensional explanation to ones which account for the potential impact of any and all factors.

The organisation of the thesis

Chapter One discusses the range of network type approaches to policymaking analysis. It considers the original, broader, formulation of issue networks and the more focused analyses of policy communities and epistemic communities. The

chapter highlights two weaknesses of the networks approach which require some adjustment to the model. Given the domination of policy domains by core groups often found in network analysis, the policymaking picture looks more static than dynamic. It is argued that a fuller elaboration of possible constraints on the meso-level, fundamentally involving a theory of the state, may provide additional explanatory space for both the means by which certain groups come to dominate policy domains and, in light of this, how we might still observe policy change. That is, the role of the state may be important in this regard either as a key social actor or as a structural constraint on action. So, the first weakness of network analysis is its lack of a theory of the state.

The second weakness of network approaches is argued to be its lack of engagement with structure. In addition to a need to understand the state as a potential facilitator or inhibitor of network policy impact, the macro context of policymaking may also be relevant to the type of political outcomes achieved. This partly challenges the method adopted by network type approaches. Consequently, this chapter also considers the epistemological issues involved in pursuing an alternative perspective: one which requires a prior theorisation of social structure, and thus something which falls outside the remit of pluralist approaches.

In light of the claims made about the desirability of a broader analytical framework than that provided by pluralism, Chapter Two considers the relevance of debates about the conceptualisation of power, structure and agency. Given the arguments made about the limitations of network analysis, the core of the critique lies in network theory's emphasis on individual agency rather than an assessment of

potential structural constraints on social action. It is proposed that structure and agency should be considered as relative terms, where social action is restricted in part by existing 'rules of the game', but also that social structures can be changed through social action. This duality of power, represented through the power capacities of both structure and agency, adds weight to the arguments made for the necessary analysis of social structure and its potential impact on the exercise of agency.

Chapters Three and Four introduce a case study of policymaking from the water policy sector. The precise case is a European Union Task Force which sought to address the long run issues of water quality and water management, with the aim of discovering the best means of exploiting future markets in these areas. The purpose of the case study is to map out the contours of a policy domain in which networks of interest were formally constituted to influence the EU's agenda in this area. In identifying the key network actors and the relationships between them in the policy consultation process, it is possible to examine some of the claims made by network theorists in terms of interest group hierarchies, insider groups and the existence of epistemic communities.

In other words, the case study is a typical type of network investigation, which thus serves to highlight the types of information that such approaches can provide. In so doing, the case study also demonstrates the restricted nature of the type of questions which can be asked within such a framework. That is, the case study illustrates that observations of actor interaction in a given policy sphere

cannot be used to clarify the role of non-network actors such as the state or the possible impact of structural constraints on the capacity of network interests to act.

The case study shows that network theory on its own does not have the explanatory force which it is argued is necessary for a complete picture of the policy process. In fact, the type of information gained through its application, may be secondary to a comprehension of states as social actors and social structure as providing macro constraints. Network analysis may be contingent on state action and structural context.

In order to attempt to remedy the first significant weakness identified in network theory, its omission of a theory of the state, Chapter Five examines the contributions of state-centred approaches to political analysis. The statist perspective has gained increasing currency in political analysis, successfully challenging the dominance of society-centred accounts such as pluralism and Marxism. Clearly the emphasis within statism is on the potentially decisive role that states play in political outcomes. The identification of an autonomous state with not only its own preferences but the capacity to implement its preferences despite countervailing socio-economic pressure, is a particularly strong vision of the state as a social actor.

Chapter Five contends that whilst statism provides a useful corrective to the society-centred focus of network theory, the criticism of a lack of engagement with structure can be applied equally to statism, as it has been to pluralism. That is, the type of structural constraints which may limit the autonomy of network actors, may similarly constrain the role of the state. If the definition of the state is one

which identifies the state as a distinct social actor (as is the case with statism) then this dislocation of the state from structural context inevitably weakens the analysis. This is due to the claim of significance made for the organisation of social structure.

Chapter Six therefore considers the contributions of Marxist theorists to discussions of the state. The reason for this is that the critique of statism emphasises the disengagement of the state from its structural context within these approaches. Therefore, theory which considers the state not as a distinct actor, but as an integral part of the social relations of which it is constituted, seems to respond to this criticism. A number of different Marxist contributions to understanding the state are considered, reflecting the variation in Marxist interpretations.

Functionalist and instrumentalist accounts are rejected for reproducing the same problem of separating the state from its structural context which is found in non-Marxist theory. Instead, theory which locates the state as a part of the social relations unique to the capitalist mode of production is the preferred interpretation. This is owing to the fact that only this type of formulation succeeds in avoiding the criticism of analysing social action (including state activity) in a structural vacuum.

It is thus contended that Marxism is the analytical framework which is most likely to address the two stated weaknesses of the pluralist method. It is conceded that there can be dangers of functionalism and determinism in the application of traditional Marxist analysis in political inquiry. In order to avoid these difficulties as well as to conform to the stated advantages of a duality of structure and agency, the thesis concludes that investigations of the meso-level (policymaking) must attempt to operationalise this duality through a perspective which harnesses the

benefits of both agency-focussed and more structuralist accounts. That is, a theory of capitalism (as the structural context of activity inside a capitalist system) is logically prior to network type investigations of specific policy domains. The information rendered from the application of networks models retains its significance, since investigations of the operation of capitalism as a particular productive system, require detail of policy practice in order to add substance to claims made about the significance of capitalism for political outcomes, and to make predictions about its future stages of development.

Chapter 1. Pluralist Theories of Policymaking

1.1 Introduction

The following chapter will consider the range of pluralist and neo-pluralist contributions to understanding the policymaking process. With much of the original literature developed by American academics, it is perhaps no surprise that one of the central points of focus for pluralist theories of policymaking is the interaction of sub-state actors. Its translation into British politics in the late 1970s and 1980s saw even greater elaboration of the nature of group dynamics and a more open and competitive picture of policymaking than the entrenched politics of corporatism which it replaced.

As policy networks analysis has developed, a range of interpretations of the precise locus of power within networks of actors has also developed. In other words, a sophistication of the approach has emerged through a more precise identification of the power capacities of different types of policy actor.

This chapter will examine the development of policy networks, from the initial broadly constructed issue networks to the more specific elaboration of epistemic communities and technocracy, which identify 'expertise' as a key source of power. The argument which will be pursued in relation to the networks method is that, although a useful tool for identifying key actors and the nature of their interactions its limited identification of policy actors, in particular its omission of

the state as a potential constraining factor, limits its utility. In addition, its reliance on an inductive approach limits its explanatory capacity in relation to structure. Both these factors, if found to be important, may indicate that the type of information discovered through the networks empirical approach is in fact secondary to assessments of the actions of the state and/or the structural context of society more generally. That is, it will be argued that the study of networks needs to be understood in a broader context than simply that of the policy domain under discussion. Chapter Two will elaborate the importance of this type of theoretical argument in respect of policymaking and will, therefore, provide the substance for the claims to be made about the significance of concepts of power, structure and agency for discussions of the policymaking process.

1.2 Pluralism and Policy Networks

Pluralism, as a method for explaining political phenomena, has always engaged on an empirical level insofar as it looks to observable phenomena in order to generate broader theoretical frameworks of understanding. The importance pluralism registers in the actually existing differences between political phenomena (within and between societies), points to an emphasis on particularisation and variability at the heart of its explanation, as opposed to a more universal or holistic approach.

The tradition of pluralism then, is one in which empirical observation is the focal point of political investigation. This results from a particular understanding of

the nature of power and the way in which power is exercised through both agents and structures. This is of particular importance in discussions of the policymaking process, in which explanations of political outcomes are an exercise in identifying and attributing power to some actors rather than others. With respect to the networks method in particular, any prior theorisation about structural power (rather than simply attributing power to agents) necessarily changes the assessment of the capacity of the network to have a real impact on outcomes. However, precisely as a result of the way in which power is operationalised within pluralism and neo-pluralism, as well as its empiricist foundations, structural power cannot be effectively factored in. This results in the actions of power holding agents being interpreted as free and autonomous rather than constrained from without. This is partly explained by understanding that the aim of pluralism is not to provide a universal theory of capitalist society for example, rather it is to be continually engaged in understanding how a particular part of it works, at a particular time, in a particular context. Further in not attributing meaning to the nature of the system, pluralism is concerned with observing political phenomena in order to generate conclusions about, say, how democracy operates in practice. This can be achieved because direct observation, within this method, is valid without prior theorisation of structural context.

Policy networks as a manifestation of neo-pluralism in the investigation of the policymaking process reflects these key characteristics. Policy networks is clearly a meso-level concept which is intended to provide a link between the micro-level and macro-level of political analysis. As it has developed, the networks

method has highlighted the importance of increasingly specialised groups of policy actors as having a more than equal input into the policymaking process. This indicates a drift away from the original incarnations of pluralism which provided a vision of truly plural politics in which access was possible by a wide range of groups, through the access points provided within the political system. The more recent neo-pluralist interpretations of political decision making, indicate something of a more hierarchical system of resource (and thus power) distribution across groups and, more particularly, access to decision makers is something which is more restricted and implies political manoeuvring to an extent which you do not find in the work of, say, Dahl (see Dahl 1957 and 1961).

From the initial issue network frameworks provided by American political scientists one can find in more recent British contributions, a more closed picture of policy access by relevant publics and group subgovernment than one might expect from classic pluralism. However, the guiding principles of the conflictual nature of the terrain of interest group lobbying and the dynamic, changing character of the dominant groups over time, remain an essential part of the new pluralism.

The evolution of issue networks, as already indicated, has produced a range of variants which isolate a key characteristic of policy actors as a relevant resource for gaining greater input into the policymaking process. This has included professional interests, shared normative beliefs and policy relevant knowledge or expertise. This chapter will now consider each of these variations in turn and will indicate some of the continuing limitations of the networks method, despite its

shift away from classic pluralist analysis. This will provide the foundations for the discussion of the importance of prior theorisation in Chapter Two, in contrast to the inductive approach used by neo-pluralists.

1.3 Issue Networks

. . . a group will [also] try to establish ongoing relationships with policymakers to gain access more easily. Ideally, such efforts by the interest group will evolve into a subgovernment in which a small group of legislators, lobbyists, and administrators working by consensus will make policy in a particular area. In contemporary Washington though, many policy areas are populated by so many participants with such fundamental disagreements that they cannot be controlled by a subgovernment. In such a case, we're likely to find an issue network instead. Issue networks are composed of organisations and individuals who share expertise on a policy and frequently exchange information.

Berry, 1989: 164-5.

As a development from Heclo, the idea of issue networks was a reaction to the *iron triangle* framework which placed its emphasis on the stability and predictability of group-department-legislative committee relations. Instead, Heclo argued that

political administration is 'fragmented' rather than 'segmented' (Jordan and Richardson, 1987: 117).

Heclo claimed that 'looking for the closed triangles of control we tend to miss the fairly open networks of people that increasingly impinge upon government' (Jordan and Richardson, 1987: 121). Theories which developed in response to the more rigid, hierarchical and power-centred explanations of public policymaking, have thus tended to de-emphasise the notion of unequal power relations in the political process. These approaches suggest that there exists an open and competitive arena for the interaction of different sets of interests, which are thus able to impact on political outcomes. Understanding the extent of the impact of interests, and the interaction of different types of actor, can be uncovered through an investigation of the relevant policy domain.

Following from the work developed by Beer, McConnell and Lowi, Jordan and Richardson go further in their estimation, describing the participation of groups in the policy process as 'the *structured, regularised* participation of organised interests in policy making' (Jordan and Richardson, 1987: 107), but participation which is not in any way corporatist. However, without a theory of the state it is difficult for network theorists to conclude, beyond dispute, that the nature and scope of the policy arena is not in some way determined from without. That is, it is difficult to be confident about the extent of interest group impact on policy outcomes without considering the potential constraint of, say, the state in this regard. The fact that there is no investigation of the state nor of the context within which policies are made, arguably limits the utility of the networks approach in

general. Partly the difficulty arises from the unchallenged assumptions about the macro-level – that it is more fluid, accessible and unrestrictive than other perspectives may claim. Precisely because of what might be considered as two key omissions from the neo-pluralist method, a theory of the state and an analysis of the structural context of the polity, then it is likely that such an approach would overestimate the power of individual agents.

In light of this possible interpretation, a central criticism of the issue networks construct is that its weakness lies in its adherence to a pluralist interpretation of the distribution of power and resources. That is, the conclusions it draws only make sense within a pluralist perspective:

The policy process is seen as more open, more decentralised, more conflictual, more dynamic and broadly more participatory. In short, issue networks come much closer to fulfilling the pluralist prescription for democratic politics.

Berry, 1989: 195.

A further criticism of Heclo's very broad issue networks construct is that it is so imprecise as to tell us very little about policy formulation. For example, even if we were to accept the assumptions about the competitive and open nature of the political arena, issue networks cannot explain why certain groups at different points in time appear to exercise more influence in a policy sector than others. The changing fortunes of interest organisations suggests that policymaking is not

equally accessible by all groups and that resources, organisation, experience and political relationships may restrict the interaction of policy actors in a network.

The recognition that policy impact is uneven resulted in attempts to move away from the very open access implied by classic pluralism, and led to the identification of sub-governments within the policy process. This is a less naïve approach than previous interpretations, in that it admits the possibility of different types of access to policy or policymakers, by virtue of the type of interest or network of interests represented. Clearly this development seems to imply a more elitist picture of policy than had previously been envisaged. However, this implication is tempered somewhat by the fact that it is not the identification of *an* elite but of *elites* – fragmented according to the different policy areas and policy areas over time – and thus is still evidence of democratic, plural politics.

Once the possibility of constraints on the effectiveness of interest groups has been accepted, they can begin to be identified. This occurred within network analysis insofar as there has been a recognition that, within each policy domain, it is possible to identify some groups which seem to have privileged access to the policy machine and thus have an increased chance of policy impact. The notion of privileged access colours the work on policy communities and, additionally, has formed the basis of major contemporary developments or trends within the perspective: economically-derived privileged access (which can inform, potentially, New Right or neo-Marxist accounts of policymaking); improved access derived from close links between network actors and political brokers (civil servants) and knowledge based privilege (fuelling work on epistemic communities and

technocratic approaches). In each case, the range of groups with the ability to influence policy is more limited as some groups come to dominate and, consequently, other actors in the policy process are marginalised or reduced to observer status. The following sections consider the main work of those concerned with these two, more limiting, trends within network theory.

1.4 Policy Communities

The ideas of policy community (Jordan and Richardson, 1987) or group subgovernment (McConnell, 1966: 7) see policy being made in specialist sectors of substantial autonomy. This interpretation of the political process therefore dwells on the '*sectorised* negotiations between government departments and their (often) clientelistic groups rather than one which sees government as a single entity, facing the full breadth of competing group demands' (Jordan and Richardson, 1987: 8).

The implication here is that different government departments, potentially, have differing levels of influence within the context of their own policy negotiations. This may further imply that there is a greater degree of flexibility and autonomy in policy formulation and negotiation for each government department than is the case if one assumes a more unidimensional state actor. So, the policy community is more coherent and has a closer relationship with decision makers in the policy sector and thus is more influential than other, less well placed and less coherent, interest networks. In addition, this formulation offers up more power to

government officials, as the relevant government department has an interest in the policy outcome as well as perhaps having to impose government limitations on policy development, for example exercising budgetary constraint. This is a more empowered vision of government than classic pluralist formulations which see government more likely to be at the behest of pressure groups.

Policy communities are networks characterised by stability of relationships, continuity of a highly restricted membership, vertical interdependence based on shared service delivery responsibilities, and insulation from both other networks and, invariably, the general public (including parliament).

Marsh and Rhodes, 1992: 12-13.

However, the restricted nature of Jordan and Richardson's definition of what constitutes a policy community, allows little room for explanations of a changing composition of membership, which may be part of an explanation of policy change. Also, if policy communities are characterised as being stable with restricted membership then one may have to assume that they would remain static rather than dynamic. This limits both the possibility of policy change (or any explanation of it) and marginalises the role of any competing interests in the policy domain.

In more general terms policy communities, as with the broader concept of issue networks, is based on several assumptions which are open to direct challenge. This is found in terms of the accessibility of decision makers, and the

relationship between government officials and policy communities as a partnership, rather than any notion that such officials may be able to pursue their own interests without needing to court the relevant policy community.

A further interpretation of government-network relations is provided by Grant, where more allowance is made for constraints on the pressure groups by external factors and other parts of the state, and this is coupled with a more explicit statement of the imbalance between groups in the policy process. Grant's concept of 'insider groups' (see Grant, 1995) establishes a slightly different power relation in the political process, but still rests on a notion of policy development through consultation with interest groups or policy networks. Thus it still fails to provide explanatory space for a fundamental change in policy direction. Insider groups are the dominant interest within policy negotiations as they have such a close relationship with decision makers that they are brought inside the policymaking process at this level. This prevents such groups from being very radical or oppositional (relative to groups outside the formal policymaking process) as they are keen to maintain their insider status and the thus the privileged access and leverage that this implies. This concept retains a pluralist conception of state-society relations, highlighted by Grant thus:

Pressure groups do make a significant contribution to democracy, one which can be understood if we visualise a situation in which pressure groups were either banned or disregarded.

Grant, 1995: 165.

So despite acknowledging that the cards are often stacked in favour of established insider groups, this interpretation of a democratic policymaking process, only makes sense if one accepts the assumption that pressure groups can have negotiated inputs into the policy process, and that this is evidence in itself that democracy is being served. Again then, the notion that somehow the state is above 'interests', does not, for example, have distinct preferences of its own, is open to a variety of different agendas, and does not represent a structural constraint on actor agency, runs throughout this line of argument.

1.5 Professional Networks

Professional networks are placed near the 'highly integrated' end of Rhodes's continuum of policy networks (Rhodes, 1992). They are similar to policy communities in their composition which indicates that they also demonstrate stability, restricted membership, vertical interdependence and limited horizontal articulation. The added component is that their mobilisation is designed to serve the interest of their profession. In this sense, professional networks are likely to be more resistant to change, although the degree of change will be a function of the salience of the particular issue.

It is assumed that professional groupings, by their very nature, are apolitical as they organise and operate according to professional standards and ethics. There is

a further assumption that the professional in a given policy area will provide the best solution to a given problem, and can do so without the involvement of the general public in a policy debate. These assumptions are, in fact, about perceptions (or misperceptions) of the role which professionals play in the political process. As Maloney points out, in an area such as the water sector:

Since the mid-1970s, professional hegemony has come under threat for three main reasons. Firstly, the rise of the environmental movement. Secondly, and closely allied to the first, is the growing disenchantment of the role being fulfilled by professional groups in society and the validity of their esoteric claims to competence. Thirdly, the financial retrenchment from the mid-1970s, which became particularly acute from the 1980s onwards in the water sector.

Maloney, 1995: 18.

Much of the literature on the reorganisation of the water sector describes the significant role played by 'water professionals' both in the 1974 reorganisation and again in the privatisation process in 1989. The legitimacy of their involvement clearly lies in their perceived policy expertise as engineers, scientists and water managers. But, in order to actively participate in what was essentially a politically motivated organisational change, it is worth considering that the experts were 'allowed in', and these same professionals accepted that they were involved in political decisions. In this way the notion of objective professional interests is

compromised, allowing the government could ensure a technically efficient new structure which accorded with a particular political framework of how the water sector should be organised.

In this sense ‘professional networks’ may provide a useful template for how one should approach epistemic communities and technocrats: professionalism or expertise is no guarantee against being politically compromised. The fact that professionals can be used as a means of communicating ‘what’s best’ for the policy domain, implies that professionals and experts may not always be detached from the political context (even if they would prefer to be). The status of professionals and experts in the process of policy consultation delivers a veil of ‘best practice’ as well as legitimacy for change, but the ‘end’ to which this is applied so often remains wholly politically determined.

This leads us into more direct discussions of the role of particular interests within the policy domain, in particular knowledge-based interests and expertise.

1.6 Advocacy Coalitions

Sabatier maintains that within policy subsystems advocacy coalitions emerge. These are, as he puts it, aggregates of individuals who share a set of normative beliefs, and who form groups in order to further their policy objectives.

Hann, 1995: 20.

Advocacy coalitions have consistently been defined as ‘people from a variety of positions (elected and agency officials, interest group leaders, researchers []), who [1] share a particular belief system – i.e. a set of basic values, causal assumptions, and problem perceptions – and who [2] show a non-trivial degree of co-ordinated activity over time’.

Sabatier, 1998: 115.

Sabatier’s Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), picks up from two of the stronger elements of Heclo’s issue networks construct: policy subgovernments’ (communities) responsiveness to socio-economic change, and a context of ‘over time’. It has five main elements which are set out in *‘Policy Change and Learning’*, (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993). These five main premises are: the need to understand the impact or role of technical information in policy processes; a need to understand policy change through a time perspective of a decade or more; a focus on ‘policy subsystems’ which seek to influence government; government is used to describe all levels of government; and, public policy can be conceptualised as sets of value priorities and causal assumptions about how to realise them (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993: 16; Sabatier, 1998: 99).

All of these elements are instructive, and a positive development from those types of networks already discussed. It is certainly important to consider policy change over time, that is, to understand the changing context within which decisions are taken, and to gain some insight into changing group dynamics and

differences in the groups which dominate in a particular policy domain. ACF subsystems are a useful means of focusing the analysis, in order to further clarify whether all policy subgroups can have an observable policy impact, or whether it is a particular kind of subgroup which is more effective. One of the most interesting feature of Sabatier's ACF however, is his point concerning policy options as *value priorities*. Clearly public policy is a matter of political choice, something which is informed by judgements about what is and is not an acceptable or desirable course of action. This indicates, therefore, an idea of 'interests' and, as such, a choice of which interests to serve. If policy options are considered as value priorities then this, at least partly, demystifies the policymaking process as not one in which 'what's best' always triumphs over 'what do we want'.

In the same way that the concepts of issue networks and policy communities attribute a degree of importance to a competition between subsystem organisations in informing political debate, a similar element of the ACF construct is the notion of opposing, or conflicting, coalitions operating in a given policy sphere. Again the significance of the relative positions of such coalitions is important. That is, as with other more restricted interpretations of the relationship between interest groups (in this case, an Advocacy Coalition (AC)) and government, if one AC, one policy community, or one issue network continues to dominate then policy outcomes are likely to be more static and incremental than dynamic and radical. This is problematic in all network approaches as a lack of analysis of context limits their capacity to explain how new groups enter the policy domain or replace the dominant group, but raises a particular difficulty for

Sabatier. A key element of his Sabatier's model is his incorporation of the concept of policy oriented learning as a means of explaining policy change. The dominance of a core group in a policy subsystem however, may undermine this essential part of Sabatier's framework. As Hann points out:

. . . within any given policy sub-system there is likely to be a dominant advocacy coalition, and while this advocacy coalition remains dominant, the basic attributes of government policy are unlikely to change significantly. It follows from this that a minority advocacy coalition has little hope of changing its place within the sub-system and that the expert discourse which is so essential to Sabatier's policy oriented learning may also be dominated by a powerful group which has the ability to manipulate the flow and status of information coming into the system.

Hann, 1995: 21.

Policy change and the related idea of policy-oriented learning in Sabatier's construct are, according to Sabatier, two of the more compelling elements of the ACF idea and certainly provide an advantage over the more static picture of policy arenas already discussed. However, the genuine capacity of the ACF to explain these is questionable. In terms of explaining policy change, Sabatier lists two sets of exogenous factors, which he considers to be relevant: 'relatively stable parameters' and the more dynamic 'system events' (Sabatier, 1998: 102). It is the latter group of

variables which are described as essential prerequisites for major policy change, and which are listed as:

1. Changes in socio-economic conditions
2. Changes in public opinion
3. Changing in systemic governing coalition
4. Policy decisions and impacts from other subsystems

Ibid. p.102

Other policy change can occur as a result of either policy learning (for example the introduction of new evidence which challenges the initial perspective and cannot easily be disputed), or can occur from the introduction of new AC members, which can alter the political resources of the AC (Sabatier, 1998: 105)

The basic structure of Sabatier's ACF looks like this:¹

¹ There are some non-affiliated actors, but these are considered unimportant because they will join an AC or leave the subsystem.

POLICY SUBSYSTEM



AC

AC

AC

AC



individual actors individual actors individual actors individual actors

where ↑ (act of joining AC by individuals) is determined by:

(a) ‘share a set of normative and causal beliefs’, and

(b) ‘engage in a non-trivial degree of co-ordinated activity, over time’ (Sabatier, 1998: 103).

Figure 1: Characterising Sabatier’s policy subsystem.

In addition, each AC is organised according to a hierarchy of belief, as follows:

- DEEP CORE
- (for example, individual freedom versus social equality)

- POLICY CORE

(normative commitments and causal perceptions of policy domain)

- SECONDARY ASPECTS

(narrower beliefs, for example the seriousness of the problem)

This hierarchy represents a more to less rigid set of beliefs which are, therefore, more or less open to change (from deep core as most rigid to secondary aspects as more open to change). This type of hierarchy may further indicate that policy change is less likely to flow from ACs.

A final significant descriptive element of Sabatier's ACF, which is also relevant to the dynamic of policy change, are his conflict resolution actors. Once the different ACs within the policy subsystem have chosen their instruments and strategy for achieving the outcome they most want from the policy process, there is often likely to be a difference of perspective, on preferred outcomes, as between ACs. In those situations Sabatier describes a mediating role by a third group of actors, 'policy brokers', who find a compromise position in order to minimise conflict. The outcome of this process is government programmes or policies (Sabatier, 1998: 102).

Despite the more recent revisions to Sabatier's framework, which he undertook in response to problems or new findings in the application of the ACF, difficulties remain particularly around the issue of policy dynamism. As indicated

above, Sabatier places significant emphasis on the capacity for ACF to explain policy change, which has been a problem in other network approaches. However, it has been argued that the dominance of a particular AC in a policy subsystem is likely to prevent the development of ACs who could challenge the dominant group, particularly if that group can manage the process such that policy oriented learning does not take place (as Hann argues). This therefore limits the potential for internal shocks within the ACF to produce the desired change. That leaves external shocks, which Sabatier describes as system events. If one has to rely on external shocks as an explanation of policy change, then it is necessary to accept that the ACF or policy network itself has no explanatory capacity with regard to policy change.

Other areas of difficulty in the ACF model, which resonate with network type approaches more generally, are worth highlighting. Firstly, the overarching framework of the policy subsystem may have a significant impact on the nature of the ACs which form within it (in other words the terrain of policy domain may determine the types of groups who emerge to challenge it). This affects Sabatier's framework in two dimensions: (a) the composition of ACs; and (b) the conflict resolution as between two or more ACs in any given subsystem.

It is clear that with any set of competing ACs, one AC may come to dominate the subsystem. The reason one AC may dominate could be as a result of pre-existing relationships with precisely those decision takers whom the AC is seeking to influence. Particularly given Sabatier's 'over time' element (a decade or more), internal subsystem relationships may significantly distort the competition

between ACs (for example, the emergence of an AC with insider status). This has further implications for competing ACs vis-à-vis the significance of policy brokers. Sabatier does not provide any guarantees that this third group of actors are neutral and, therefore, that the compromise achieved by their involvement is a genuine one.

The second problem arises from the way in which individual actors and organisations coalesce in order to form ACs. As noted in *figure 2* above, one of the key hierarchical features of the AC is sharing normative and causal beliefs. At the highest level ('deep core' in Sabatier's terminology), this is presented as a more generally pervasive belief system, which Sabatier likens to religious belief but which might equally be ideology. Even at the next level the idea of 'policy core' beliefs, which operate across a particular policy domain, seems to indicate something more significant than just a set of beliefs to which any individuals or groups can accede. In this way each AC seems to be self-selecting in terms of the value system they share. This makes the AC more *exclusive* than inclusive.

Two points in Sabatier's defence need to be made here: firstly, it seems clear that without this type of value coherence, the AC would not be able to function as effectively as a lobbying organisation. Secondly, a conflicting value system or ideology can, within Sabatier's framework, simply provide the focus for a separate AC. However, if ACs operate on an ideological basis, then the role of the policy brokers is significantly enhanced (so it becomes more important whether or not they are objective), and the question of an overall agenda-led policy domain or any established internal political relationships, between subsystem actors and decision

makers, also becomes more significant. Further, the issue of the resources of ACs becomes relevant if we consider that, as groups are organised around value systems, the type and extent of their resources may affect their ability to lobby. In other words, actors who coalesce around a more marginal (to the policy domain, society, dominant political context) deep core or policy core beliefs, may be more limited in their ability to effectively lobby within a policy subsystem by virtue of a limited political and economic resource base.

Since coalition actors (by definition) share a set of policy core beliefs, actors in different coalitions will perceive the world through different 'lenses' and thus often interpret a given piece of evidence in different ways.

Sabatier, 1998: 109.

John Grin and his colleagues have criticized the ACF for focusing solely on actors' beliefs relating to *public policy*, forgetting that most actors have a much more important belief system (which they refer to as 'professional beliefs').

Sabatier, 1998: 111.

So, the same two principal objections to the previously discussed network theories could equally be applied to Sabatier's ACF. In effect, the ACF as a whole is only useful insofar as one accepts some baseline assumptions about the

overarching framework of decision making. In other words, the ACF makes sense and can provide useful information about subsystem actors (organised as ACs) only within a more pluralist interpretation of the policymaking process: viz. that it is open; ACs can compete with each other to lobby policy architects for their desired outcomes; and that pre-existing relationships and/or agendas either do not exist or do not have a significant impact on the outcomes of that process. The fact that there is no attempt to give depth or shape to the context within which decisions are taken (despite references to value systems, political resources and policy brokers) nor any analysis of the nature and role of the state, places limits on the ACF's application within other perspectives.

Having considered some of the broader policymaking theories, the chapter will now consider ones which concentrate even more exactly on the role and power of particular groups within the policy domain. The following theories emphasise the role of experts, thus they represent something of a new trend within pluralism, which recognises the possibility that groups are not equal in the policy domain by virtue of the extent of their policy 'expertise'.

1.7 Epistemic Communities

The development of the notion of epistemic communities has been very useful in providing a better explanation of policy change, and in particular emphasising learning as a policy dynamic. An on-going criticism of the variety of policy

networks theories has been their emphasis on stability, and therefore their lack of a satisfactory explanation of how new initiatives occur in a policy arena and, in particular, how the direction of policy as a whole may change if the area is dominated by a particular community of interests who have a shared vision.

Haas (1992) develops the concept of epistemic communities in the context of international relations, using it to explain the cause and effect of international policy co-ordination, and the more problematic area of changes in a nation state's interests. He explains that decision makers will refer, or even defer, to scientific knowledge for policy resolution at times when they are unfamiliar with technical aspects in a policy area. The significant context is 'times of crisis' or 'political uncertainty':

The concept of uncertainty is (thus) important to our analysis for two reasons. First, in the face of uncertainty, and more so in the wake of a shock or crisis, many of the conditions facilitating a focus on power are absent . . . And, secondly, poorly understood conditions may create enough turbulence that established operating procedures may break down, making institutions unworkable.

Haas, 1992: 14.

This is an understanding of the policy dynamic which is based on a different conception of power than has been dealt with in the foregoing theories. Here knowledge, or specialist knowledge, is seen as a potential power base and this has

important implications for the identification of power and its distribution within the system.

Haas is convincing in his analysis of an epistemic community's ability to aid policy formulation along established lines, as well as to change the goals of the decision makers, through the exercise of their knowledge-centred power. As Haas points out, epistemic communities do not equate with the scientific community, but can apply to any specialist knowledge groups. A particular interest here is the idea that the importance of a knowledge-based community is a function of the fact that its power lies in its control of policy-relevant knowledge. That is, that knowledge or expertise is in itself a power resource, which may be more significant than others in a network.

Although Haas makes a useful point in emphasising the significance of knowledge-based power, the concept of epistemic communities arguably attributes too much importance to the *possession* of knowledge as opposed to the *use* of knowledge. Policy relevant or expert knowledge in itself is not power rather, the power lies in the ability to use and apply that knowledge in the policy process: the ability of technical-rational expertise to be translated into, or applied in public policy, stems from government. Choosing which knowledge to use, and putting the knowledge into practice is a power that only government, not experts, have.

It is in this regard that the concept of epistemic communities, that policy initiatives and possibilities for problem resolution stem from technical-rational expert communities, is considered flawed as it is argued here that the application of the knowledge in practical terms, is a political function and therefore requires

political power. That is, policy power still resides with the application of policy proposals and expertise rather than in just ownership of knowledge.

1.8 Technocracy

... we argue that technocratic theory and practices are largely shaped at the level of the organisation and that much of postindustrial politics can be understood as an attempt to extend such technocratic managerial practices to the state.

Fischer, 1990: 14.

The mystique of scientists and of doctors serves not only to reinforce their role in the nuclear or health networks respectively, but also to strengthen the relevant network's claim of rendering policy free from the 'irritating' constraint of political, especially electoral, legitimacy.

Marsh and Rhodes, 1992: 265.

Technocratic theory has been useful in its illumination of the increasing role played by technocrats or policy experts in the political process, and seems to be near the front of the trend for highlighting the privileged role of expertise. Also, technocracy has a broader application than epistemic communities as it tries to say something about society as a whole, rather than just about the policymaking aspect

of the political process. Although there seems, at yet, to be little agreement over the precise details of a technocratic theory of government, the main strand in all arguments is that, as a response to the crisis of government, the same kind of technocratic rules which apply in the private sphere should be applied to the level of the state. In other words, political problems should be resolved with reference to technical solutions.

The idea of technocracy accepts that there are still three observable spheres in the political process – a governing elite, a technocratic strata, and the general public – but claims that technocrats are becoming more and more autonomous, or independent from, the elite decision makers. Fischer (1990) makes clear that the technocrats are not yet a class in themselves but, given the system of inducements and rewards, do remain wedded to the dominant political and economic elites. However it is this implicit acceptance of the evolution of a sub-government technocratic strata into a dominant class which is less than convincing. Again, as with the foregoing theories, it does not adequately account for any constraining impact by the state, or the relative power positions of other elites, which may be significant in assessing the political importance of technocrats.

In addition technocracy, given that it is driven by an acceptance of the positive good which a technocratic system would deliver to the governing system, surely accords experts a too beneficent role vis-à-vis the wider society. The role outlined for such experts is not one in which they are interested in gaining political power, just the ‘best’, most rational solution to the problems the system throws up.

In a similar vein, technocratic theory seems to exaggerate the positives involved in this end-product in our new postindustrial societies:

. . . this new social configuration is one in which capitalist values associated with property, wealth, and production are steadily giving way to values based on knowledge, education and intellect.

Fischer, 1990: 148.

Technocracy describes the decline of politics due to a preference for technical solutions to what are, increasingly, technical problems. However, lacking a thorough-going analysis of societal organisation, there seems to be little basis for such a fundamental change in societal power relations.

A significant problem with technocracy then, is that it reduces political problems to the fact that they have not been defined in scientific terms. One may suggest that policy problems can occur as a result of political decisions being taken irrespective of expert advice to the contrary, but to extrapolate that into a crisis of governance is to deny the possibility of wider motivations for decision making.

1.9 Theory and Evidence in Political Science

Like other forms of pluralism, network analysis might be thought to gain support from its implicit *empiricism*. Empiricists take an extreme view of the relationship

between theory and evidence in science (including political science), arguing that theoretical claims are valid only insofar as they summarise the results of empirical observation. The widespread tendency of political scientists to adopt some form of empiricist epistemology, if only implicitly, is one reason why they are often suspicious of theoretical claims that are proposed on the basis of theoretical, rather than inductive, arguments. However there are strong arguments against the extreme and one-sided empiricist view of the relationship between theory and evidence. This section briefly explains the view on this question which underpins the theoretical claims made in later chapters.² Identifying the role of empiricist assumptions in political science, and questioning their validity, helps to establish the foundations of the argument pursued here.

We can identify four main epistemological views about knowledge in any area. Thus with respect to political science, we can identify the following views:

(i) scepticism: the view that knowledge of political phenomena is impossible in principle;

(ii) empiricism: the view that knowledge of political phenomena is possible, but is restricted to what we can directly observe;

² I am grateful to Christopher Woodard for discussion of these issues.

(iii) idealism: the view that knowledge of political phenomena is possible, but is significantly constructed by human minds, so that knowledge of the world ‘as it is in itself’ is impossible;

(iv) realism: the view that knowledge of political phenomena is possible, is not limited to what we can directly observe, and is genuine knowledge of the world as it is in itself.

Most political scientists are not completely sceptical about political knowledge – although more limited forms of scepticism, for example about the possibility of cross-cultural moral judgements, or knowledge of the ‘laws’ of history (Popper, 1957) have often flourished. These limited forms of scepticism aside though, most political scientists accept that knowledge of political phenomena is possible: the disagreement is over the source of knowledge, and its character.

Although empiricism and idealism agree that knowledge of political facts is possible, they argue that this knowledge is limited in important ways. Empiricism restricts the scope of knowledge: it says that we can know only what we observe directly, and what can then be derived from this knowledge. Idealism does not claim that our knowledge is restricted in this way; but it says that the quality of our knowledge is limited: we cannot know the world itself, only how it appears in our minds.

In contrast, realism portrays our knowledge as not limited *in principle* in either of these ways. Of course, any particular claim to ‘know’ some fact may be

false, reflecting superstition, prejudice, bias, or other kinds of error. Realists are no less critical of our views than empiricists are. According to realists however there is no necessary limit in the scope or quality of our knowledge. In principle we can know the world as it is in itself, and our knowledge can penetrate the surface appearances which are 'directly' observable. On this issue we can distinguish between 'deep' and 'shallow' forms of realism, where shallow realism has some similarities with empiricism (Collier, 1994: 6-12). Shallow realists are sceptical about hidden structures or mechanisms, preferring explanations which do not invoke these entities; deep realists on the other hand suppose that theoretical arguments implying the existence of these entities can justify belief in them. Perhaps the best-known form of 'deep realism' is the philosophy of science developed by the Marxist philosopher Roy Bhaskar (Bhaskar, 1986; Collier, 1994: chs. 1, 3, 5).

As Collier notes, the difference between these views can have important political implications:

If history is just 'one damned thing after another', then all the politics we need is a resolve to do better damned things than were done before. If, on the other hand, societies and their institutions have inner structures which generate and by the same token constrain their powers, then we can ask, first of all, what sort of thing can be done given existing structures and what cannot; second, what different sort of things could be

done given different structures; and third, how one sort of structures can be transformed into another.

Collier, 1994: 10.

The significance of structural constraints on human agency will be discussed in Chapter Two, and is a theme of the whole thesis. For present purposes, however, the important point has to do with the relationship between theory and evidence which is implied by each of the four broad views identified above. Scepticism implies that theory is always mere speculation, which can be justified neither by evidence nor by independent theoretical arguments. Empiricism implies that theory is justified only so far as it merely generalises inductively from direct observation – that is, it implies that logically speaking evidence comes before theory, which is justified only if it is supported inductively by evidence. Idealism implies that theory is justified insofar as it articulates the necessary structure of the mind or of language, and that this structure colours the ‘evidence’ provided by our senses – that is, theory is logically primary, and evidence is logically secondary. Realism in its most attractive forms, meanwhile, implies that theoretical claims can be justified both inductively and by deductive (or ‘theoretical’) arguments – that is, neither evidence nor theory is logically primary, but instead they are logically interdependent.

If we leave aside scepticism and idealism, then, we have two different views about the relationship between theory and evidence. Pluralists tend to adopt the empiricist view that evidence is logically prior to theory, insofar as they do not

accept anything other than inductive arguments for theoretical claims. However this disregard of deductive arguments for theoretical conclusions – arguments which may ultimately have some empirical basis but do not proceed directly from observation – presupposes a controversial epistemological position. As we have seen, there are well-developed alternatives to empiricism, not least the sophisticated form of realism advocated by Bhaskar. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to enter into the philosophical debate between empiricism and realism; but the simple point is that we should not assume that empiricist epistemology is the only epistemology going, nor that it is the only epistemology which attributes due importance to empirical investigation. The epistemological position assumed here conceives of deductive and inductive arguments alike as capable of justifying theoretical claims, and as being ultimately logically interdependent. Thus we should not accept unreflectively the pluralists' tacit suggestion that only inductive arguments can justify theoretical claims, and indeed in Chapter Two we shall consider theoretical arguments bearing on the analysis of policymaking.

1.10 Conclusion

It is clear that network approaches to policymaking have some capacity for explaining political outcomes. Through their emphasis on the interactions of social actors within a policy domain, they seek to highlight the importance of relationships between actors as a means of understanding the nature of political

outcomes. Network type approaches are a useful means of identifying core and peripheral actors as well as providing insights into the type of resources which allow cohorts of policy actors to maximise their input into the policymaking process.

The evolution of neo-pluralist models of policymaking has seen the development of concepts which point to a more closed picture of policy access than that implied by classic pluralism. Rather than a very open and competitive political arena, network approaches have found that policy hierarchies exist where the extent of policy access can be determined by the resource foundation of different actors. The type of resources which have been highlighted by neo-pluralists as being relevant are not only economic, but can be the result of particularly close relationships with government officials or the control of policy relevant knowledge or policy expertise. In each case the type of resourcing allows some groups to dominate the policy domain.

Consequently, one of the shortcomings of these approaches is that they are limited in their capacity to effectively explain policy change. Given the tendency towards network domination by a core group, these models seem to indicate a very static picture of policymaking. This is exacerbated by a limited ability to explain how membership of core groups changes or how new groups could challenge the core. Internal network dynamics are not able to account for this type of change, which indicates a need to refer to external shocks to the network, which might provoke a directional change. Thus the networks themselves have a limited

explanatory capacity in this regard, and only work well if used as a template for identifying policy actors.

A further area of difficulty is that neo-pluralism is built on certain assumptions about the distribution and exercise of power in society. As well as having a strongly agency-based account of power (power is something which can only be exercised by individuals), it is also very society-centred. This results in a more limited range of actors being included in network analysis. In focussing on groups and individuals, network approaches miss the potentially constraining influence of the state. The significance of the state may be such that if we were to define it as a distinct social actor, which may also have autonomous power, then we might expect that at certain junctures the state could successfully pursue its own agenda, irrespective (or in opposition to) the societal interests which surround it. This may be, at least partly, an explanation of policy change. This would also indicate that the autonomy of social, network actors could be constrained by the actions of the state, indicating an even less open and competitive picture of the policy process.

In addition, a further assumption of pluralism and neo-pluralism which may be relevant to the types of political outcomes it recognises, is that it has no direct engagement with structure. In other words, to discuss the possibility that capitalism as a specific productive system may have some bearing on the types of political outcomes we might expect, is difficult terrain. It certainly would not be plausible within a pluralist context to make any assumptions about the nature of capitalism being relevant to outcomes, such that actors were constrained in the same way by

the social organisation of capitalism. At least part of the explanation for why this type of assumption is invalid outside a more Marxist framework, can be found in the method chosen by pluralist investigations.

The empiricism which underpins pluralist theories of policymaking means that prior theorisation of the social structure is neither possible nor desirable. The possible delimiting of individual agency by the social organisation of capitalism does not fit into pluralist conceptions of policymaking and the operation of democracy. It would be difficult, to discover through empirical investigation alone the extent to which capitalism as a mode of production had inhibited actor autonomy in specific ways. Further, by focussing on the observable interactions of social actors, pluralists generate theoretical points about the contours of the meso-level, but are unable to make statements about their applicability across nation states, or even across the spectrum of domestic policy domains. Particularisation and variation in outcomes is evidence enough of pluralism, and is further interpreted as evidence that capitalism, as a mode of production, does not constrain meso-level activity in uniform ways. Thus, the conclusion drawn is that capitalism is not a relevant variable in the explanation of political outcomes.

In light of the fact that network approaches do not account for these two possible constraining factors (the state and capitalism) they have limited utility for political investigation. Although the information which can be discovered through the application of the networks model is useful and interesting, it may be of secondary importance if we consider that the impact individual policy actors can have is not simply the product of meso-level competition, but is competition

conducted at a level which may be constrained by the actions or organisation of the macro-level. The next chapter will develop these points further, in part by examining some of the relevant theoretical arguments in the literatures on power, structure and agency.

Chapter 2. A Critique of Pluralist Theories of Policymaking

2.1 Introduction

Chapter One provided an overview of the main developments within network analysis. Throughout that overview, a number of points were made in relation to the limitations of the networks method, particularly in being able to present an overall picture of the policymaking process. The networks approach remains strongly pluralist despite the new directions in which it has been developing (epistemic communities and technocracy for example). The criticisms which are levelled at network theory then can be understood as criticisms of this style of neo-pluralism.

The criticisms are on three levels which extend from more specific points to general difficulties with the neo-pluralist method. Firstly, in the specific case of the most recent incarnations of networks models, we can criticise the notion of expertise as the most significant power resource. This will be discussed in section 2.3 below. Secondly, as a result of the society-centred nature of neo-pluralism, there are several points to be made about the identification and distribution of power within these approaches. Section 2.4 will therefore give an overview of the power debate within social science, with the aim of demonstrating the limited range of the power concept used by pluralists and neo-pluralists. A different conception of power would not only allow the possibility of introducing a wider range of actors

into the investigation, but would also bring more depth to the analysis of the relationships between actors.

Thirdly, the logical next step from a discussion of power is to one of structure and agency. There is a general point to be made here about the perspective on structure and agency found within pluralism. The analysis of policymaking necessarily flows from the way in which one approaches the relationship between structure and agency. Neo-pluralism is an agency based approach and thus the focus of criticism here arises from its lack of engagement with structure or notions of structural power. This is a much more fundamental criticism of pluralist methodology, and the contemporary contributions to this area will be discussed in section 2.5. The chapter will conclude by raising the possibility of developing an approach which can successfully combine the flexibility to fully investigate *both* the macro and the meso-levels of political economy. The desirability of an approach which can successfully investigate these two levels should be clear. It has already been stated that the type of information which network models supply is useful, if limited. The argument has been that it may be secondary to some other features of social systems, such as state power or the social organisation of those systems. In spite of this it is clearly important to be able to identify key social actors and their interrelationships within the spectrum of policy domains. Consequently, it is desirable to attempt to overcome the limitations of neo-pluralism in developing a more integrated meso-macro approach rather than to do away with pluralism altogether.

2.2 Where are the constraints?

It has already been stated that the basis of pluralist investigations is one of open politics, in which a wide range of outcomes are possible. Further, the way in which those outcomes are reached is identifiable through an examination of the interplay of actors in the policymaking process. In policymaking terms this indicates that policy outcomes are not determined, insofar as the policymaking process is open to the competing pressures of a spectrum of relevant lobbies, interest groups, policy communities and other networks of interest. The policy outcome is therefore, to a large extent, the product of the relative success of these policy networks, where access to policy makers is only restricted by network specific hierarchies or limited mobilisation abilities.

The picture then is one of an open interplay of various interests at the meso-level, which thus does not identify the nature of the macro level as anything other than fluid and open to the ebb and flow of plural politics. It is not the aim of pluralist theory to characterise macro level concepts such as the state or structural context, as these are not the focus of their investigations. Rather they are society-centred accounts, which purposely seek to explain the less formalised relationships in policymaking. Consequently, it is possible to claim that this limited type of political inquiry into meso-level activity may in fact distort the explanation of political outcomes. This claim would be premised on the potential of macro-level factors to constrain the real autonomy of the meso-level. There are two points to be made in relation to pluralist conceptions of meso-level autonomy. The first

relates to the potential for constraints on the autonomy of the network (network actors) by the state, and the second is a wider point about pluralist methodology.

The first point to make then is that the nature of network approaches as society-centred accounts, is such that the state is not a central area of concern. As part of the neo-pluralist reaction to state-centric approaches which preceded its development, the state has been removed from the analysis as a key social actor in its own right or as a potential structural constraint. The state as distinct actor, even if defined in more individualistic terms as the sum total of public officials, is not considered as a social actor with either its own agenda or with the power to translate its preferences into actions. If considered in such a way, the state could, potentially, be able to limit the range of possibilities or may, in some instances, change the preferences of organised interests in order to pursue its own agenda. The state as a key social actor could therefore be considered as a significant constraint on individual agency. It is possible, however, to reconcile this different position on the state within the confines of the pluralist method, and this will be the subject of Chapter Five.

The second point is more directly a criticism of pluralist methodology and, if found to be persuasive, requires us to step outside the pluralist method and seek further approaches to policymaking. It has been noted that the empiricist basis of pluralism provides the explanation of the parameters of its analysis. At the same time, empiricism provides a focus for a critical assessment of the impact of that method on understanding the nature of the policymaking process and, thus, the nature of political outcomes. It should be possible to theorise about the nature of

the macro-level of the polity, and so provide some judgement of the context within which the meso-level of policymaking is taking place. Not only should that be possible but it is not unreasonable to claim, even at the outset, that a different assessment of the nature of the macro-level may have a bearing on the meso-level of political examination. In other words, it could be asserted that the central failing of pluralist and neo-pluralist approaches to understanding the policymaking process lies precisely in its method of inquiry, one which may significantly underestimate the constraints on the power of agents at the meso-level. This, it can be claimed, arises as a result of the lack of a direct engagement with the macro-level or structural investigations of the polity. In other words, pluralism is not a structural theory and, as a result, does not seek to explain in any general terms the ways in which the system (capitalism) may constrain meso-level decision making. Further, this flows from the point already made about the lack of a theory of the state, as it has already been indicated that the state may also provide a constraint on actor autonomy, as an aspect of structure (if it is not defined as a distinct social actor, as in the preceding formulation). As noted above, this type of criticism – as it is a critique of the method of inquiry – is one which cannot be resolved without adopting a non-pluralist approach. This will be the subject of Chapter Six.

A range of more specific critical points can be made in relation to the broad spectrum of networks approaches outlined in the previous chapter. All such points can be seen to originate in the more fundamental criticism of their failure to account for the possibility of contextual or structural constraints on the ability of the network to genuinely exercise autonomy and power in the policymaking

process. In other words, the focus of the critique is on the claim that all outcomes are open. Some of these limits can be demonstrated using examples of the approaches outlined in Chapter One.

The interpretation of the macro-level as non-consequential, produces an implication in the earlier formulations of network analysis that the policy process is accessible to any range of interests which organise to participate in that process. This seemed to indicate, for example in the case of issue networks, that all or any group could have some input into policymaking, and that it should be possible for any group to compete with any other group for access. In other words, any limits to their ability to act effectively would be self-imposed, for example through poor organisation or quality of argument. Despite the development of analytical tools such as policy communities, which recognise more distinctly the reality of external advantages accorded some groups and not others (in particular close relationships between certain communities of interest and relevant civil servants), and which can thus be the difference in being able to effectively engage in the policymaking process, there is no real on-going assessment of the ability of certain groups to dominate in any given policy field.

Again the answer to this area of potential difficulty can be found in neo-pluralist analysis: given that the macro-level is not of primary consideration which thus allows the claim that the meso-level is plural and competitive, then the domination of any group is not entrenched. Network analysis maintains, despite accepting that different political and economic resourcing of groups will affect a group's ability to impact on political outcomes, that this unevenness does not result

in domination by a single sectional interest in policymaking generally. Rather there will be a different core group in each of the different areas of policy interest and within any particular policy area over time. The fact that the claim is for a circulation of elites rather than the domination of a single elite within the polity as a whole, seems to be evidence enough for claims to be made about the plural nature of politics.

The issue of what have been referred to as 'insider groups' however, does raise the question of the extent to which there can be any real dynamism both within the membership of any tight policy network or community and, thus, the degree to which that would produce policy stagnation rather than policy change. Further, the potential for a circulation of dominant groups over time, which seems to be the claim of neo-pluralism, does not fully address the question of the possibility of any structural constraints on the participation of any and all interest groups. For example, it may not satisfactorily explain the continued exclusion of the same groups in the policy process. As a consequence of the method, network analysis is much better placed to explain the positive inclusion of groups rather than negative 'selecting out'.

This is a significant limitation, as it is possible that obstacles to access for some groups may be irreversible for the 'lifetime' of any particular political context. In other words, the inclusion of some groups who may aspire to insider status, and the continued exclusion of others, may be the result of structurally determined factors which, thus, are unlikely to change whilst the structures of the society remain the same. This would necessitate a conclusion that the policy

process is not open as pluralists claim but may be restrictive in ways which are determined at the macro-level. Again, the empiricist method does not have the capacity to sustain this type of claim nor to investigate it further.

The example of Sabatier's Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) only serves to further underline this point. This particular framework of analysis comprises all the elements of the network approach and its evolution towards the acceptance of group hierarchies within the policy process. Again, despite acknowledging the dominance of any particular advocacy coalition at any given time within the ACF, the underlying question of the means by which any group comes to dominate remains unanswered. The same reliance on empiricism prevails: policy investigations may show that one particular advocacy coalition dominates through its close ties with the policymakers but, on the assumption that this is not the result of any 'unobservable' structural factors, then this dominant position can always be challenged by another advocacy coalition within the ACF.

A further point of difficulty with Sabatier's ACF is that it is clear that each advocacy coalition is self-selecting in terms of its composition, as a result of the key mobilisation factor which Sabatier refers to as shared normative beliefs. So entrenched are these that he likens them to religious belief. Such strong principled bonds mean that the changing membership of any given advocacy coalition is unlikely to produce any real shift in its preferred goals for policy outcomes. Further, any connections it has with policymakers which allow it to be successful, may indicate something about shared normative beliefs extending further than the

advocacy coalition, to the policymakers also. This would represent a coalition of interests which would be difficult to challenge from within the ACF.

A final significant point can be made in relation to the full range of network theories. That is, in considering that political outcomes are open, and that access to the policymaking process is something which, over time, is possible for all or any network of interests (with varying levels of success); network approaches do not accord any particular status to the state. As already indicated, the omission of the state from policymaking analysis may distort explanations of political outcomes.

Given that networks can partly be understood as a reaction to the more statist theories which preceded them, neo-pluralists do not address the state as having the potential to have a significant and different power capacity in terms of placing constraints on policy subsystems. Neo-pluralism, as it is manifested through the networks models, seeks to explain the policy process through the range of actors who can be seen to be directly involved in the policy process. Given the nature of its method, this new pluralism also does not seek to explain the nature and role of the state as a unique actor with either a self-interested agenda or as a possible constraining factor in terms of the range of policy outcomes which are achievable. An assessment of state activity along these lines is possible and has been pursued by more contemporary statist theory. So, although a criticism of network approaches is their failure to address the potential for the state to be a constraining factor in policymaking, at least the possibility that the state is a powerful and autonomous social actor, is possible within the framework of the empiricist method.

As previously indicated, there are specific points which can be made about the limits of any particular manifestation of the policy networks approach, but the broad criticism of the approach which underpins all such points lies with its concept of the nature and distribution of power, and its consequent structural indeterminism. It should be clear that the claims of neo-pluralism about the open nature of the political process only make sense in terms of the approach it adopts, that of concentrating on observable interactions and thus developing theory from this type of empirical investigation. Despite this, it is possible to challenge this inductive method and thus the analysis of political outcomes which result from the application of network formulations.

The following sections will concentrate more specifically on the issues of power and structure, beginning with a discussion of the very particular use of power used within the epistemic communities approach, as this is an example of the limited way in which power is understood in the pluralist method.

2.3 The power of experts

In addition to what has been identified as the more general problem of an absence of significant contextual or structural constraints in the pluralist picture of the policy process, there are some significant points to be made about the particular development of the theory of epistemic communities. This highlights the way in which power is used within network type approaches. It was noted in Chapter One

that the evolution of network theories has seen the sophistication of models according to the identification of a particular knot of actors in the network, who can have more power relative to other actors. One particular example of this development highlights the specific role of knowledge or expertise in the policymaking process: in other words, attributing greater power to actors or a cohort of actors who have policy relevant knowledge or expertise. Such approaches consider ownership of knowledge or expertise as a power base in itself. It is this core of such approaches which is challenged here.

There are two approaches in particular which focus on the exercise of knowledge as power, epistemic communities and technocracy, which were identified in Chapter One. The interesting element of these approaches is that they seek to explain knowledge-based knots of actors in terms of ‘special access’ to the policy process.

It may be the case that experts have always been important to policymaking, so the assumption is not necessarily that there has been an increasing involvement by experts in the policymaking process, but that the nature and extent of their involvement is something which needs to be explained. Existing theories about the input of knowledge-based communities are compelling insofar as they point to the special place of experts in decision making. However, there are two key reasons why it is important not to over-estimate the apparent power of policy expertise in decision making:

1. Available knowledge is not necessarily 'correct' knowledge – given that people with 'mistaken' knowledge can also be powerful, it is not the knowledge itself which is powerful but instead the capacity to have it applied / taken on board in the process of shaping policy;
2. Policy knowledge or expertise cannot tell us what the 'ends' of policy should be – ends-setting is an exercise of power which is not at the disposal of experts.

To take the first point, one set of expert knowledge is not necessarily 'correct' knowledge. It is often the case that there is a range of equally defensible theories about the best means of addressing or solving a given problem. If that is the case and the government chooses one course of action over another, the importance lies in discovering why that particular choice was made. Secondly, even if we could be sure that the expert knowledge was both objective and the 'truth' about the best means, it cannot tell us what the ends are. In other words, if we know perfectly how something works, then that will help us pick the best means to achieve whatever the ends are, but it does not tell us what those ends should be.

In other words, the adage that knowledge is power is not true. The ability to apply knowledge in real situations – to implement knowledge for a particular end is where the real power lies, and this is a function retained by decision makers. It may be possible to argue that knowledge in the policy process is a power base if it is the only knowledge or expertise available to policymakers – in other words, if a single organisation has the monopoly of control over the production of policy relevant knowledge. The first thing to say here, is that such a contention does not

alter the fact that knowledge in itself does not deliver power in the policy process, just that it may deliver some power to some experts in *certain conditions*. Further, it is certainly accepted here that policy experts can, potentially, have more power in the policy process than other individual actors. However this still does not make them the ‘power-houses’ of the policy process, as choosing to use or choosing not to use that available knowledge is still a function which lies with political power brokers. For example, even if a water company has the monopoly of knowledge for a particular aspect of water management improvement, the decision makers do not have to implement it.

So, it may be the case that experts have better access to decision makers because of their control over specialist knowledge in a given field. ‘Specialist access’ may even derive from their perceived monopoly of policy relevant knowledge in certain circumstances. In this sense there is a policy network or community available for consultation or to provide new research/ideas for policy. But policymakers still have the monopoly of control over the direction of policy, the long-term goals for the economy and society, the ‘ends’ for which they consult to discover the means. This is true even if one maintains a pluralist vision of policymaking. In other words, this particular development in the networks approach is something which can be challenged even within a more limited pluralist interpretation of the political process.

So, perhaps the advantage in attaching some importance to the presence of knowledge-based communities or knots of experts as policy consultees is that it allows for an investigation of more precise, even the key, policy actors and some

assessment of their impact on policy. It highlights the particular importance of a specific type of meso-level actor who may have 'special access' to the policy process and, therefore, the ear of the policymaker. The special access which they enjoy may derive from their perceived control over expertise or 'correct' policy specific information. However, the contention that expertise can be equated with power gives a clear indication of the way in which power is identified in pluralism: agents have it and exercise it unencumbered by structural constraints. These approaches stop short of an explanation of the wider context within which decisions are taken which means that they can only tell us something about the influence of these type of network actors, relative to others. They cannot tell us anything about the different ways in which power might be exercised as they retain a limited, individual concept of power.

Technocracy attempts to do something more ambitious than the epistemic communities approach, as it bases its discussion around a transformation of societal power relations rather than making an assessment of the interaction of sets of policy actors. As already outlined in Chapter One, there are two main areas of difficulty with this particular development. Firstly, as with the professional networks approach, there seems to be a general point to be made about the way in which the participation of 'experts' is seen in politically neutral terms. That is, that experts can be relied upon to provide the best solutions to political crises through the application of technical-rational solutions, rather than be politically compromised. The involvement of either professionals or experts in the policy process should not necessarily produce any assumptions about neutrality and

objectivity for reasons already stated: being 'allowed in' or rising to dominant/insider status may in itself be evidence of pre-existing relationships or of agendas which are politically motivated. This simply reproduces the means / ends distinction again.

The second point has already been made in the discussion of technocracy in Chapter One. The literature on technocratic society has yet to produce any analysis of existing societal relations in order for us to understand the evolution towards technocratic decision making. They also do not provide evidence of a new class of technocrats in the upper reaches of society, who are relied upon by the political elite for objective guidance on policy matters. Without either of these it is difficult to find the technocratic approach persuasive.

Given the range of criticisms which have been forwarded in relation to the development of network approaches and the particular examples of knowledge based power analysis, it seems that the fundamental points at issue are two. Firstly all investigations into the policymaking process make judgements about the amount of power available to and exercised by different actors at the meso-level. It seems important then to give an account of the way in which the power concept is used by pluralists and neo-pluralists as, in forming part of their method of inquiry, this presents one of the key limitations of such approaches.

It should also be clear that the way in which power is used in political analysis is enmeshed with the most enduring area of conflict within political science - structure and agency. It has been highlighted throughout the discussion on the limitations of network approaches, that a potential area of significant insight into

the policymaking process is an understanding of the possible contextual or structural constraints on the autonomy of policy actors. An empiricist method cannot account for non-observable political phenomena which, it can be argued, therefore leads such approaches to discount the possibility of both structural power (and in the case of network approaches, also state power) as pre-determining, or at least limiting, the range of possible political outcomes. A realist approach which would allow a certain amount of prior theorising on the nature of the structural context of policymaking may, therefore, be more instructive.

In order to demonstrate the importance of taking a different view on the significance of making a prior assessment of the macro-level, which thus allows some judgement about possible structural constraints, it is important to consider the range of perspectives on power as well as structure and agency. Together these should provide a basis from which to consider the best way of improving on the neo-pluralist method in order to counter the limits which undermine its general application.

2.4 The political science literature on power

It has been indicated in the previous section that perhaps the central issue of contention with the application of pluralist approaches to policymaking lies in their conceptualisation of power. It is the different definitions power found in competing perspectives of the policymaking process, which makes any attempt to

reconcile the desirability of a conceptualisation of structural power within a neo-pluralist analysis impossible. That is, the way in which the power concept is operationalised within neo-pluralism indicates that, as a theory, it cannot answer the questions raised about structural constraints on actor autonomy.

However, the problem of structural indeterminism arguably cannot be overcome by simply replacing neo-pluralism with a more structuralist method, as this can encounter a different set of problems related to over-structuration. Finding the middle ground between these two positions then seems to be persuasive. However, it has been the case that social science inquiry so far, has demonstrated a preference for *either* a structural or an agency-based approach, rather than a serious attempt to harness the benefits of both. In the case of research into the nature of the policymaking process, the method chosen will, to a certain extent pre-empt the conclusions which can be reached. This has been clearly demonstrated in the literature on power, where it has been shown that the method used can shape the explanation of political outcomes and thus also colours the interpretation of larger concepts such as the nature of democracy.

Approaching the question of power takes us to the heart of questions of structure and individual agency, observable and non-observable formulations as well as more radical interpretations. The significance of the relationship between structure and agency is a logical development from the discussions about power and will complete the argument being developed about the limitations of pluralist analysis. Firstly however, the community power debate will be discussed, thus demonstrating its relevance for arguments about the utility of network approaches.

Dahl (1957) is the theorist most closely associated with the more empirically observable explanation of power (the one-dimensional view in Lukes's terminology, see Lukes, 1974) and, thus, with pluralist interpretations of the policymaking process and democracy more broadly. His study of the decision making process in New Haven, USA, confirmed his view that power was something which you could see being exercised, and the power of social actors could be measured along the path of decisions taken. He went on to conclude that, given the typicality of New Haven's politics, this reflected a wider system of democracy in America. To test his assumptions about policymaking, Dahl conducted his research through observing and then cataloguing the discussions and outcomes of meetings of local government through secondary sources as well as limited direct observation. By simply recording victories and defeats and adding up wins and subtracting the losses for each item on the agenda, Dahl found that the elected officials had the most power. Thus, citizens had indirect influence over policy and, in this sense, democracy was being served. Dahl's method of only considering the observable exercise of power as actual power and seeing outcomes as a result of competitive politics, ensured that he succeeded in his own terms of showing a polyarchal model and, therefore, that an elite does not control the political agenda. This was a straightforward example of the empiricist method, where Dahl's observations of the political process generated a theory about the nature of the political process and its inherent democracy.

Problems with Dahl's account were swiftly identified, and his work was significantly critiqued by Bachrach and Baratz (1962 and 1970). Bachrach and

Baratz identified problems with Dahl's analysis in terms of what they referred to as 'agenda-setting' and 'non-decisions'. In other words they identified the capacity of some individuals to exert indirect influence on the policy process which would not manifest itself in Dahl's empirically focussed study. Often considered as an elite theory response to Dahl, the central problem for Bachrach and Baratz, arising from Dahl's analysis, was his concentration on the agenda as already set (and thus a given, without prompting the need for further investigation) as well as his totalling of victories and losses based only on those discussions which were had within the formal political arena of the Council chamber. Bachrach and Baratz were able to point to events in contemporary American society to claim that Dahl's analysis was deeply flawed. The civil rights movements and, later, anti-Vietnam protests were attracting more and more attention in the late 1950s and early 1960s and it was clear that unnoticed protest had built up, thus demonstrating a lack of the consensus (the assumption of consensus had been based on an absence of conflict in Dahl's model) and therefore an absence of the democracy of which Dahl had written.

It was clear to Bachrach and Baratz that a consideration of the power to set the agenda – which could therefore prevent issues from ever appearing in the public or the formal political domain, thus avoiding observable conflict – was necessary. Bachrach and Baratz proposed that a lack of conflict in the formal political arena, rather than indicating consensus, may actually indicate that power had already been exercised. Thus, of importance is the 'mobilisation of bias' in the formation of political agendas (Bachrach and Baratz, 1970: 45-46) and an awareness ' . . . that

there are in the community serious but latent power conflicts' (Bachrach and Baratz, 1970: 9). The empirical work which Crenson (1971) carried out on steel industries in Gary and East Chicago, Indiana showed that power *could* be exercised in the way Bachrach and Baratz described, and so there was a second dimension to the power concept - agenda setting and non-decisions. This analysis of power also indicated that policymaking was not necessarily as democratic a process as had previously been accepted. Bachrach and Baratz's analysis retained the actor-based, agency account of power, however, in terms of the formulation that 'a' has power over 'b' to the extent that 'a' can get 'b' to do something 'b' would not otherwise have done. In other words,

Like their pluralist forebears, Bachrach and Baratz assume that power relations exist only insofar as there is actually observable conflict between those exercising power and those over whom it is exercised.

Hay, 1997: 46-7.

Although acknowledging the significance of individual or group actors in terms of their impact on policy within a given context, Lukes (1974) added a third, radical dimension to the power concept by introducing a more systemic analysis. Briefly, Lukes highlighted the need to consider 'interests' and whether the interests of an individual could be manipulated so as to forge false wants and therefore prevent the expression of 'real interests'. The first two accounts of power also consider 'interests', but underlying each is a different conception of the individual:

as manifesting wants in actual observed behaviour (Dahl), or as having the potential to develop wants under a variety of conditions (Bachrach and Baratz). Lukes's alternative formulation introduces the notion of 'real interests', highlighting the importance of conditions and relations independent of the individual. In other words, individuals can have false wants in the political process and the political system is designed in such a way as to prevent the expression of real interests which may conflict with the objectives of 'the system'.

This least observable form of power clearly has close associations with Marxian concepts of false consciousness and structural power, although Lukes stops short of developing a structural approach. As a result, and added to the difficulties in proving in actuality that such a power does exist, it has become a more difficult set of ideas to take on board for some political scientists. For example Hay writes:

Lukes thus resurrects the spectre of false consciousness which many had thought exorcised from contemporary social and political theory.

Hay, 1997: 47.

Although this does not need to be considered a serious criticism of Lukes (more a dislike of intangibles such as false consciousness), Hay (1997) goes on to advance a more interesting critique of Lukes's radical view of power.

Hay is concerned with the problems associated with perceived versus real interests, and attributes the difficulty to a problem of conflating the identification of power with its distribution within the system. According to Hay, this results

from the identification of power as a negative force: The fact that 'a' exercises power over 'b', subverts the real interests of 'b' and, as such, this limits the autonomy of 'b'. In other words, Lukes's identification of a power relationship involves the judgement that, in all cases, the exercise of power is negative:

To identify A as exercising power over B is to identify a situation in which B's (real) interests are being subverted and to identify A as not only responsible but culpable.

Hay, 1997: 48-9.

According to Hay, this formulation leads Lukes into further problems when attempting to give substance to 'real interests'. In order to be able to claim that real interests have been subverted in the exercise of power, we require some understanding of what constitutes both 'real interests' as well as judgements about the motivations of A. For Hay this is an ethical dilemma which leads Lukes to conclusions which cannot allow for the legitimate exercise of power. Further, in order to make sense of Lukes's concept of power, it has to be understood as a *relative* concept, where the 'ideal' is a system in which no individuals' interests are subverted (which is a normative statement about political life) (Hay, 1997: 49).

For Hay then, the problems which arise from Lukes's formulation could be avoided if the identification of power was separated from value-laden judgements critiquing the distribution and exercise of power:

In short, the problems of Lukes' formulation reside in his failure to differentiate clearly between analytical questions concerning the *identification* of power within social and political settings, and normative questions concerning the *critique* of the distribution and exercise of power thus identified.

Hay, 1997: 50

Hay goes on to propose that the way to remedy this problem is to distinguish the consequence of the exercise of power (as an individual-agency based concept) from the context within which future actions must be taken as a result of that exercise. So power now has two main components: it is something which has an impact on the behaviour of 'b' *and* it has consequences for the context within which future behaviour can take place, and this is posed in the negative sense '... which deprives the range of possibilities of others' (Hay, 1997: 50).

What Hay outlines then is a dual concept of power which takes account of its different dimensions through reference to both structure (as context) and individual agency. Power for Hay then has two equally important strands to it, one of direct power, which is *conduct*-shaping and a second strand of indirect power, which is *context*-shaping:

In the first formulation, power is a behavioural phenomenon which is immediate, directly observable, empirically-verifiable; in the second,

power refers to the capacity to redefine structured contexts and is indirect, latent and often an unintended consequence.

Hay, 1997: 51.

The main benefit which this delivers for Hay is that this dual concept of power does not require any judgements to be made about interests, responsibility or culpability. In addition, with Hay's useful introduction of a dual concept of power, which allows an investigation of power in both direct and indirect forms, a similar exercise or application of it should be possible for the purposes of a fuller explanation of the policy process.

It is clear that there are identifiable weaknesses with the type of limited concept of power which is used in pluralist and neo-pluralist analyses. Network approaches utilise a method which relies on empirical investigation and thus allows no significant inquiry into what are more intangible concepts such as structural power. The problem which this produces is a possible underestimation of the capacity of contextual power resources to constrain the range of actions of individual actors. Lukes's third dimension of power highlights the potential significance of having a more structural approach, on the basis that otherwise we may be seeing a very limited picture of politics. The consequence of a limited view of the political process is the production of distorted conclusions about the nature of democratic politics in practice, a criticism levelled at Dahl's suggestion that democracy was being served not only in New Haven, but across the United States.

The more recent work by Hay on power takes issue with the work of Lukes, largely on the basis of reintroducing what is considered to be the undesirable, intangible concept of 'real interests'. Although Hay makes some useful contributions to the debate, in particular in relation to some duality of the power concept, he essentially returns us to a very individual concept of power. The two elements which Hay identifies as conduct and context shaping power both refer to the capacity of individual actors to exercise power, either to affect the behaviour of other actors or to change the future context of other actions. This type of argument retains an agency-centred approach to power and thus leaves no room for any structural concept of power. In this sense it does not overcome the stated weaknesses in the application of agency-centred accounts of policymaking, that of not taking account of possible structural constraints on actor autonomy.

Hay's style of argument takes us to the heart of the structure and agency debate and introduces the notion of a relationship between agents and their context insofar as agents can affect both individual behaviour as well as the context within which that behaviour takes place. This type of dynamic relationship between structure and agency has become a dominant theme of the literature in this field. However, the most recent contributions to this particular debate see a more significant, reciprocal power relationship between structure and agency where each impacts on the other.

As it has been suggested that some ability to account for the potential of structure to impact on individual agency may be fundamentally important for our

understanding of the policymaking process, it is to the relationship between structure and agency that we now turn.

2.5 The social theory literature on agency and structure

The desire to find a middle ground between agency-emphasising and structure-emphasising accounts within social science is not new. There has been an on-going debate throughout the evolution of the political and social sciences about the validity of reducing political and social phenomena to either individuals or to society (see Giddens, 1979 and Archer, 1995). This is a distinction between the primacy of the meso- or the macro-level, which will inform the method of inquiry.

As Archer (1995) points out, what is referred to as the debate about structure and agency in fact mirrors older debates of individualism versus holism which have always been a strong current within sociological discourse. There is an enduring epistemological issue about how far one can understand society through the character and actions of individuals, or whether it is necessary to understand the social context, and thus the constraints, which may shape the character and actions of those individuals. Given the centrality of this debate, and the steady rehearsal of the perceived flaws within each approach, it is unsurprising that there has been a third current within sociology which attempts to transcend these two positions.

Before discussing this alternative position, it is instructive to briefly outline the main points of the structure and agency debate. As already noted, social theory has traditionally fallen into one of two camps which have had different labels over time, but essentially refer to the same methodological/epistemological distinction. Those theories which focus on the 'social system' tend to see social actors as being affected by the system, as Dawe explains, 'In terms of their existence and nature as social beings, their social behaviour and relationships, and their very sense of personal identity as human beings, they are determined by it' (Dawe, 1979: 367). By contrast, sociology of social action '. . . conceptualizes the social system as derivative of social action and interaction, a social world produced by its members, who are thus pictured as active, purposeful, self- and socially-creative beings' (*Ibid.*) These two positions have been, for the most part, considered as alternatives to one another and, as such, provide a basic tension within sociological thought.

It is clear that there are some difficulties in both the individualist (social action) and the more structural (social system) approaches to social and political inquiry. Despite these difficulties, social scientists still tend to be more closely associated with one of these two modes of investigation, as the method which underpins each is a crucially important epistemological decision. The debate has retained its significance precisely because the method of generating general theory from the interactions at the micro-level and meso-level, or of admitting some prior theorisation of the structural context, informs any analysis of social or political outcomes. In other words, it forms a part of the explanation of social and political phenomena.

As previously noted, the difficulties of each method, which essentially revolve around the problems associated with reductionism: either to the level of the individual or to society, have produced a further dimension to the discussion: that of an approach which seeks to demonstrate a reciprocal relationship between structure and agency. That is, an approach which claims that it is not possible to be reductionist in your method, whether that be to the micro- or the macro-level, as the two are interconnected. To avoid statements about social systems being logically prior to and therefore conditioning social action or, alternatively, that social systems have no pre-determined form but arise and gain meaning from social interaction, a position which supposes that there is a two-way causality seems more appropriate. This type of 'dual' approach to structure and agency again is not particularly new, although it has been further refined in its most contemporary version.

Westergaard and Resler (1975) discussed two levels of power, which they thought essential for understanding the functioning of society. They indicated that it was necessary to have an approach which utilised two levels of power – one for individuals, another for structure – in order to understand the nature of the impact of individuals on their context, as well to understand that individual actions are limited by the constraint of structural power. In this way Westergaard and Resler were attributing different types of power to what they considered to be different types of actor – individuals and the social system. This can be seen as one particular dual approach to structure and agency which, although separating out the two levels of analysis, nevertheless points to something of a mutually dependent

relationship. With this particular approach it is possible to emphasise one type of power actor as being dominant in the relationship, but importantly highlights the validity of considering each in relation to the other, rather than focussing solely on structure or on individual agency.

One criticism of this approach however, is that although it highlights a certain dualism of structure and agency, it doesn't articulate the nature of the relationship between the two levels of power. This type of criticism has also been made of Anthony Giddens's contribution in his theory of structuration. Giddens (1979) discusses structure and agency in relation to power, and develops a *theory of structuration*, which points to the false dualism of objectivism and subjectivism and instead indicates the unity of structure and agency. Giddens is concerned with social order and the recurrent social practices which comprise it. This leads him to ask questions about 'what 'action' and the sphere of the 'social' must be like and how they should be conceptualised' (Cassell, 1993: 9). What Giddens then argues is that there are sets of actions (social practices) which are enacted by individuals through reference to a set of rules which, in their turn, are able to shape those (future) social practices.

In this sense then, structure and agency are bound together, and only make sense conceptually if considered as part of a two-way relationship, where individuals behave according to social rules and this activity creates or reproduces future social rules. In this way social action and the social system are conjoined and each provides meaning for the other. So structure is external to individuals but also provides the means by which (through rules and resources) agency is produced.

Structure and action are conjoined - by applying the rules it has the unintended consequence of reproducing them. This is the duality of structure -- as a medium and unintended outcome of social practices. At each point of structural reproduction there is also the potential for a change to the rules

Cassell, 1993: 13.

As Giddens explains,

By the duality of structure, I mean the essential recursiveness of social life, as constituted in social practices: structure is both medium and outcome of the reproduction of practices. Structure enters simultaneously into the constitution of the agent and social practices, and 'exists' in the generating moments of this constitution.

Giddens, 1979: 5.

In this way structure and agency are inextricably linked so as to be considered a unified concept, in which structure and agency only make sense if considered as existing and, at that same time, generating the other.

A further important element of Giddens's theory is his emphasis on the importance of spatial and temporal conceptions: ' . . . as in the theory of agency – and in order to show the interdependence of action and structure – we must grasp

the *time-space relations inherent in the constitution of all social interaction* (Giddens, 1979: 3). The time-space relations are significant in terms of the means of recognising the unity of structure and agency, and form a significant part of Archer's analysis in the same way.

According to Archer (1995) the main problem with Giddens's theory is that it is not enough to recognise that there is a dualism of structure and agency, it is essential to be able to explain the relationship between them. For Archer, Giddens's theory has no means of explaining the way in which one (structure/agency) affects the other or the interplay of the two.

In her work on structure and agency, Archer develops what she refers to as the *morphogenetic approach* (Archer, 1995: 5). Again she begins with a discussion of the need to avoid the perceived difficulties of both upwards and downwards conflationary approaches, through a social realism which seeks to transcend the two. The further dimension to Archer's approach is that she does provide an explanation of the relationship between structure and agency and the ways in which one affects the other. Her description of the approach indicates the nature of her model. 'The 'morpho' element is an acknowledgement that society has no pre-set form or preferred state: the 'genetic' is a recognition that it takes its shape from, and is formed by, agents, originating from the intended and unintended consequences of their activities' (Archer, 1995: 5).

The important elements of Archer's approach are the dynamic and reciprocal relationship between structure and agency, and the context of 'over time'. Archer elaborates the reciprocal relationship through a discussion of her

proposition that, at any given point in time, *either* individuals or structures are logically prior to the other. In other words, firstly, individuals do not exist at any point in a context which is not previously determined by the pre-existing structure of society. She then contends that structure is not static, it changes over time, and the way in which it changes is explained by the actions of individuals. That is, individuals are able to impact on the shape of the existing structures such that their actions produce structural change. The new structural context then provides the environment for the actions of future individuals and so on. In this way Archer seeks to demonstrate that structure and agency are in a dynamic and reciprocal relationship where each affects the other in a formative way, and thus provide the societal dynamic.

What is particularly useful in Archer's approach is the recognition of a need for a dual approach to structure and agency, which thus implies a dual approach to power. A difference between Archer's contribution and that of Westergaard and Resler for example, is that it indicates the significance of the exercise of power by both individuals and structures, in that individuals can alter the structural context of future individuals as much as structure can constrain the actions of individuals. In this way, neither social action nor the social system are primary, neither has the sole or 'real' explanatory capacity. Further, it is impossible to conceive of either structure or agency in this way as current manifestations of social structure are formed by the prior exercise of social action and vice versa. Whether we should agree that this is always true or perhaps is equally true for any given context is maybe an area for discussion. For example, even a strongly structural school of

social science such as Marxism could argue that a particular group of individuals, having gained class consciousness, are able to change the structural context. They may also want to argue, however, that a certain conjunction of historical, structural forces needs also to be present in order for that to take place successfully. In other words, at any given time it may not be possible for individuals, even if organised and class conscious, to seriously affect the structure because the nature of structural power is of a different and greater magnitude than individual power or agency.

2.6 Developing the idea of a dual approach to policymaking

The benefit of the dual approach to structure and agency is that it expresses a conviction that to artificially separate structure and agency is to misunderstand the complex enmeshing of the two. In fact, it is claimed, in order to make sense of social systems it is essential to conceive of structure and agency as conjoined, where shaping power is afforded to both structure and agency in terms of their impact on one another. It is worth noting four points of commonality in these theories:

1. The duality of structure and agency;
2. The duality of power insofar as agency can change structure and structure provides the rules of social action;
3. The ability to change the structural context may be an intended or an unintended consequence of social action;

4. To make sense of this type of duality, it is necessary to have a spatial-temporal conception.

The benefits of this type of approach are clear in that they successfully avoid the problems of reductionism either to the individual or to structure. To highlight such a dynamic and reciprocal relationship between structure and agency is to avoid determinism, functionalism, individualism and structural indeterminism. Despite the fact that this type of interpretation provides a more sophisticated framework for conceiving of structure and agency, the way in which it operationalises power may still pose a problem. It may seem sensible to attribute power resources to both structure and agency, but the way in which this is formulated retains a concept of structure which is constantly open to the pressures of social action. In spite of the fact that the structural arrangements are understood as providing 'the rules of the game', these are able to be challenged and changed through the actions of individuals. In other words, the emphasis on liberating social analysis from any form of determinism or reification of structure means that the 'rules of the game' have no additional purpose, separate identity and so on. As Giddens explains,

According to the theory of structuration, social systems have no purposes, reasons or needs whatsoever; only human individuals do so.

Any explanation of social reproduction which imputes teleology to social systems must be declared invalid.

Giddens, 1979: 7, emphasis in the original.

Whilst it is important to avoid the errors of functionalism and reification, however, we should be careful not to lose any grip of the particular character of structural constraints within certain historical epochs. In fact there is no reason why the retreat from functionalism must involve our denying that structural constraints have an historical character.

The literature on structure and agency tends to leave the historical element out, as if we could have a purely ahistorical conception of the relationship between structure and agency. In contrast, it is argued here that we cannot properly understand this relationship without understanding the particular character of structural constraints which is specific to the epoch under consideration. So, the dualism outlined by Giddens and Archer may successfully navigate social inquiry through the pitfalls of an artificial distinction between structure and agency, but may not fully liberate us from real structural indeterminism.

It is possible that *ahistorical* dual formulations could still fit with a pluralist methodology, if they sought to make some assessment of the state as a potential articulation of the preferences of system level actors, for example. However, it seems impossible to incorporate a view about the general character of structural constraints in different epochs in a pluralist approach. The formulations outlined above discuss structure and social action in general terms. There is no historical context insofar as structural arrangements reflect the organisation of the social system. Each transformation of structure presumably indicates a new era, the

development of the social system. Other approaches, notably Marxism, would want to emphasise the importance of the organisation of the social system. It is not necessary to fall into the traps of instrumentalism or functionalism in order to highlight the significance of type of system – feudalism, capitalism and so on – for shaping social action and therefore political outcomes.

The notion of a certain dualism in power and in the relationship between agents and structures is a persuasive and dominant theme of most recent contributions to this field. If it is possible to retain some element of this type of dualism in our approach to understanding the policymaking process then there seem to be some clear advantages over network type approaches.

In order to overcome what is claimed to be the central weakness of network approaches – that of considering that any outcome is possible within the political process – some introduction of a structural dimension to the power concept may overcome this difficulty. If the contention is that some assessment of the macro-level would inform our understanding of the meso-level political process, then a method which would admit such an assessment would be an improvement on network theory.

It should be clear from the discussion throughout this chapter that the various incarnations of the networks approach only make sense within an overarching pluralist framework. Any differing assumptions about structural power or contextual constraints on actor autonomy cannot have any impact within pluralist approaches. The reason for this is that such assumptions are part of a prior theorising process about the nature of the polity, democracy and so on. Such claims

cannot be evidenced in observable phenomena, precisely because they are the kind of intangibles such as 'false consciousness' which Hay finds a hindrance to political inquiry. Consequently they cannot form a part of an empiricist method and, as such, are not addressed by network approaches.

Having proposed that some judgements about the structural context of political activity are a fundamental part of any method, the implication is not that all empirical investigation should thus be abandoned. The proposal is not that network approaches do not work because they are not structuralist approaches, but that perhaps a duality of these opposing methods, if possible, should be preferred. The reason for this is that structuralist arguments can encounter as many difficulties in application as network approaches. In particular, the tendency to determinism is a problem which has seen a steady trend away from wholly structural approaches, including some contemporary schools of Marxism. The criticisms of over-structuration are valid insofar as structurally pre-determined outcomes, which thus allow no role for agency, seem nonsensical. If it was possible to read off all answers from an analysis of structures without any engagement with day to day political interactions then there would be little point in social and political inquiry. However, most structurally focussed accounts do not entirely disengage with the empirical approach, but understanding the balance between structure and agency here is crucial.

To summarise:

1. Pluralist and neo-pluralist approaches are limited by their method – in particular by their understanding of the concept of power and a certain structural indeterminism.
2. A dual and dynamic relationship between structure and agency seems to have distinct advantages for political inquiry.
3. Consequently, substituting a purely structural account for a pluralist one, simply produces new problems rather than providing a simple solution to the weaknesses of pluralism.
4. A method which can operationalise a dual concept of power, and can thus account for a combination of structural power resources and individual agency in the policymaking process, is more desirable.

2.7 Conclusion

There are three areas which have been discussed within this chapter, which should enable us to establish more clearly the needs of policymaking theory and, thus, the apparent requirement of what we have referred to as a 'dual approach'. The chapter began by further highlighting the unsatisfactory elements of the currently dominant neo-pluralist approaches to policymaking analysis. It was claimed that the weaknesses of the networks approach can be partly explained through reference to the range of actors considered within such approaches, and partly through the concept of power at the heart of pluralism more generally.

The first problem arises from the omission of a theory of the state which may identify it as a potential constraint on actor autonomy. Owing to the emphasis on non-formalised power relationships as well as the fact that they are a reaction to state-centric approaches, networks models do not consider the state as either a strong, unified, distinct social actor which is able to successfully pursue its own agenda or as a structural constraint in policymaking. The lack of investigation of the state in these terms could certainly produce a distorted explanation of political outcomes.

It was noted that the issue of state theory could be resolved within a pluralist approach, if the state was defined as a distinct social actor. This possibility will be discussed in Chapter Five. What is more difficult to resolve is the distribution of power between structure and agency. Within neo-pluralism the focus is clearly on actor autonomy at the meso-level. Even if we were to include a strong state in that formulation we would be discussing the (relative) autonomy of those social actors (including the state) from their macro context (the social system). The social organisation of the system, it is argued, should also be considered as directly relevant to understanding political behaviour. However, although structure is considered important, a return to structural determinism only hinders the discussion as reductionism to either individuals or the system is considered problematic. Consequently the development of a *dualism* of structure and agency was considered.

It was claimed that the benefits of a dual approach to structure and agency are essentially two. Firstly it allows us to begin to seriously engage with a notion of

structure once more; and secondly it is possible to avoid the pitfalls of both functionalism and structural indeterminism using this type of approach. Despite providing a framework for understanding the reciprocal relationship between structure and agency, the problem remains one of an ahistorical approach. One of the main issues of contention with the pluralist and neo-pluralist method is that, because it only truly engages with the meso-level, it does not provide a theory of social context. The contributions of Archer and Giddens, although allowing us to take structure seriously, do not provide a theory of *specific* social context – for example, capitalism.

The following chapters will provide a case study of policymaking, which will serve to underline both the utility and limitations of pluralist approaches. The case study, considered through the lens of neo-pluralism, provides a reservoir of useful information about the management of a specific policy domain, as well as the actions and interactions of social actors in that field as they attempt to influence policy. It is suggested, however, that this type of approach cannot ask questions about other social actors, for example the possibility that the state may be an influential social actor, nor assess the relevance of the structural context of policymaking. If the argument that the state and the social system are relevant to political outcomes is persuasive, then the limitations of the network approach should be clear.

Chapter 3. An Outline of the Case Study

3.1 Introduction

The opening chapters have considered the contributions of pluralist and neo-pluralist frameworks to the analysis of the policymaking process. The discussion indicated that neo-pluralist network approaches are society-centred and, as such, concentrate on the informal interactions between policy actors as they attempt to exert influence on decision makers. The benefit of this type of approach is the mapping out of the actions of cohorts of policy actors in the policymaking process and an assessment of the types of actors who are able to have the greatest impact on political outcomes. As previously described, different network approaches focus on different types of resource – expertise, access to civil servants, economic resources (businesses) – which may improve the lobbying position of some interests in any given policy domain. These type of approaches then can identify the influence of non-formalised networks of policy actors, as well as make judgements about their motivation and capacity for policy impact.

The purpose of the following two chapters is to provide an outline of part of a policy domain which should allow for a networks-type assessment of social actor interactions. The aim then, is to illuminate the type of information, in a specific case, which can be uncovered using this type of approach. It is clear that this type of focus on social actors in a policy domain provides a good indication of

the range of actors, and the ways in which consultation may be more limited than classic pluralist pressure group politics would imply. As well as identifying a hierarchy of policy actors, the marginalisation of other groups through the formal consultation process is instructive.

This first chapter will provide an overview of the case study area: the EU Task Force Environment-Water. Chapter Four will look more closely at the experience and outcomes of this consultative Task Force, in order to indicate the constraints on real and open interaction of all interested actors in this domain.

Although the use of Task Force initiatives is not a new policy tool for the EU, the Task Force Environment-Water is a relatively new area for action, only formalising its structures in 1995/96. One advantage of looking at a recent policy initiative is that the networks involved in the consultation also had to be newly formulated. In that sense the means by which different groups either accessed the area or were drawn into the consultation were visible, making the identification of core and marginal groups more straight forward. Also, the Task Force system of policymaking formalises the need for wide consultation within sectors, within member states and across the two key levels of governance: national and European. Further, this particular consultation called for concertation between technical and professional experts as well as consumer and environmental interests. Taking these two dimensions together adds to the possibilities for classifying access by types of actor according to means (that is, resource access – for example expertise, relationship with civil servants and so on) and motivation.

The discussion of the policy actors in this case study should thus enable a clearer indication of the types of information about policymaking which it is possible to discover using this type of empirical approach. We can test the utility as well as point to the limits of an inductive approach like pluralism, and thus further elaborate the case for an approach which considers both the full remit of social actors and which takes account of the macro context of policy behaviour (an approach which allows the use of deductive arguments).

3.1.1 The context of the case study: EU water policy

It can be noted that there has been an increasing policy reach by the EU into significant national policy domains. As such, much policy discussion and negotiation now takes place in pan-European arenas – whether those are led by the EU itself, or formalised business, labour, (or other) networks which are sector specific – and water policy is no exception. Consequently, the level of interaction between the domestic and regional (European) arenas is increasing and, therefore, it is important to be clear about the nature of the type of policy forum offered through EU policy tools such as Task Forces.

As noted above, the water industry has not been immune from the expansion of EU policy competence. Environmental policy more generally has been an integral part of the EU agenda (in terms of regulation and targets) since the 1970s through the development of the Environmental Action Programmes. In

industry terms within the UK, pricing and product quality issues have also been subject to review and regulation since the privatisation of the water industry in 1989.

Together these two factors have forced the UK water industry and the regulatory bodies (the Environment Agency, Ofwat) into the realm of enhanced strategic thinking in terms of long-run research to meet current EU and UK imperatives, as well as developing new technologies to meet future supply problems. In other words, the water industry has to be at the forefront of research and development in order to meet EU criteria around quality targets, as well as to maintain competitive advantage within the UK. (Since privatisation, the water companies in England and Wales have been operating in a competitive market of pricing, quality, supply and management of ground and surface waters, where expertise is no longer a shared commodity as all such information is deemed commercially sensitive).

Consequently, as a result of the significance of research and development for the UK industry as well as the need to be profitable, the industry is hungry for external funding for research from any agency which has money available. The Department of Transport, Environment and the Regions in the UK (DTER: formerly separate government departments for transport and the environment) does support strategic research from the technical and scientific community in relation to water management issues. However, such support is constrained by other considerations, in particular, departmental spending limits and public recognition of the problem (which may be limited or inaccurate). These two factors

have had a negative impact on the ability of water research professionals to act as they see fit, in order to respond to the demands placed upon them. Firstly, as the DTER will admit, it isn't always a case of the best case getting funded, as the Department may often respond to those who shout loudest in the lobby rather than the best proposal for problem resolution. (Telephone interview with Tony Lloyd at DTER 19/5/97)

This factor is further exaggerated by the problem of public identification of a water management problem. From the point of view of those leading the research and development within the industry, the public are full of misconceptions about what the 'real' problems are for water companies and other regulatory bodies. In those cases, monies can be directed to areas which resonate with the public, rather than to those which would benefit most from resources. (Interview with Dr Packham, at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97)

Secondly, with the advent of competitive tendering for research and development, a call by the DTER for ideas for a particular policy issue can result in a series of responses from the industry which are then farmed out to other (cheaper) agencies to carry out.

The net result of the difficulties which can be experienced in working with UK government funding, has been for the industry to look increasingly to the EU for assistance. The EU, as yet, is not constrained in the same way as national governments in terms of problems of resourcing and electability. Additionally, the relevant public (in terms of funding research for future markets) for the EU remains, essentially, the business sector.

The Task Force which is the subject of the case study presented here, then, is one of the 'carrots' used by the EU in order to further embrace business and thus serve its own agenda of policy expansion and authoritative decision making. The EU documentation explicitly stated that the key objective of the consultation exercise engendered by the Task Force was to improve the competitiveness of European business in this policy domain. The research would be targeted to exploiting gaps identified in the international market for water management technologies in an ever-expanding global market.

The nature of this particular policy area then is such that it should highlight the important relationships between policy actors in both national and pan-European fora. What is clear is that the location and interaction of UK water policy actors has changed as a result of two key developments. Firstly the expanding remit of the EU and the funding which it makes available, has increased the scope of some policy actor networks through the EU's emphasis on pan-European policy approaches. Secondly, the privatisation of the UK water industry is likely to have affected the importance of development and control of expertise, due to the more competitive nature of the policy domain. With strategic thinking being commercially sensitive information, the influence of leading policy experts is likely to be enhanced.

This has a further consequence in terms of competing expertise. It has already been noted that the water industry is wary of public problem identification for water quality and water management. This may already push the role of organisations representing consumer interests to the margins. Also, if policy

expertise is significant network currency, water company professionals may be reluctant to be challenged by competing views on quality and management issues. One might expect then that environmental organisations would encounter difficulties in any such network if their 'policy expertise' conflicted with that of water professionals.

The purpose of the following two chapters will be to examine the actor interaction in the case of the EU's Water Task Force and to highlight the relationships between these different types of policy actor. The Task Force, as noted, was a means of conducting research into improving the competitiveness of European business. In addition it was very clear that the consultation required, prior to the drafting of proposals, should include consumer and citizen concerns. In this way the Task Force formalised a network of diverse actors. The following sections will outline the aims and organisation of the Task Force.

3.1.2 The organisation of the chapter

This chapter will set out the overall framework of the case study of the Task Force: Environment - Water. It will also provide an introduction to the UK organisations and individual actors who played a key role in the Task Force consultation process. As such, the chapter is divided into sections on the different aspects of the Task Force organisation.

The first part (section 3.2) gives an introduction to the philosophy behind the Task Force initiative. Section 3.3 looks more specifically at the particular Task Force under discussion: Environment - Water. It is concerned with the shape of the Task Force, its history and purpose. It further details the way the Task Force operated through the use of what are referred to as 'Mirror Task Forces', organised around either national or pan-European professional nexuses. The major part of this section then profiles the central players involved from the UK and the different capacities in which they were invited to participate.

Specifically under consideration are: the professional Mirror Task Force involving the UK base of Techware (a pan-European research organisation which serves the research needs of water professionals); the UK national Mirror Task Force, which conducted the day-to-day management of the UK submission to the EU's central Task Force (organised under the auspices of the Foundation for Water Research and headed up by Dr Ron Packham); and finally, the range of individuals and organisations contacted by the UK national Mirror Task Force and invited to form a part of the consultation process within the UK. (A more detailed breakdown of the involvement of different organisations within both the UK Mirror Task Force and the professional Mirror Task Force can be found in Chapter Four.)

Having outlined the broad structure of the Task Force and how it operated, and following the discussion of the various roles played by those involved in the UK, this chapter highlights the main issues for empirical consideration. Significant questions about the fundamental operation of the Task Force, the weight of inputs

from sub-national actors and the mechanism for forging a national network arise from this first appraisal of the Task Force. In addition, some more fundamental questions about the openness of the Task Force from its outset and the benefits of ‘imposed’ consultation are considered. These begin to identify some of the constraints on the autonomous capacity of policy actors.

3.2 The Task Force philosophy

In June 1995 the European Commission created eight ‘Task Forces’ to stimulate research and technology development and encourage a closer link between research and innovation in key areas for industrial competitiveness, employment and quality of life.

Commission of the European Communities, Science, Research & Development: Research-Industry Task Forces 1/1 internet.¹

The Task Force philosophy is wedded to the broader aims of the EU, which is evidenced in the Task Force mission statement. The consensus around key priorities of employment, competitiveness and sustainable development (using new technologies) is reflected in Directorate General XII’s (the Directorate General responsible for Research) justification for launching Task Forces which are focused

¹ All references to internet pages within this chapter, refer to the following site:

<http://europa.eu.int/en/comm/dg12/tf-wat1.html>.

on meeting the goals of their own research agenda. As a means of finding new solutions to old problems, the Framework Programmes² opened up the way for collaborative research and new ideas to be filtered into the system.

The Task Forces are a way of accessing and then applying national 'know-how' (which is located in the industries and universities of the member states) to European initiatives in a more telling way. In other words, the Task Forces are designed to highlight the key problem areas (to which the EU can apply itself) within a particular policy domain, as identified by researchers and the industry in the various member states. The EU then offers the incentive of research contracts to individuals and organisations which have the expertise to successfully execute the proposals. Task Forces are an exclusively European tool in the sense that they can only be used to generate research for pan-European problems and, thus, rather than undercut national initiatives, they are designed to have 'clear added value'.

The Task Forces are an instrument for consultation and coordination. They aim to improve the effectiveness of EU research by targeting the most strategically important areas; coordinating research across the Union and with other areas of policy; and demonstrating the relevance and value of research expenditure to Europe's citizens.

Commission of the European Communities, Science, Research & Development: Research-Industry Task Forces 1/1 internet.

² First created in 1984, these are research programmes designed to provide a five year strategy in given policy areas.

The Task Force, as a more general process, has been developed as – what the Commission refers to – a ‘new approach to working’ (Commission of the European Communities, 1996a: 1). Task Forces should consist of a formalised consultation towards directed policy ‘ends’ through a mix of government, industry, scientific community, research community, and consumer inputs. The benefits to policy (and therefore EU citizens and also non-EU states) from this kind of network, should be immense.

Of particular interest is that this kind of policy procedure, with its in-built consultative approach, thus incorporates a multi-layered approach to working on both the vertical (from national to international) and horizontal (the range of actors involved at each point) axes. Vertically this is managed through the national-regional (e.g. the Mediterranean)-European-international dimensions, channelling expertise upwards to promote both concertation and improvement of the competitive position. Horizontally, it is managed at each of the vertical junctures by the relevant socio-economic actors, stakeholders, users. This can be represented by the following diagram:

INTERNATIONAL \Rightarrow *EU interaction with other international markets*

\Uparrow

EUROPEAN \Rightarrow *Pan-European research organisations, e.g. Techware*

\Uparrow

REGIONAL \Rightarrow *e.g. the Mediterranean region has a collaborative submission*

\Uparrow

NATIONAL \Rightarrow *Researchers, users, water managers; organised through national Mirror Task Forces*

Figure 2: The management structure of the EU Task Force

Vertical axis : different levels of input into Task Force
Horizontal axis: organisations relevant to each level of input

The case study focuses on the national and the European level of input. This is because the interaction between the national and the European level of governance with regard to policymaking is of particular interest, as this should give some insight into relationship between the EU policymakers and the member

states. In this sense then, it should demonstrate the outcome of increased EU policy reach: the need to drive towards goals that can best be reached at the supranational level (penetrating new international markets), but doing so in close harmony with member states and sub-national stakeholders (to satisfy the requirements of clear added value and subsidiarity). It further acts as a means of legitimising EU action in a given field and, through initiatives such as the Task Force, the Commission should be made aware of national stakeholder and member state government concerns – particularly in areas where those individuals or organisations see a specific role for EU action.

Further interest derives from the significant input in this particular domain of both government officials (represented through the DTER) and expertise (those researchers and water professionals who can offer up solutions to water quality and water management problems). Therefore, the case study should help to shed light on another area of interest, by illuminating the role and impact of ‘experts’ within the policy process and their relationship with other actors.

3.3 The case study: Task Force Environment-Water

According to the Task Force Environment-Water documentation, its specific objectives were:

- to define research priorities in strict consultation with the socio-economic actors;
- to reinforce the co-ordination between Community, national and private research activities;
- to stimulate an environment favourable to innovation.

Commission of the European Communities, 1997: 1.

In other words, the objectives were to create a formalised network of expert actors across the EU, as well as to manage the input from *all* relevant socio-economic stakeholders (including consumers and environmentalists) and to encourage public-private networks to channel their energies directly into a pan-European research agenda.

The aims of the Water Task Force reflect recognition of the increasing salience of global water management issues (supply, pollution, waste water treatment and so on), but they also reflect the EU's increasing remit to regulate this area. Having established the right to regulate the water sector in the 1970s, the boundaries of that remit have continued to move ever outwards. As the Commission notes in its Preliminary Report (1996), the very fact of EU regulation of water has added to the demand for new technology in the water sectors of the developed world and, additionally, the Commission therefore sees a future role for the EU in providing research and development in these growing water management sectors.

There are, however, significant differences between the various operators and between regions, which research and technology transfer could help to reduce . . . The market is in full expansion . . . On the global scale, the market will probably more than double in size over the next 15 years; the growth will be particularly strong in south-east Asia and Latin America. In order to meet the opportunities of this growing market, a particular effort is required in research, the adaptation of technologies, and innovation in the financing and organisation of international cooperation.

Commission of the European Communities, Water: A European Priority, 1/1 internet.

The Task Force process is not simply a set of measures which seek to accumulate the best knowledge, with the aims of improving water management and eradicating differences between states. The Commission has also recognised a gap in the market which it is particularly well positioned to exploit, assuming it can raise the competitiveness of its research and new product development in this field. The objectives of the Task Force Environment-Water were:

. . . to contribute towards the development of a European strategy for sustainable management and rational use of water, to make European enterprises associated with this area more competitive on the internal and world markets and to refocus scientific and technological cooperation on

priority projects, inter alia in the EU's relations with the Central and East European and Mediterranean countries.

Commission of the European Communities, 1996c: 1.

To fulfil this remit and to maintain, or attempt to increase, the social capital³ element of Commission activity, the Commission outlined four axes within which inputs from the various Mirror Task Forces should be framed and which it also identified as the focus of citizen concerns. These were:

- The Fight Against Pollution
- The Rational Use of Water (Demand Management)
- The Fight Against Water Deficits
- The Prevention and Management of Crises

Commission of the European Communities, 1997: 2.

Within these broad citizen-focused axes there are a number of more detailed target areas. These are areas where, according to the Commission, the relevant actors (in this case decision makers and implementors) '... require specific types of knowledge to orientate their actions' (Commission of the European Communities, 1996a: 4). Herein we find the significance of the specialist knowledge which is required, in order to meet the concerns of

³ Social capital is used here to refer to the knock-on benefits for citizens of the member states from policy and research initiatives enacted by the Commission.

water management. Thus the research know-how garnered from the experts is to have both the more immediate benefit of improving national and EU water management policy, as well as the longer-run benefit of being able to market that information for developing countries and so improve the EU's competitive position.

TASK FORCE CHRONOLOGY	
October 1995	Start of Task Force
March 1996	Initial Call for Ideas
	DTER designated UK National Contact Point (NCP)
May 1996	DTER contacts Foundation for Water Research (FWR) to manage UK Mirror Task Force (MTF)
	FWR appoint Ron Packham as UK Mirror Task Force co-ordinator
	Ron Packham begins to make contact with potential participants
	Second Call for Ideas: deadline December 1996
December 1996	Techware Forum, Marlow, UK
	Dr Packham contacts all 'second wave' respondents
February 1997	Submission of UK MTF's report
May 1997	Summary of Progress
June 1997	Meeting in Baveno, Italy
October 1998	Publication of final document

Figure 3: Chronology of main events in the evolution of the Task Force

The Commission began the consultation process through an initial 'Call for Ideas' which provided information on the remit of the Task Force and the proposal for national (centred around the relevant government department or agency. In the case of the UK this was the DTER and the Foundation for Water Research) and industry (professional) based 'Mirror Task Forces' (MTFs). The Commission suggested that there should be a National Contact Point (NCP) for the co-ordination and management of each national input. The NCP for the UK was Tony Lloyd at DTER. The initial task of the NCP was to find and appoint a national expert to head the national Mirror Task Force. The MTFs then created their own consultative network of interested policy actors (through the leader of the national MTF) with the purpose of drawing up a series of proposals for the key areas to target for the future of pan-European water management.

Having received the various national, professional and individual submissions of priorities within each of the four axes, the central (EU) Task Force secretariat made a selection of proposals to pursue, making clear that it intended that the proposals (in this particular case) would find policy form through the Fifth Framework Programme which was to be launched in 1999. The fact that, formally, the consultation procedure and research agenda should transmit directly into the Fifth Framework Programme (and thus provide social capital in addition to the other benefits noted) should provide continuity between the network consultation and the policymaking

process, which is helpful when deciphering the extent of the impact of the different network actors.

The selection will be made taking into account on-going activities at different levels, the importance and urgency of the problems, the perspectives offered by science and technology, the market opportunities, the competitive position of European and the potential for the exploitation of the results of the research.

Commission of the European Communities, Cooperation and Concentration 1/1, internet.

The UK was represented in the central EU Task Force through the creation of a national Mirror Task Force as well as a UK agency providing the focal point of one of the key professional Mirror Task forces, Techware. The structure of the UK involvement in the Task Force process is shown in the following diagram.

DG XII (Research)

Bruno Schmitz (Joint Research Centre)



UK National Contact Point
DTER
Tony Lloyd



Professional Mirror Task Force (pMTF)
Techware
Mr Alan Bruce / Mervyn Bramley (EA)



National Mirror Task Force (nMTF)
Foundation for Water Research
Dr Ron Packham



Consultees

for example, the Water Services Association, Institute of Hydrology



More ----- Less input

Figure 4: UK involvement in the Task Force process

3.3.1. Purpose of the Task Force

The Task Force Environment-Water was a joint initiative of Edith Cresson, Ritt Bjerregaard and Martin Bangemann, representing the Commission Directorates General in science and education, the environment and industrial affairs. The main orientations were agreed after what was described as,

. . . broad inter-services consultation and first contact with some of the key European organisations concerned, at industry and research level.

Commission of the European Communities, 1996c: 1.

As previously indicated, the Task Force on water policy is a reflection of the Commission's growing policy initiative in this area. It presents its interests in water management from many angles – from consumer demands about pollution to issues of competitive market location. It assumes that a pan-European collaborative approach would allow the EU to better achieve these objectives. Forging a single agenda from potentially such diverse sets of interests, however, is not such an easy task and could be considered as a major obstacle to the development of the agenda.

After some limited consultation the Commission provided four broad axes within which submissions to the Task Force should be made (see section 3.3 above). Within those axes there were further, more targeted, issues which were the product of internal and limited external review. This may indicate that the consultation process which was about to begin through the initial Call for Ideas to

member states, was more restricted in terms of the agenda for policy strategy. The agenda was already set in terms of key objectives, so the purpose of the 'Call' may be interpreted differently. One clear advantage to the Commission of establishing objectives and then calling for input into the means of achieving those objectives, is that it is an important means of identifying and then taking new research and strategic thinking from within the member states.

The first meetings to get the Task Force project off the ground were held in October 1995, when discussion and consultation was closed from more general participation. External input on a more open basis was invited in March 1996 where pan-European water industry organisations such as Eureau, EWWG (industry), EURAQUA and Techware (Research) could have an input. The broad consultation was then further expanded to the full range of potential participants, as the EU's Joint Research Centre (as manager of the process) approached enterprises and other stakeholders in the water supply and treatment sector (for example, specialist research centres on all aspects of water use, water and water research users, regional and national authorities and regional planning authorities).

The framework which was established by the Task Force, effectively worked as a means of rationalising the potentially diverse inputs from the wide range of national and water industry policy actors in the member states. This seems to further indicate a less open framework. To achieve this rationalisation, 'Mirror Task Forces' (MTFs) were set up to co-ordinate the responses of a discrete field. These fields were national (member state), regional (cross-national within EU regions) or professional (in this case they were also pan-European).

The Commission encouraged the operation of more national MTFs because '[T]hey provide a means of involving the maximum number of participants (relay function)' (Commission of the European Communities, 1996c: 8). This 'relay function' would prove beneficial for the Commission in providing a summary of all interests in one discrete field. However, the down-side of such summaries is that the MTFs' desire to submit a coherent set of proposals provides less room for diverse or conflicting opinion, within any single submission document from a MTF, whether a national or a professional network. In other words, the creation of single MTFs for such large areas as 'the Mediterranean' or even 'the UK', rather than maximising input may in fact have limited both the range of actors to be consulted as well as the input of those involved, to those actors who share opinions on the direction of water management. This seems to be the only means of achieving a coherent MTF submission. In other words the very structure of the Task Force from the outset seemed to encourage coherence rather than diversity. Although this seems not unreasonable in attempting to achieve specific objectives, it does raise questions about the about the ability of actors who do not share the view of the dominant MTF network actors to effectively penetrate that network and have their views reflected in the submission.

Already, a general *convergence* between the priorities of industry and of universities and research centres can be observed . . . Despite the fact that water management is, in essence, a local activity, there are clearly several

topics of common interest for which a European approach is amply justified.

Commission of the European Communities, 1996c: 8.

It is clear that the Commission was actually very precise in the outline of the kind of areas on which they were seeking advice. The four broad axes were broken down further into much more detailed areas of investigation which had been established through initial, more closed consultation at the European level. In other words, in order to formulate the public document establishing the main consultation process, a significant consultation had to have already occurred. This first consultation produced the menu of needs and wants of the Commission in the water policy domain. In that sense the formation of the public consultation exercise was, in fact, a way of providing information and knowledge on a range of pre-determined issues, rather than sparking a new wave of initiative.

This indicates that the Task Force process was more about harnessing new knowledge and expertise than creating an agenda for the future of water research. The Commission had identified the issues which (in light of subsidiarity) were both significant in terms of challenges facing the EU, and ones which required a renewed input from water professionals who are otherwise spread across the EU. The 'hook' for the external consultees within the MTFs is likely to have been one of potential research

funding for ideas which had not been able to reach national agendas through a combination of limited national funding opportunities and public misconceptions of the priorities for water management. Overall, then, the real motivations for participation by all parties in the Task Force may have been hidden behind the claim in the public documentation that the exercise was one of consultation to form the future research agenda for water management in Europe.

3.3.2 How the Task Force developed

The framework which was originally designed by the Commission changed little throughout the process with two notable exceptions. The Commission had indicated that the purpose of the Task Force was to provide a framework for consultation and ultimately concertation in achieving a coherent research agenda for the water sector. Having one eye on citizens (in their role as consumers, primarily) and the other firmly on its research export market, the EU created a structure which should have produced a valuable circuit of knowledge and thus social capital. In fact, given the actual cycle of events, the internal (social capital) benefits seem not to have arisen and, in addition, the impact of MTF participants seems to have been limited.

The first reason for this is due precisely to the fact that the agenda (objectives) had already been identified. A second reason lies in a change of

procedure some way into the Task Force process. In their initial publicity materials and information packs to the embryonic national MTFs, the Commission had indicated that after some external consultation they would issue a questionnaire to the MTF participants to elicit their ideas for the European research agenda. In actuality this became, what amounted to, a second 'Call for Ideas' to 1500 interested individuals and organisations, who had been identified by the Commission and who, in the case of some of those contacted in the UK, had not been invited to participate in either of the UK national or professional MTFs. The change on paper may seem subtle, but its significance lies in the impact the decision had on the role of the MTFs. Contact, by the Commission, to other interested parties effectively by-passed the existing MTF structure (Interview with Dr Packham, at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97). This changed the role of the national Mirror Task Force significantly from one of 'ideas man' (a dynamic consultation managed by the UK MTFs) to that of providing a 'position paper' (writing up the range of inputs which were sent to the Commission from UK stakeholders, rather than ones who had been invited to participate by the UK officials). This change had the effect of further weakening the potential impact that the MTFs could have in terms of presenting their own ideas, as the EU now seemed to be choosing their consultees for them.

To summarise, the Commission initiated the Task Force process and used it both as a mechanism for internal review as well as a platform for external consultation (between government, private and user interests) in order to achieve its aim of an improved market position. The Task Force can also be seen as a means

for the Commission to firm up its own ideas as well as providing a conduit for the input of new proposals. In addition, it encouraged horizontal consultation within member states as well as providing for themselves (the Commission) a better understanding of the problems facing the water sector.

The main criticism of the role of the Commission, however, is that given the nature of the consultation process and the very precise elaboration of targets in the initial documentation, we may question how open the Task Force process was in reality, and how far this inflexibility was intended by the Commission at the outset. If inflexibility was intended, then this clearly changes the way we can characterise the Commission's role in the overall process. Rather than a facilitator of a valuable network for exchange and co-ordination of ideas with policy implications, the process conducted by the Commission can be seen as one of reaffirming existing proposals (emanating from a closed consultation), legitimising the future direction of EU regulation by appearing to have consulted widely on each aspect, and attempting to increase its authority within this policy domain through the incentive of future research contracts for business.

The chapter will now give an overview of the UK actors who had an input into the process, firstly in the professional MTF and then in the national MTF.

3.3.3 The professional network. The example of Techware

Techware (Technology for Water Resources)⁴ was invited by the Commission to be a part of the Task Force process in the role of ‘professional Mirror Task Force’, alongside other pan-European research and industry groupings. Its role was to be similar to that of the national MTF, in providing proposals for the Commission agenda. Techware’s credentials for fulfilling such a role derive from both the nature of its organisation and its previous involvement in similar European Union initiatives.

Techware describes its mission as being a facilitator for research exchange between relevant actors, as well as bridging the gap between the national and the European level. It seeks to achieve its mission objectives through a range of

⁴ Techware was established in July 1990. It has a co-ordinating Techware Bureau (CTB) in Brussels which is responsible for the European and international dimension of Techware’s work. There are also Regional Bureaux (RTBs) in Belgium, Italy and the UK, which provide a regional dimension to their objectives (Information Leaflet). Techware has three main functions. Firstly, its structure is one of a network for the exchange of information and technology between researchers and research users – in universities, public authorities and professional associations. Secondly, Techware is a University Enterprise Training Partnership (UETP) and is therefore recognised for funding by the Commission. In this role it participates in a student and academic training exchange programme for participating organisations and students wishing to gain training and experience within the profession. Thirdly, Techware through its contact with the Commission and other international organisations can match members to new projects and initiatives or provide a broader structure to allow individuals to respond to initiatives which they would not otherwise have the resources or range to meet (Techware 1997a: 1).

activities including training courses, academic exchanges and 'Think Tanks' of Techware members to forge proposals in the hope of securing funding. (Techware, 1997a: 1)

The central purpose of Techware is to create a pan-European network of active researchers and professionals in the water sector. Through such a network greater opportunities for funding and other contract work can be realised. In this respect Techware has close contact with key actors across the European Union and has already considered potential 'gaps in the market' and priorities or (at least) possibilities for pan-European research in the water management domain.

(Interview with Alan Bruce, at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97) It is clear then, that Techware would be a useful reservoir of information for Commission officials in the central Task Force.

The role of the professional MTF was to provide a 'position paper' relating to the perceived problems of water management in the future, and ways of resolving such problems. Given Techware's nature as a pan-European research organisation, the strategy they adopted was to highlight a pan-European issue which could then form the basis of their submission to the central Task Force. The choice of subject to reflect its multinational membership was, according to Techware, easily narrowed down:

[T]here is one topic which is, indisputably, of fundamental importance to all regions of Europe and that is the availability of adequate water

resources in the future to meet both the social and economic needs of the community. Techware, 1996: 1.

For the purposes of their submission to the Task Force, Techware created a specialist group 'Environment-Water'. It submitted its position paper entitled, 'European Research Priorities in 'Environment-Water' under the Fourth and Fifth RTD Framework Programmes' in March 1997.

3.3.4 Techware's role in the Task Force

Techware were involved in the Task Force process as one of three organisations with pan-European contacts and experience. The Commission has an established relationship with organisations such as these. Both the pan-European make-up of such organisations and the potential input of expertise and innovation from the combination of water managers, engineers, researchers and so on, makes them an ideal source of information for the Commission.

The description of two types of MTF by the Commission is telling. National MTFs could provide an insight into the needs of the national water sector and the direction of national research and development. They should also provide a valuable insight into the perceived national needs of the European Union level of policymaking. The professional MTF by contrast, should be able to provide something of an already integrated agenda of priorities for the water sector.

Organisations such as Techware should provide in their submission something like a more limited version of the main Task Force process as a whole. In this sense the professional MTFs are likely to have a narrower (and thus more coherent) focus than national MTFs which may have to take on potentially competing views from the public, industry, environmentalists and so on. Working as a forum for the exchange of information from young researchers, academics and professionals and matching teams to bids, they already have some idea of participating member states' priorities. They have also worked in a similar capacity for the Commission, and so have important knowledge of how to put together a submission for the EU and, in addition, the likely areas of Commission interest. (Interview with Alan Bruce, at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97) So, the experience of being a major player in the research community in Europe and knowledge of the mechanics of Commission initiatives made them an obvious choice as a professional MTF.

3.3.5. The national Mirror Task Force. The example of the UK

The UK national MTF and its consultation process was to involve all relevant sets of interests in the water domain, ensuring input from representatives of all relevant policy actors, from the utilities and researchers to consumers and environmentalists. With such a broad range of actors to be consulted, the creation of national MTFs was a more effective means of harnessing their input and one

which could provide an overall picture of the problems, as perceived by users, of gaps in the technology supplied by industry.

The structure provided by the Commission for the national submissions was two-fold, involving a National Contact Point (NCP) and a MTF. In the case of the UK, an individual government representative was nominated from the DTER to act as the bridging unit between the EU and the member state (in the role of NCP) for maintaining contact during the Task Force process. The national MTF was established alongside the NCP to manage and co-ordinate the national response.

How the national MTF organised its network and screened the various inputs from the stakeholders was left to the secretariat of each national network. The Commission indicated that the MTF should be a means of maximising participation in the Task Force process, by all relevant stakeholders (in order to perform the relay function) which would both legitimise the process and would also mean gaining an all round perspective on the future of water policy. This was to be achieved by involving not only the industry/the utilities but those who one may expect to be more critical of the water company's strategy – consumers and environmentalists.

For the UK, the DTER, (through the agency of the Drinking Water Inspectorate), provided the UK NCP but, rather than keep the MTF as a DTER structure, the Department decided to give that responsibility to the Foundation for Water Research (FWR) as an independent organisation. To head-up and co-ordinate the UK response, FWR appointed Dr Ron Packham to chair the UK MTF. Dr

Packham has a very strong reputation within the UK water sector, (having previously worked in FWR and other agencies for the DTER), and thus also has many contacts throughout the industry.

Funding was provided by the DoE, the Environment Agency for England and Wales and the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency. The only guidance from the Government was to remind the Task Force about the criteria for Community-funded research which distinguishes it from research at member state level.

Bruce, 1997: 10.

With the formal organisation of the UK MTF in place, Dr Packham's task was to initiate the consultation process. Broad categories of actors had been noted by the Commission in its initial communication and, through his already established contacts, Dr Packham was able to draw up a list of consultees. (Interview with Dr Packham, at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97) The response to the established national MTF in the UK, was strong until the 'second' Call for Ideas was initiated. The UK MTF responded to what it initially perceived as a rug-pulling exercise by the Commission, by obtaining a list of the UK respondents to this second 'Call' (and copies of their proposals) from the Commission (Interview with Dr Packham, at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97). The benefit to the UK MTF from this second call, however, was that it did highlight some groups which the national

MTF had not previously contacted (notably the university sector), and who could now be directly involved in the UK consultation exercise led by Dr Packham.

Having drawn up a network of consultees (see Appendix 2 and Appendix 3), this was subdivided on a participatory basis. Individuals and organisations which were contacted or opted into the Task Force process, stated how much involvement they wished to have in the consultation and thus had more or less input into the final document. The most active participants sent representatives to meetings and focus groups, others were kept in touch with written updates, and the least involved could submit comments to a circulated draft of the final UK submission (Interview with Dr Packham, at Techware, Marlow, 15/5/97). Through this process of consultation and exchange the UK MTF reached a consensus on research priorities for water.

Despite a shifting timetable and a much more drawn out process than was initially envisaged by Dr Packham, the UK MTF completed the task outlined by the Commission. It established a network of consultees, with a very clear hierarchy, who thus had varied inputs into the process. It submitted its proposals to the Commission and attended the closing meeting in Baveno, Italy to discuss the production of the final Commission document.

3.3.6 Characterising the role of the UK national Mirror Task Force

Effectively the UK national MTF had a dual role vis-à-vis the central Task Force. Importantly it played a linking role between the Commission and the UK stakeholders in the water policy domain. Rather than all individual actors submitting individual responses to the Commission, the UK could provide a more structured response which relied on a broad range of inputs. Incorporating both water industry professionals and (latterly) academic researchers, it would be able to provide ideas for the resolution of water management problems as well as more long term strategies for new technologies. As a result of the consultation, the additional benefit to the Commission from the public consultation process, was that the position paper of the UK national MTF, distilled the better inputs and integrated the issues arising from different perspectives on the water management field. In this sense the position paper represents a 'screened' and consensual viewpoint which can be considered as representing the UK industry perspective.

Clearly there were some benefits for those who participated in a managerial capacity in UK MTFs. The Commission's 'Call for Ideas' coupled with the potential for new funding to flow into the area as a result, meant that the response within the UK was very strong: 'Some 50 ideas were submitted by the UK and most reinforced the more general research priorities identified through the main consultation process' (Bruce, 1997: 11). The consequent benefit for key researchers in the field was to establish contact with previously unknown (to the MTF secretariat) knots of researchers outside the industry itself. The significant 'new'

groups in this regard were researchers in universities, who had not previously been known to the secretariat of the UK MTF. In other words, the Task Force had the effect of expanding the existing network of expertise within the UK.

The key functions of the UK MTF in relation to the main Task Force were to structure an overall UK response through consultation and then to provide a filtering process, in order to present a coherent set of proposals in the submission. The key positive side-effect of the process was to expand the existing UK network and to raise the possibility of maintaining contact between participants for future UK ventures.

3.3.7 The network of consultees : The UK respondents

The UK consultation for the national MTF was organised by the Chair of the MTF, Dr Packham. As an expert in the field, Dr Packham was an obvious choice for the Foundation for Water Research, once that organisation had been appointed by the DTER to undertake the MTF responsibility. Having already worked alongside the industry, the Chair of the MTF had established a significant list of contacts. This is a very valuable commodity when trying to establish a network of experts.

The personal and professional contacts which Dr Packham already had, formed the basis of the initial list of consultees for the national MTF. Organisations with which he had collaborated previously, personal contacts from previous

associations in major organisations and key industry organisations and quangos (Ofwat, Water Services Association, Environment Agency and so on) were included on the list. In other words, the initial contact list was somewhat a personal list of colleagues, associates and key water industry representatives who had had some prior contact with Dr Packham. This list was used to organise the first discussions, and to establish a network of participants for continuing the national MTF process (Interview with Dr Packham, at Techware, Marlow, 15/5/97)).

As already noted, the next stage of the main Task Force process, according to the original Commission documentation, was to circulate a questionnaire (directly from the EU) to other identified socio-economic stakeholders. As it, in effect, became a second Call for Ideas, it seemed to cut across the objectives of the national MTF. As noted above, the second Call for Ideas resulted in some respondents who were new to the UK MTF secretariat. So, a second contact list, incorporating the new wave of respondents was drawn up by the end of 1996.

Although this set of additional contacts allowed the national MTF to be, arguably, more 'rounded' in that it now had a different dimension through the input of academic researchers, the list remained limited. Despite discovering a new group of relevant policy actors through the Commission's second Call for Ideas, this did not result in a further widening of the net for possible consultees, particularly in the public (non-industry) domain. To meet the stated Commission criteria of the broadest consultation of all relevant socio-economic stakeholders, very diverse groups including citizen representatives and environmental organisations could claim that they should have been consulted. The UK national

MTF was only partially successful in this regard. Consumer representation was expressed through the involvement of the Ofwat National Customer Council and the Scottish Water and Sewerage Customers Council. But, clearly, ‘consumers’ is only a smaller subset of ‘citizens’.

It seems that environmental concerns should also have been incorporated either as citizen concerns – which cannot only be considered to be ones involving pricing and service – or through access to environmental groups’ research into some of the main issues of water management. In the case of the UK national MTF, ‘green’ groups were not invited to be part of the consultation process. Environmental organisations were not approached at any stage in the consultation process and the national MTF conceded that this might have been a mistake (Interview with Dr Packham, at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97).

3.3.8 Characterising the consultation process

The consultation process of the UK national MTF was limited, having been built on an established list of contacts. The introduction of new actors did not come through the actions of the UK national MTF but through those actors responding directly to the Commission’s second ‘Call’. It seems at least a possibility that ‘new’ actors would not have had any significant impact if the Commission had not initiated this second, direct call to interested individuals and organisations which it had identified. The UK national MTF, on that basis, was not actively seeking to

expand the range of network actors from those who were a comfortable ensemble, having worked together previously and which stemmed from prior personal contact in other contexts. Even after some new contacts were established (highlighting the fact that the policy field was more densely populated than had initially been envisaged), further attempts were not made to discover other potential actors.

The particular concern that this raises, as noted in the preceding section, surrounds the lack of environmental-citizen concerns articulated by any campaigning organisations. Although the agenda presented by this sector may have different priorities from the key industry players, this is precisely why their views should perhaps have been courted. Further, the ‘green’ dimension was specifically called for by the Commission in its initial communications with potential MTF actors.

A fuller evaluation of the consultation process can be found in the following chapter after a consideration of the experience of those organisations which were involved in the UK Mirror Task Force, and the opinions of those who were omitted from the consultation.

3.4 Conclusion: Impressions of the Task Force

The structure and operation of the EU Task Force raise certain questions about the openness of the process, and the potential hierarchies of interests within the

consultation framework. There are five key points to make, at this stage, about the nature of the Task Force.

Firstly, it seems clear that the agenda of priorities for action in this particular area were already set, in advance of the distribution of the public documentation. Despite the description provided by the Commission, that the purpose of the Task Force initiative was to create the future agenda for water research in Europe, four broad axes and more specific targets had already been identified.

In order to formulate these axes, the Commission had initiated a consultation process within its own structures as well as with a limited number of pan-European organisations, who already had close relationships with the EU. The second point then, is that the Commission had relied upon its own established (and trusted) contacts to draft the documentation.

The creation of the Mirror Task Forces can be understood as a means of rationalising the wide range of potential inputs to the consultation process, initiated by the Commission. Within the UK, both the professional and the national MTFs also relied upon established contacts in order to draw up their list of consultees. Consequently, the range of actors (interests) represented within the consultation was limited and, consequently, the diversity of opinion which could be expressed was also limited.

The fourth point is that the Task Force process as a whole was biased towards the participation of industry experts. Precisely because, at both EU and the national levels, the managers of the process were taken from the industry itself and

relied on established contacts, there was a professional-industry bias within it. As a result, of course, very few non-experts or actors with different types of expertise (different interpretations of the problems for water management) actively participated – or were invited to do so. In this case then, the experts were not just the holders of policy-relevant knowledge, but were experts with particular water industry concerns.

Finally, the second call for ideas from the Commission had the potential to counteract the professional-expertise bias, as it did have a positive impact on the UK national MTF through the expansion of the range of consultees. Other interests were alerted to the Task Force process and, therefore, had the potential to channel in non-industry opinions. Therefore we can begin to see that the Task Force process of formalised consultative networks produced hierarchies of policy actors and a limited impact for those not already ‘on the inside’, in terms of being an existing contact of the network managers. The need for coherence in the submission from the MTFs further constrained the network from expanding its horizons to those groups who may have challenged the dominant ethos of the core network actors. This resulted not only in hierarchies of input but of a clear industry bias in the proposals, as the groups kept on the margins were those outside the pre-existing professional-industry network, those representing citizen concerns - consumer and environmental organisations.

The following chapter will analyse the policy consultation using a network approach. It will show the value and limitations of this kind of analysis. Network analysis is able to show the limited nature of the consultation. Networks are not

necessarily open and competitive. They create hierarchies which are then difficult to penetrate by groups outside the existing network of actors. However, I shall argue that network analysis has to refer to constraints on policymaking which it cannot explain.

Chapter 4. The Operation of the Task Force

4.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the network involved in the EU Task Force water policy consultation. It discusses some of the main actors' experience of this process based on information gathered from interviews and questionnaires. In section 4.2 the experience of the professional MTF, Techware, is discussed. Section 4.3 deals with the national MTF, which required a much wider consultation. Some preliminary analysis is given of the MTFs' views of the central EU Task Force and its management in Section 4.4. Both MTFs felt that the consultation was in some respects badly managed.

The national MTF consulted a wide range of relevant organisations in compiling its submission. Questionnaires were sent to all of the consultees who were contacted by Dr Ron Packham, the national MTF head. Section 4.5 discusses the views of those who responded to these questionnaires, and identifies some relevant organisations who were not contacted. Section 4.6 performs the same task with respect to the national MTF consultees as Section 4.4 performed with respect to the MTFs. It makes some observations about the way in which this particular network operated. Section 4.7 considers the implications of this particular case study for our understanding of networks in general, in two ways. Firstly some reasons for the static quality of a policy network are discussed. Secondly the

characteristics which tend to increase an actor's impact are identified. I argue that dominance is a function not only of policy relevant knowledge, but also of more practical knowledge of the policymaking process itself.

The broader aim of this chapter, however, is to illustrate the value and limitations of network analysis. Previous chapters have already made some theoretical arguments in this direction. The purpose of the empirical material is not strictly to prove these theoretical arguments, however. As I have argued (Section 1.9) the relationship between evidence and theory should not be seen in terms of the logical priority of the former. We should think of theory and evidence as ideally supporting each other, and this should alter our view of the purpose of empirical studies. The purpose of this particular empirical study is to see exactly what can and cannot be explained within the network approach. I shall argue in Section 4.8 that, while network analysis enables us to understand many features of the Task Force consultation, it does not enable us to explain why that process was subject to certain constraints. More generally, my argument is that network analysts can refer to constraining factors on policymaking, but must depart from the networks model in order to explain those constraints. The following chapters will explore some of the ways in which they may try to do that.

4.2 The professional Mirror Task Force: Techware

Techware was founded by two Belgian academics in 1990. It was organised as a means of obtaining a share of the growing European pot of money which is available for transnational research initiatives. As with the COMETT¹ programme, which was already operational, its central focus is on transnational meetings and the exchange of personnel.

Techware has a pan-European philosophy, which shapes its input into an integrated research agenda for water policy. It has a student exchange programme as part of its framework, to support on-going European research in the field. Along with workshops for members, it has programme development and learning delivery strategies, which makes Techware a strong forum for trans-national exchange, and thus an important reservoir of information for policy developers within the European Union. Asked to describe Techware's central aims, Alan Bruce (Director) said they were 'co-ordination, co-operation and exchange; Techware works well as a network.' (Interview with Alan Bruce at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97)

¹ The COMETT and COMETT II programmes are EU exchange schemes for students, teachers and training specialists, particularly for those representing the 'new technologies' field. They are exchange networks linking universities and enterprises within the member states as well as with central European and EFTA countries.

Techware Membership (1997)

Country	Affiliation
Austria	Technical University of Vienna
Belgium (Vlaanderen)	Vlaamse Milieumaatschappij
Belgium (Wallonie)	Ministere Wallon de l'Equipment et des Transports
Finland	Finnish Environment Institute
France	Office International de l'Eau
Germany	Deutscher Verband fur Wasserwirtschaft und Kulturbau
Italy	Federgasacqua
Netherlands	Delft Hydraulics
Portugal	LNEC
Romania	Technical University of Bucharest
Spain	CEDEX
UK	Environment Agency for England and Wales
UK	Techware UK/Ireland

Figure 5: Techware pMTF: Membership of Specialist Group ‘Environment Water’²

² Adapted from Techware Specialist Group, ‘European Research Priorities in ‘Environment-Water’ under the 4th & 5th RTD Framework Programmes’, March 1997.

The professional MTF structure was organised in response to the Commission's proposal that the overall Task Force should operate through the creation of MTFs, reflecting both national and professional interests. Despite being created by organisations already well known to the European Union (from previous research contract work), the professional MTFs had to re-establish their credentials with the central Task Force secretariat, prior to organising their consultative networks. The professional MTFs offered a different kind of input to nationally organised MTFs as, given their position in the field, it should have been clear that they already represented a reservoir of European (relevant across the European Union) and thus transferable expertise. Techware operates on a day-to-day basis as a network of practitioner interests and as an information bureau for up to date sources and information on policy in the field. It is membership based, where participants pay an annual fee in exchange for the services it provides. Although Techware has a Brussels office, the location of the key secretariat in the UK means that Marlow in Buckinghamshire is the focus for European wide meetings and consultations.

Techware is a network of water sector experts which has established credentials with the Commission. According to its Director therefore, as a result of the good work it has conducted in the past, it is held in high regard by European Union officials. (Interview with Alan Bruce at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97) In this sense Techware was an obvious choice for the type of organisation which should have a role as a professional network. The Commission was, to a certain extent, relying on its established contacts to draw up a directional framework for future

water strategy. Further evidence that the Commission felt comfortable about the nature of Techware's input is found in the fact that there was no pro forma for how the professional network should organise itself, how it should consult its membership, nor how it should channel in ideas or put together its final report. As a result, the nature of Techware's role was assumed by both the organisation and the Commission. Techware understood their role as one of 'expressing a view appropriate for the Commission (to take action) and which the Commission could interpret as it saw fit'. (Interview with Alan Bruce at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97)

In other words, its role was understood as being to put forward a range of proposals which can be seen to be relevant in at least one national context but, as far as possible, are pan-European. The Commission could then sift those proposals for those which provided the best fit with their long-term objectives.

With no given format for consultation, procedure or drafting, Techware could proceed on their own terms in trying to establish an overarching professional view. According to its structure and organisation, Techware has no vested interests, nor does it claim to reflect the perspective of any particular industry or operator in terms of what should be the long-run strategy for research (Interview with Alan Bruce at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97). The membership does reflect a mix of affiliates across national boundaries (see Figure 5) which could potentially cause difficulties in reaching any single, agreed position. The four axes were given in the initial Commission Call for Ideas (see Chapter Three above), and these were used as a basis for 'expressing to ourselves the reason for EC research'. (Interview with Alan Bruce at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97)

As a membership based organisation representing small and large operating concerns, Techware is an active network, which does not necessarily aim to be overtly commercial. The high turnover of membership (it loses and gains members on an annual basis through the membership's calculation of Techware's 'value for money' and whether the forum offered by Techware is a particular need for the coming year), in addition to the wide mix of affiliates, is also likely to add to any difficulties in establishing a single perspective. In order to put together a report to the Task Force then, which could be said to truly reflect this particular professional network, the task of writing and producing a draft fell to the key personnel – in fact the Director had individual responsibility for authoring the report. (Interview with Alan Bruce at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97) Thus the substantial document was put together by the Director and then circulated to the membership for comments. Significant contributions from members were incorporated into the draft and then circulated a second time for comments/opinions, but these did not produce any significant amendments to the initial document. (Interview with Alan Bruce at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97)

Given the nature of Techware, then, any articulation of core priorities is problematic. In fact the result for the Task Force document was to present a long list of priorities, only some of which can be seen as relevant to all member states. This is the difficulty of attempting to express a 'European' perspective. On the one hand the substantial list of priority areas in the Techware Report are relevant to someone, but few can be said to be relevant to all. Arguably this diminishes the Techware input, as only those proposals seen as having directly pan-European

application can be taken on board. The strategy needs to be one in which research reports should concentrate on common ground, so as to be more directly transferable into European Union framework programmes. Techware, however, consider that this type of approach is not particularly helpful and re-emphasise that the full range of possibilities was presented and the job of interpreting the reports (and thus which areas to pursue further) should be left to Commission officials (Interview with Alan Bruce at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97).

In the opinion of the Techware Director, the report submitted was balanced, Techware did its best to respond positively to the Commission's Call, and tried to provide an overview of priorities which reflected the concerns of all of the membership. Alan Bruce does admit however that the weakness of the report lies in the very long list of priorities which were presented. He also tried to link up those priorities directly to the key concerns which the Commission highlighted in the four axes. Techware provided a matrix for the justification of their research priorities in the terms that the Commission set out. In some instances it is a case of a broad interpretation of those justifications, for example, 'everything or nothing can impact on employment'. (Interview with Alan Bruce at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97) Again it was left to the Commission to sort out from this matrix which bits were the most appropriate for the research agenda.

4.2.1 Techware's perspective on Task Force consultation

For those involved in the Task Force through Techware, the process was seen as a means of operating a wide consultation with a range of interested organisations, the outcomes of which should ultimately benefit citizens/consumers. For the Techware secretariat, it seemed that, within the broad sweep of the organisation of the Task Force, all ideologies were represented. The differing political concerns of Commission officials, it is suggested, can be detected in the terms and proposed 'ends' of the Task Force programme. A crude interpretation of these ideological convictions, according to the Techware Director, is a political Left – Right – Environmental differentiation, reflected in the documentation's concern to represent three strands in the Task Force: People (bottom-up approach); Markets (competitive edge of EU market over external competitors); and Ecology (integrated water resource management). In other words, the Commission was trying to have 'something for everyone' in the Task Force, which would allow it to justify the expenditure of time and money. (Interview with Alan Bruce at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97)

In terms of the positive aspects of the Task Force for Techware, the main perceived benefit was its method – that it put in place a framework which brought relevant sectoral actors together, in some cases for the first time. Despite the existing networks which seek to give an effective base to information and research exchange, the EU Task Force brought in some actors who had not previously been a part of the pre-existing, established networks. (Interview with Alan Bruce at

Techware, Marlow 15/5/97) The variety of individuals and groups actively involved in research in the field was wider than had already been recognised. One reason for this could be the Commission's reliance on established networks of contacts. A problem which may be identified then is a reliance on the same individuals/organisations time and again to deliver, rather than picking up on new people entering the field.

Networks of interests can tend to be more static than dynamic insofar as they rely on established connections rather than actively seeking out new talent and new ideas. The result is that familiarity of network actors can make the policy domain stale. Leaderships can emerge to the extent that few individuals have a significant input (let alone impact). If new actors can be propelled into the network through an external shock such as an EU Task Force initiative, there is still no guarantee that new actors will be able to break down the established leaderships nor, particularly if they do not fit into a pre-existing network location, be carried forward into any future consultations or network events. In other words networks will tend to be static unless there is some type of external shock to their organisation. Even in those cases where this does happen, the familiarity and established network leaderships which exist may prevent new actors from remaining in the network after the conclusion of the specific task which drew them in, in the first place. Techware were reasonably isolated in terms of their own submission (they did not consult outside the membership and did not therefore draw in new network actors) but the organisation did feel that the Task Force

process as a whole had the potential to expand networks of expertise in the water sector, and overcome those problems just stated.

Some concern was noted by Techware in respect of the range of reports submitted, which varied in size, length and quality – raising questions about the weight of each individual network input. (Interview with Alan Bruce at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97) This however, may be something one would expect with the wide range of partners involved in submissions. More difficult for the professional networks though, were the moveable deadlines which operated throughout the process. They recognised that it is difficult, if not impossible, to cut off member states with a deadline, as all member countries' contributions have to be, or at least seen to be, of equal importance. If Techware had ignored the deadline then, they claim, their report may have been more coherent and more directly applicable to the Commission's objectives (Interview with Alan Bruce at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97).

In terms of quality also there was concern expressed about the extent to which the member state reports represented the same degree of input and shared priorities. The UK MTF Report is considered to be a reflection of all those consulted, in other words that most consultees were on board before delivery of the final document. This is arguably not the case with other member state reports, where significant actors or sectors were not in agreement on the content of the submission to the Commission. Perhaps all this indicates is the Techware Director's own perception of having done a good job on his report, unaware that

the limited authorship of the Techware submission could also invite criticism of its utility.

4.3 The UK national Mirror Task Force

From the perspective of the key personnel involved in the UK national MTF, research in the UK in the 1970s was very much goal driven: trying to provide solutions to specific and (politically) targeted problems. This was the result, it is claimed, of long-term research (as a strategy) coming to an end. In terms of resources it was no longer considered efficient to throw money into a general research pot and see what came out. (Interview with Dr Packham at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97)

In the opinion of Techware, this has been a negative development as this strategy means that people with innovative ideas are suppressed by senior management if their work falls outside the specific programme aims. (Interview with Alan Bruce at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97) However, the national MTF officials, particularly those used to working in tightly financed research organisations or government sponsored agencies, see such a system in less negative terms: arguing that research essentially needs to be applied and, as such, there needs to be some analysis of major problems – as opposed to relying on inspiration from bright individuals. (Interview with Dr Packham at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97)

For those perhaps more used to working in an environment which is more likely to work in concert with government officials, then giving money to people to work in isolation is inefficient, and may miss the mark. In areas such as toxicology, for example, a solution may not be found if the research is not target driven. It is possible that this difference of opinion may be a difference of private sector versus public sector thinking on the best strategy for research. On the one hand the professional network (those who have, for a long time, worked outside agreed frameworks through having established their own agencies) expresses a greater need for strategic thinking in the water industry, claiming that there is a lack of inspiration within it. On the other hand, those who still work more closely with government have a perspective which emphasises efficiency and budgets, without the luxury of inspirational, long-term thinking.

This should not imply that those who work more with national agencies have less of a free hand in determining any agenda whose priorities they work to – after all, policy-relevant knowledge is potentially a very effective resource when in negotiation with, or lobbying, government departments for funds and contracts. However, it is possible to detect a difference of approach as between these two groups of professionals, and the difference is further observable in the approaches of the professional MTF and national MTF to the EU Task Force process.

It is acknowledged by the directors of both MTFs that everything is budget driven and thus research organisations within the UK respond vigorously to European Union proposals which may have a resourcing reward. Clearly budgetary issues can significantly impact on the selection of priorities for research

innovation, 'how you order priorities depends on how much money there is. Research that costs fifty thousand pounds won't happen' – as it is simply too expensive, according to officials within the DTER (Telephone interview with Tony Lloyd at DTER 19/5/97). A clear consequence is that new ideas arising from UK research try to find room to develop at the European rather than the national level, where budgets are a little less tight. Given that there is European Union money available, then good ideas/proposals may see a return in terms of European money filtering back to the national level to aid future research contracts in new areas.

This may be an admission that the national level is now too limiting in its resourcing of research which is not policy- or means-ends specific. As argued in Chapter Three, key researchers in the field are increasingly looking for new sources of financial support to prop up longer term research proposals. One very serious question that this raises is whether strategic thinking has therefore moved to the supranational EU level, not only undermining national research bases but also increasing the legitimacy of the European Union to take on this mantle.

In terms of existing funds which are available for research, organisations like the Water Research Centre (WRc), derive a certain amount of income from membership contributions from water authorities and associations. Any other resources come through contract income from central DTER funds (approximately £1.5 million/year) (Interview with Dr Packham at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97).

From the point of view of the research organisations, bureaucrats do not have time to set the agenda so, essentially, the most active and most familiar (and trusted from previous contract work) organisations in the policy domain highlight

priorities for the agenda. In other words networks of key policy actors are able to have an input into the agenda for the sector and reliable delivery means that it is likely to be the same organisations involved in this process each time. Again this may indicate that although access and agenda setting is possible for networks and key policy actors in a given domain, these are likely to remain static rather than dynamic, particularly through familiarity with government officials they can achieve something like Grant's 'insider group' status. The DTER acknowledges however that what research organisations see as important areas for study are not always the same as the sponsoring department. In that sense they further acknowledge that it is actually often a case of who shouts loudest. (Telephone interview with Tony Lloyd at DTER 19/5/97) There is also a need for a supportive role for research to play in terms of government policy, as it is public money being spent. Thus, research on areas in the public domain is subject to the further constraints of public opinion and electability. These are a constraint for experts insofar as those 'experts' or actors with strong policy-relevant knowledge are limited in their ability to set the agenda by people who, they consider, have no real understanding of the policy domain or its problems.

As the bureaucrats haven't the time to set the agenda, they tend to favour organisations which have already given them a reasonable return. Research organisations which have delivered the goods in the past are trusted to do so again. In this case there can be often as little as one big planning meeting at the outset, and then the researchers are left alone to carry out the work. (Telephone interview with Tony Lloyd at DTER 19/5/97) However, the relationship between

established research organisations and the government has been strained by the shift to competitive tendering. It has been the case that established researchers have fed ideas into the DTER, who have then taken those ideas and offered them out to tender. When the government has appointed the successful bidder, that outside agency has had to go back to the original researchers for consultation on how to move forward. This is a further de-motivating force for researchers in the national context. (Interview with Dr Packham at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97)

With regard to the EU Task Force, a similarly suspicious note was taken by the key UK research organisation (Foundation for Water Research): they did not want to hand over all their ideas to the Commission for fear they would hand them on to their own agencies. This concern had to be balanced by the fact that ‘everyone was interested because everyone was short of money and here was a possible funding opportunity for research. If you could demonstrate evidence of expertise, you could hope that some [money] would come back’. (Interview with Dr Packham at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97)

There were other pitfalls to guard against in addition to the possibility of losing ideas. Maybe, in the final stages, a decision would be taken for only partial funding of a project. These type of difficulties have been the actual experience of many people doing contract work for the Commission (Interview with Dr Packham at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97). A further dimension to the problems of the competitive nature of ‘good ideas’ lies with Ispra, the EU’s own research arm. As Ispra has evolved it has become more competitive. It is also in the position of

having to justify its existence and is thus further considered to be a potential burglar of ideas.

4.3.1 The formation of the UK consultation

Aware of the shortcomings of the EU Task Force, key actors in the UK went about the task of putting the UK national MTF together. The National Contact Point was Tony Lloyd at the DTER. The DTER and the Environment Agency initiated the original UK response to the Commission's call. The DTER, using their tried and tested method of using trusted organisations, saw the Foundation for Water Research (FWR) as the ideal place from which to run the UK MTF, and set aside funds for the contract as well as for the co-ordination of the MTF. FWR asked Dr Ron Packham (who had worked for FWR – and still does in a semi-retired way, as well as having worked for WRc and DoE in the past), as an established contact, to be involved and to head up the UK response. Initially Dr Packham took on the role of co-ordinator in May 1996 with an end point some time in July that year.

The first significant change to the development of the consultation, which caused difficulty for the national MTFs, was that the organisation of the Task Force changed. Initially the Commission had approached governments and requested a response to the Task Force. The positive response from the national governments led them to set up the national MTFs. Then, as already noted in

Chapter Three, in June - July 1996 the Commission sent out a second and more general 'Call for Ideas', of which the existing MTFs were not made aware. The UK national MTF had thought that the main effort, for proposals to be forwarded to the Commission for inclusion in the Fifth Framework Programme, would be through the national MTF, and yet the Commission was approaching other actors with questionnaires (which effectively formed a second Call for Ideas) to generate a more general response.

The first fundamental question that this new development demanded, was how the UK national MTF would fit with the new Call for Ideas. The FWR had already begun approaching senior figures in key contact areas for their input into the national MTF, and there was a major concern that this would somehow undermine their authority in the process. (Interview with Dr Packham at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97) However, in successfully securing copies of all the responses from within the UK to this second call, the UK national MTF was in a better position than it had been at the outset of its consultation, in terms of having access to a greater number of potential participants than it had managed to muster on its own initiative. This point will be returned to below.

4.3.2 The operation of the UK national Mirror Task Force network

Dr Packham consulted the following groups: (i) Scotland, Northern Ireland, England and Wales; (ii) the government departments and the Environment Agency;

(iii) the operators – representatives of water undertakings in all parts of the UK; (iv) major research organisations – for example, WRc, the Institute of Hydrology, and the Institute of Freshwater Ecology. (A complete list of the UK national MTF's consultees can be found in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3.)

The method of consultation varied, and ranged from holding group meetings with some participants where meetings were held at the Water Services Association; to corresponding on a letter-only basis with others; and to providing only a circular for a wider range of groups, who remained on the margins. Some organisations took less of a direct interest in the consultation than others and just wanted to be kept informed of outcomes rather than to play a particularly active role in the drafting of any documentation. So again, as with the professional MTF, the active core took most decisions and consisted, essentially, of the secretariat of the national MTF. (Interview with Dr Packham at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97)

Thus, there was a clear hierarchy of consultation within the national MTF but, according to the secretariat this was a voluntary arrangement on the part of those who participated. (Interview with Dr Packham at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97) However, it is also the case that those at the core, who were already well known to one another, were satisfied with this arrangement and they did not seek to persuade others to have a more significant input.

The Commission's 'second' call for ideas had received a huge response. They had been bombarded with replies from a wide range of actors and organisations wishing to participate in the Task Force. The UK MTF personnel were keen to look at the responses to see if there was a 'fit' with the ideas which

had emerged from their initial consultation with senior figures in the existing established network of the national MTF. From the UK national MTF's point of view, an analysis of the responses to the EU call showed that the ideas from other agencies tied up well with existing proposals. What the MTF hadn't previously realised, however, was the volume of responses from the university sector. Several universities had knots of researchers engaged in work in the field, and this could potentially provide a new dimension to those already established in the network who can be characterised more as professional or industry-based researchers.

The positive outcome from the EU's second call, therefore, was a new dialogue between the university-based research community and the established network. Contact was established with the interested academic community and was built in to the existing national MTF. This could be considered as the entry of a new set of actors into a network of interests, as the original consultation process by the UK national MTF had relied upon existing contacts. This reliance on established contacts, in itself, is not necessarily negative. Through a long career in the field, working within the major research organisations, Dr Packham knew who many of the key researchers in the sector were. In that sense, choosing who to consult was simply a matter of referring to an existing list. (Interview with Dr Packham at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97) However, the problem with this method of consultation lies with who it misses out, which may be due to a lack of knowledge (in the case of the university sector), or perhaps is done in a more conscious way – which was arguably the case with the key environmental organisations, as these are highly visible.

As will be seen in section 4.7 below, the lack of consultation with (what might be judged as) key sets of interests may allow for the smoother running of the process. This is particularly the case if the lack of consultation can be understood as a means of avoiding complications and conflict arising from competing sciences or competing expertise between industry based researchers and campaigning organisations. However, it is interesting to consider why some groups can accede to an established network, whilst others are not invited to do the same. One interesting point in this regard is that in the analysis of responses by the UK MTF to the second call, the national MTF found that submissions ‘tied up well’ with the existing thinking. If they did not ‘tie up well’, then being brought inside the national MTF was much less likely, given that the consultation and the drafting of the submission had already begun. This necessarily raises questions about full representation of all relevant interests in the domain in the Task Force process.

The second point to consider alongside that, is not only the fact that environmental organisations were not on the ‘list’ but, in addition, that it did not occur to anyone in the national MTF to consult them. It was clear from the Commission’s Call for Ideas that it was important to have all interests represented in the process (all relevant socio-economic actors). This was detailed in the Commission documentation as necessarily including consumers and environmental organisations as well as operators, regulators and managers.

UK consumers were indirectly represented in the national MTF through Ofwat’s National Customer Council primarily, and also the Scottish Water and Sewerage Customers Council (SWSCC), who were particularly proactive in terms

of ensuring consumer input into the consultation (Questionnaire response, Archie Minto Head of Charges SWSCC, 10/9/98). The chair of the UK national MTF considered that the interests of the consumer were strongly supported throughout the process as a core set of interests. (Interview with Dr Packham at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97) Interestingly, however, this dialogue with consumer representation was more in terms of the perceived need to *change* consumer interests as they currently stand. The UK national MTF Report reflects this strongly in its claim that customer perception of the problems of water pollution needs to be improved as they are seen by the industry as being wrong impressions of the key issues for resolution. Their particular concern of course is that, given the nature of research and problem resolution (with the constraint of public opinion and electability), such misunderstandings of water management issues results in money being spent in the wrong areas because of the potential impact of consumer (voter) pressure on MPs (Interview with Dr Packham at Techware, Marlow, 15/5/97). This demonstrates a constraint on network autonomy very clearly, and indicates that policy is not made in an expertise driven political vacuum. Rightly or wrongly, the agenda is, at least in part, set by political concerns of both affordability and electability.

The further delimiting of expertise in the policy process can arguably be said to derive from the lack of consultation with different kinds of experts in the field, who may also have a different agenda – the environmentalists. As already noted, the lack of consultation with these organisations arises in the first instance from their lack of presence on ‘the list’. The fact that they were not considered to

be a necessary point of consultation despite the explicit instruction of the Commission documentation to reflect environmental interests, may also be significant.

The final delivery date for the UK MTF Report was set for January 1997, and then pushed back into February. For the completion of the final document a small drafting group of the main actors was formed which had, at most, twenty representatives from the range of consultees (Interview with Dr Packham at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97). The draft document was circulated to all those involved in the consultation and the final report was sent at the end of February 1997, to go forward to a European meeting of all national and professional MTFs, at Baveno, Italy. This closing conference was charged with producing a working document based on all the national and professional MTF submissions. The *raison d'être* of the whole process, which was distilled at this meeting, was to produce a document to help formulate the priorities and strategy in the Fifth Framework Programme. At Baveno, the delegates formed working groups to discuss any amendments to the Moscow document. The delegates had hoped that the conference would produce a final document representing all national inputs which, in turn, would change the shape of the Fifth Framework Programme. However, there were indications at that final discussion meeting that the consultation process from the Task Force process would, in fact, have a limited impact on the forthcoming Research and Technological Development (RTD) programme. It transpired that priorities had already been set and a strategy had been determined, even before the consultation process had begun, (Interview with Dr Packham at

Techware, Marlow 15/5/97) raising questions of the consultation process being merely an exercise in surface legitimation for achieving pre-determined European Union targets.

There was some anger and bitterness within the UK at the final outcome from the Task Force experience. The opinion was that the Commission should take on board what was said both in the range of documentation as well as in the final discussion session at Baveno – not least because of the amount of time and money that was poured in to the process by all those connected with it. (Interview with Dr Packham at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97) The final report from the Commission was due out in September 1997, but only appeared in early 1999. There was no written or verbal communication from the Commission explaining the delay in publication of the Commission document, increasing suspicions that the entire Task Force consultation had initially been shelved.

The role of the Commission in the Task Force was understood by the UK national MTF to be one of initiation, co-ordination and policy impact. In other words its role was to establish the various national and professional MTFs; to hold internal meetings to elaborate and co-ordinate the range of priorities in this particular sector; and to consult with other individual bodies and associations about target areas. They also used Ispra and DG XII in manager roles, but no impact from these organisations or from the Inter Service Group (which was established to co-ordinate the overall Directorate General input), can be detected (Interview with Dr Packham at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97). The dominant opinion across the board in the UK is that the lack of a final document, when expected, was a result of

internal politics in DG XII. It is considered that the central reason for the disaffection within DG XII with the Task Force process, lies in the fact that such approaches are seen as undermining the role of DG XII officials in their key function of formulating policy in this field. The Task Force could be considered as effectively putting policymaking out to tender and thus undercutting the role of in-house policy makers in the Commission. Through both wanting to maintain a key role, and also in wanting to retain control over policy direction, DG XII perceived the Task Force process as more of a threat than as an additional dimension to effective policymaking. Hence the very limited impact of any of the Task Forces which have been set up to date.

This seems to indicate that irrespective of some of the difficulties of and limits to consultation within the MTFs, the impact of the consultation exercise was limited by the structure and organisation of the Commission itself. It is already clear that there was a differential impact of network actors within both the professional and the national MTFs. In addition, the impact of the submissions from all MTFs was limited by the Commission in terms of both pre-determined targets and internal politics. This vastly reduces the autonomy and policy impact of network actors.

4.4 Mirror Task Force Experience Indicators

From the experiences of the two MTFs which had UK involvement, it is possible to draw out some central points about the constraints placed on the consultative framework which had been established. In other words, there are some elements of the design and practice of the overall Task Force, which seem to indicate that the process wasn't as open as may have been indicated at the outset by the Commission. This first set of 'experience indicators' arise from the formal construction of the Task Force process, initiated by the Commission. The second set of 'experience indicators' are based on the problems in the organisation of MTFs in response to the EU's framework. Together the two sets of 'experience indicators' provide significant limitations on the effective operation of the overall Task Force, relative to what we might have assumed would take place.

Firstly it was noted by the professional MTF that the framework provided in the EU documentation was actually quite rigid. The targets which had been set were prescriptive, rather than open and flexible. The detailed framework outlined the areas which had been highlighted as key sectors for EU action, to improve its position in some key dimensions: research and development, business opportunities, leading regulatory body and so on. So the agenda, at the most fundamental level, had already been set. This implies that the Task Force process was more a means of discovering the best means of achieving the ends as set, as well as a way of identifying the best individuals and organisations to support it in

operationalising those means. The first constraint on the Task force then was the *prescriptive framework from the Commission*.

Alongside this initial constraint is the *limited weight of the MTF inputs*.

Clearly one consequence of a pre-determined agenda is that the impact which MTFs can have is limited, and is likely to be effective only if their submission is directed to the areas outlined in the documentation rather than those which fall outside the objectives set out by the Commission. Proposals which do not directly match the imperatives presented in the EU documentation are less likely to be taken up, precisely because the agenda is not really open. By the end of the Task Force process (submission of final documents to the Commission) both MTFs in the UK recognised that the level of their investment in terms of time and financial resources, was out of balance with the return they had from the Commission. It wasn't until they reached the end of the process, however, that they realised that the potential impact of their input was probably very narrow. (Interviews with Dr Packham and Alan Bruce at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97)

This feeling of impotence at the national level was exacerbated by the structure of the Task Force, the dual MTF arrangement (professional and national) as well as by the shifting deadlines for completion of the process. It is difficult to detect any overt preference on the part of the Commission for the proposals from the different types of MTF. However, the UK national MTF did feel that they may be perceived differently on the ground, as the 'professional' tag was given to only one particular type of network. They felt that, as a result, the implication could be that they were not professionals in the same way as organisations such as

Techware, and this might be an important difference for potential participants in either network. (Interview with Dr Packham at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97) In terms of the ever-changing deadlines, those that completed their report by the original deadline felt that they may have lost out to submissions which were presented later, and which could thus reflect a more lengthy consultation process. So, this further constraint can be characterised as *differences between MTF submissions*.

A final and significant constraining element of the overall design of the Task Force is the relationship between EU-level expertise and policymakers and the experts assembled in the MTFs. It was felt by the UK participants (in this case, the secretariat of the MTFs), that some of the delays and difficulties in the operation of the Task Force process could be attributed to a possible rivalry between the national and the European level – *inter-institutional rivalry* particularly in respect of bureaucrats working in DG XII being undermined by the Task Force initiative. (Interview with Dr Packham and Alan Bruce at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97)

Taken together, these constraining factors found in the organisation of the Task Force at the EU level point to a less open, less flexible, less accessible structure than might otherwise be assumed from the initial documentation.

4.5 UK Mirror Task Force consultees

The UK consultees can be classified according to the following groups:

environmental concerns; water management concerns; consumer representation; academic interests; technical consultants; dominant insider organisation; regional interests; and interests not consulted. In this section I will discuss the experience of groups in each of these categories in turn.

(i) Environmental concerns 1: Institute of Freshwater Ecology

(part of Natural Environment Research Council)

The main concern for the Institute of Freshwater Ecology (IFE) was that environmentalists were not very well represented in the consultation process and also, therefore, in the final document submitted to the Commission. In fact IFE felt that if their organisation had not been a part of the consultation process then environmental concerns may well have not been represented at all. (Questionnaire response, Professor Pickering Director, Institute of Freshwater Ecology, 24/8/98)

This highlights the dearth of environmental representation within the national MTF. This can further weaken the input of those who did participate (such as IFE), because there were no links to be made with organisations which may share their concerns, which would have allowed them to lobby more effectively within the network.

Also, potential participants were not given a precise outline of the structures which were in place for their involvement, nor information about there being more than one arena in which UK organisations could have an input: the professional MTF as well as the national one. Particularly with the high profile of the Environment Agency (EA) who were directly involved with the professional MTF this seemed, in the opinion of the IFE, to improve the weight of input of the professional MTF, relative to the national one. (Questionnaire response, Professor Pickering Director, Institute of Freshwater Ecology, 24/8/98) In other words, not only were they not initially aware that other Task Forces existed, but that the professional MTF may, in fact, have been the more important forum to be involved with – particularly for environmental concerns, because of the presence of senior EA officials.

(ii) Environmental concerns 2: The Environment Agency

Interestingly, despite the UK government's association (through the DTER) with the national MTF, Mervyn Bramley of the Environment Agency (EA) acted as chair of the Techware professional MTF. This, as indicated above, had the consequence of giving increased significance and weight to the Techware submission.

Mr Bramley's saw his role as Chair as one which was catalytic and as a source of inspiration in the discussions which were had around the structure of the submission. Importantly the EA, in the Chair's opinion, could also have an

important role as a quality checker in terms of the substance or content of the document and, significantly, as bringing a more pro-European perspective to the process. (Questionnaire response, Mervyn Bramley Head of Research and Development, Environment Agency, 16/4/97) It seems that the implication was that a Europhile perspective may have been needed to counteract a more inward-looking approach from others represented in this particular network.

An obvious quality which one would assume could be brought to the process through this chairmanship of the professional MTF is a significant environmental angle, although Mr Bramley notes that the approach of EA is also pro-industrial. (Questionnaire response, Mervyn Bramley Head of Research and Development, Environment Agency, 16/4/97) Given that the professional MTF represented a network of professional and research interests, it seems that the industrial sector may have been over-represented relative to other interests within the professional network. Consequently, within this particular MTF, the environmental angle was not as strongly represented as it might have been. This factor becomes even more relevant when we consider the importance of the chairmanship of the professional MTF. Already it has been noted that the Chair saw his role as being both 'catalytic' and 'inspirational' which indicates a strongly active role in the consultation process. Further, Mr Bramley claims that the consensus within the professional MTF was reached through 'institutional leadership and an independent secretariat'. (Questionnaire response, Mervyn Bramley Head of Research and Development, Environment Agency, 16/4/97) Given that EA is a respected institution and occupied the Chair of this particular

professional MTF, it seems likely that this leadership-consensus-building was carried out from the front, increasing the relative weight or power in negotiations of the MTF chair.

In terms of a wider consultation from within the professional MTF, to account for the diverse interests associated with water management, it seems that this particular MTF struggled to be as broad a church as it could have been. In terms of citizen or 'needs of society' interests highlighted by the Commission for inclusion in the consultation, their precise role in the professional MTF is a little unclear. For consumers, these interests were incorporated by 'notionally allocating more weight to the more informed and involved' (Questionnaire response, Mervyn Bramley Head of Research and Development, Environment Agency, 16/4/97) and for environmentalists there wasn't an agreed means of ensuring that they were represented at all. This raises two points.

Firstly, the distribution of weights of consumer views implies that organisations already known about and well organised (resourced) would have more chance of being represented than others (although there is no clear indication that any consumer organisations were directly contacted by the professional MTF). Secondly, one can ensure the inclusion of environmental concerns through inviting representatives to participate. One possible reason why environmental organisations were not approached, is the perception that they do not have the same claims to expertise or scientific knowledge as the EA and the other non-environmental organisations within the network. (Interview with Dr Packham at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97) However, whilst it may be true that campaigning

environmental organisations (for example, Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth) are not rigorous in the same way in terms of scientific knowledge, they certainly have policy-relevant knowledge and consequently should have something to contribute to the process.

The significant benefit from the consultation process for an organisation like the EA is that it 'should reinforce links' between those actors involved in the consultation (Questionnaire response, Mervyn Bramley Head of Research and Development, Environment Agency, 16/4/97). The choice of language here is interesting in that it does not mention creating new links but of reinforcing existing ones. This not only implies that 'new' organisations (ones not previously known to the secretariat of the professional MTF) were not approached to participate, but that this exercise reinforced the network of organisations who were involved, making it more likely that the same groups will come together in the future. This is here referred to as the *reinforcement function*.

(iii) Water management concerns 1: Water Research Centre

The main concerns of the Water Research Centre (WRc) were elaborated as five outline proposals on the following issues: Contaminants in the environment; irrigation; water re-use; wastewater treatment and river catchment management. (Questionnaire response, John Davis, Senior Consultant at WRc, 20/1/98)

WRc were an obvious choice to be consulted in this process, as they are the lead organisation for the European Environmental Agency's Topic Centre on

Inland Waters. In this sense they adopted very much a pan-European perspective. Given their established links with the EU, the WRc made submissions to the Task Force through both the UK national MTF as well as to Brussels directly. As a commercial organisation with experience of the EU water domain, WRc have expertise in EU research and development and so could lend that to the process, but felt that the benefits which would flow directly to them would be limited. (Questionnaire response, John Davis Senior Consultant at WRc, 20/1/98)

(iv) Water management concerns 2: Water Services Association

The Water Services Association (WSA) was involved in the UK national MTF alongside individual water company chiefs. In an individual capacity Ted Thairs (Head of WSA) is involved with both the UK water industry and European trade associations, and so participated in these two capacities. The key areas of concern highlighted by the WSA were: water supply, availability, collection and treatment of waste waters, re-use of sewage sludge. (Questionnaire response, Ted Thairs Head of WSA, 14/4/97)

From the perspective of the WSA also, achieving a consensus was considered to be an easy task. The objectives which WSA saw as common for all those involved in the national MTF were: reliable supply of high quality drinking water, good sanitation, high level of environmental protection and optimising technical/commercial opportunities for European business. (Questionnaire response, Ted Thairs Head of WSA, 14/4/97) One can probably agree that in the

broadest terms there was some consensus around core issues of water quality and water management. However, what is more difficult to agree about is the detail, the hierarchy of aims and, crucially, the means of achieving such objectives. This may, in fact, cause more conflict than consensus.

Perhaps the most interesting element of the WSA contribution was the way they perceive the incorporation of consumer and environmental interests. In both cases, the water companies felt that such concerns were expressed through, and are an integral part of, the water companies' input (Questionnaire response, Ted Thairs Head of WSA, 14/4/97). Again environmental concerns are seen as part of the water companies' remit and, as such, are considered as already integrated into their priorities for water management. Certainly in the era of post-privatisation water supply and management, it is possible to take issue with the water companies in terms of their claim to fully integrate consumer and environmental concerns within their overall strategy. The prioritisation of concerns within water companies again may raise some questions about the effective integration of concerns which will directly impact on levels of profit and the pass-through costs to customers of increased environmental management.

(v) Consumer representation: Ofwat National Customer Council and Scottish Water and Sewerage Customers Council

The main concern for consumer representatives was articulated as the consultative arrangements for consumers. So they were not concerned with price and supply

directly, as indicated by the water companies, but with a means of better voicing concerns about price and supply which are not heard at present (Questionnaire response, Archie Minto, Head of Charges at SWSCC, 10/9/98). The central issue for these groups, then, was the need to increase their ability to articulate their concerns about the issues of improvement versus costs. They noted that there are both institutional and organisational barriers to having full discussions about their concerns. This is something which does not only affect relations within member states between consumers, regulatory authorities and water companies, but, significantly in this context, also affects their ability to lobby the EU. The significant barrier here arises from the lack of similar consumer representative organisations in other member states. (Questionnaire response, Archie Minto Head of Charges at SWSCC, 10/9/98) This significantly undermines their ability to influence the agenda in a number of ways.

Firstly, water companies are happy to claim that they effectively represent consumer interests – yet each company now is a commercial venture and so information is commercially sensitive. As a result even if consumers are represented through the water companies they cannot be represented uniformly but regionally, which weakens their position. Secondly, the fact that consumer organisations recognise that there are obstacles to proper discussion whereas the companies do not, indicates that the water companies are content to claim legitimacy of consumer representation even though the consumer organisations themselves would not agree. Thirdly, in addition to being under-represented within the member states, they are unable to be effective within the EU context as, generally,

there is a lack of similar consumer organisations across the EU. However water companies and water management officials are not similarly encumbered. So, in presenting water management issues from the industry perspective business can benefit from concertation and European level fora, increasing their ability to lobby the EU.

The Scottish Consumer Council noted directly that they would like to be able to have more influence on the EU's agenda (Questionnaire response, Archie Minto Head of Charges SWSCC, 10/9/98). In terms of the final national MTF document, they would have liked more direct reference to the interests of water payers. They also noted that they had developed no new links as a result of being a part of the consultation process. (Questionnaire response, Archie Minto Head of Charges SWSCC, 10/9/98) This seems to add weight to the impression that organisations who were already known to each other in the professional-management-industry sectors reinforced their relationships, but did not build any new linkages with non-industry interests.

Further, given the limited range of organisations involved who represented non-industry interests, there were no other organisations for the consumer councils to attempt concerted action with, and thus be more powerful in the process. As with the environmental interests then, there is some evidence of a fragmentation of the representation of consumers within their own spheres and also a fragmentation between them and environmentalists, who may be able to act together under the 'interests of society' banner. Together they were not able to create an anti-industry alliance – which only increased the imbalance of weights, as the industry

representatives exhibited a capacity to work together for their long-run interests resulting, perhaps, from a better clustering of common objectives (competitiveness of business; application of research findings; improvement of technology etc.)

(vi) Academic interest: The university sector

The main concern here was with conservation and sustainable management of species and habitats. (Questionnaire response, Paul Bradley Principal Ecologist, University of Sheffield, 28/8/98) Again, this sector submitted directly to the Brussels Task Force in the second Call for Ideas and, as a result, their proposals were passed on to the UK national MTF secretariat. Some academic respondents felt that there was an imbalance in the consultation between industry-led environmental issues and areas such as species protection. This may be further evidence of a fragmentation within the environmental domain resulting from the wide diversity of areas which are covered by the 'environmental concerns' banner. This has the further consequence that it is more possible for industry to claim to have taken on board environmental management concerns, without meaning they have integrated the full remit of conservation issues, as would be identified by the range of actors who consider themselves to be working in this field. The main university respondents were brought inside the UK national MTF, but the final report wasn't circulated to them, adding to their perception that they were not centrally involved in the process of consultation. (Questionnaire response, Paul Bradley Principal Ecologist, University of Sheffield, 28/8/98)

(vii) Technical consultants: Kaiak (UK based artificial island enterprise)

Kaiak were invited into the process directly by DG XII. Given their previous involvement with the European Union in terms of enterprise initiatives for the creation of artificial islands, they were asked to be involved specifically to raise awareness about inshore/coastal waters use. Kaiak were concerned about cost efficiency, coastal land use and clear added value at the European level.

(Questionnaire response, Gerald Clark Chairman of Kaiak, 22/8/98)

Kaiak were not a part of the UK national MTF, although they were listed as having been consulted in the final national MTF document. This is likely to have arisen from the response of the national MTF to the second Commission Call, whereby Dr Packham sent a covering letter (from UK national MTF) with the EU second call to all the UK respondents. In this way the actual consultation looked much wider than was in fact the case. Kaiak responded directly to the Joint Research Centre and, unsurprisingly as they were invited to participate, they feel their input was reflected in the final EU document. (Questionnaire response, Gerald Clark Chairman of Kaiak, 22/8/98)

However, no new links were created for Kaiak, as they were involved in a very specific capacity and thus were isolated from other participants. They further indicate that they were unclear about the precise procedures which were put in place to operate the Task Force.

(viii) Dominant insider organisation: The Institute of Hydrology

The Institute of Hydrology (IH) have very strong links with both FWR and the DTER, which resulted in their inclusion in the Task Force process. Interestingly, because of the complex of links IH has with a range of organisations, IH were involved with many MTFs (including ones outside the UK) and tried to influence all those they participated in. (Questionnaire response, Neil Runnalls Marketing and Business Development, IH, 22/1/98) In contrast to the lack of knowledge on the part of more marginal organisations, IH had a clear advantage from their prior experience of the process and structures of European Task Forces and it was possible, therefore, for IH to maximise their impact and policy reach within the central Task Force. After a re-drafting of the final document IH saw a clear return for their investment, as so much of their input was directly represented in the UK national MTF document. (Questionnaire response, Neil Runnalls Marketing and Business Development, IH, 22/1/98)

Despite this, IH had a very cynical opinion of the overall process, in terms of how much genuine impact the national consultation process would have on the final EU RTD programme. They were also in a position, as they understood the Task Force architecture better than others, to fit their submissions to the precise areas outlined by the Commission. IH were aware that the agenda was more fixed than open and so were able to apply any influence they had in the right places. In other words, IH worked on the assumption that there was no point putting forward ideas which did not provide an easy fit with the quite rigid framework

outlined by the EU in their initial documentation because, in fact, there was no real flexibility in that agenda. So, it is clear that who an organisation knew (in order to access more than one MTF) and how well that organisation understood the process in advance (making better judgements about what the Commission needed from the consultation) would allow such groups to maximise their input and thus see a much better return for their investment.

Overall, IH believed that the consultation would come to nothing, but that still it was important to participate. Other smaller, more marginal organisations did not realise the same benefits of merely participating in the consultation, as that in itself brought no reward. In contrast it was important and beneficial for IH to participate because of their links with so many relevant organisations in the domain – which meant IH could both lend legitimacy and could also have a certain influence on the outcomes. (Questionnaire response, Neil Runnalls Marketing and Business Development, IH, 22/1/98)

(ix) Regional interests: The Scottish and Welsh Offices

Both offices were contacted as part of the consultation for the report of the UK national MTF. Both departments were invited to participate because of their policy responsibilities for water regulation in Scotland and Wales. As a result the role they defined for themselves was the identification of specifically Scottish and Welsh water issues which should be included in the report. The outcome of the consultation, however, found that the issues identified by other actors in the

network were thought to be relevant to most parts of the UK, so additional regional emphasis was not required. (Questionnaire response, Philip Wright Head of European Environment and Engineering Unit, Scottish Office, 6/5/97)

(x) Organisations not consulted

As already noted, environmental organisations were not directly part of the consultation process of the UK national MTF. The reason for the lack of consultation, in particular with campaigning organisations, can be understood from the explanation from the UK national MTF as to why they were not on the list of original network contacts. According to the UK national MTF, 'green' groups are not necessarily motivated to research, as they are campaigning organisations. The UK national MTF 'was dealing in specific research proposals, and the Greens are not in that business'. (Interview with Dr Packham at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97)

Although the UK national MTF accept that the omission of green groups is a possible criticism as they have a clear interest in the policy field and have policy relevant knowledge, their omission had clear benefits to the UK MTF. Some of the coherence of the final submission would have been lost with a wider consultation, due to the differing emphases of management professionals and environmentalists. Further, the UK national MTF indicated that environmental organisation did not share the same concerns in terms of their institutional focus (and therefore research commitments) as other participants, and so were not approached. (Interview with Dr Packham at Techware, Marlow 15/5/97) A conflict of styles and purpose (in

terms of the end goal of research) would have created difficulties in the consultation process and also in being able to producing a coherent set of proposals.

4.6 UK MTF Consultees Experience Indicators

Again, as with the MTF secretariats' experience outlined in 4.4, it is possible to discuss some key elements of the Task Force consultation, as understood from the perspective of the participants. The overall experience of the consultation process from the point of view of the groups and individuals drawn into the process can be outlined across four axes.

(a) *Lack of environmental input.* It seems clear that one overwhelming element of the consultation process was the weak environmental input into the process. This can be seen not only in terms of the lack of groups brought into the consultation – particularly the key campaigning organisations in the UK – but also the limited impact of the input from those who did participate. One reason for the weakness of the input may be due to the very wide range of concerns which can come under the 'environment' banner. This leads to a certain fragmentation of any potential environmental lobby within such networks.

(b) *Pro-European versus national interests.* The purpose of the central Task Force was clearly to define EU research strategies in the water policy domain. However the EA which often works in European fora, still felt it was necessary to counter-balance potential anti-European feeling within the policy consultation. The

negative approach of some actors stems from two main sources in the case of this particular Task Force: a suspicion of the motives for consultation (creaming off strategic thinking) and a dislike of the rigid interventionism of the EU in standard setting, which is felt to be more cautious (for example in setting water toxicology targets) than is necessary. This results in a need, from the perspective of professionals and researchers in the UK, for balancing the perceived EU interference and rigidities with the possibility of financial reward for participation in EU programmes.

(c) *Consumers' interests marginal.* Consumer input into the consultation was weaker than may have been expected. Although consumer organisations had better representation than environmental interests, there was clearly a difference of opinion in the identification of consumer interests between water company managers and consumer representative organisations. It is also possible to detect a difference of opinion in terms of how well those interests were represented in the consultation, particularly through the representation of the water companies. Given that the water companies expressed a different picture of consumer interests than consumer representatives themselves, the claim by the water companies that they had effectively integrated consumer concerns into their contribution to the consultation is difficult to sustain. This may indicate that consumer input was actually more marginal than claimed by the secretariat of the national MTF, as consumer organisations had a very limited direct exchange within the MTF.

(d) *Dominant insider organisation.* The weight of inputs of those organisations which did participate was further unbalanced by the ability of key

organisations to exploit their knowledge of the structures, Commission preferences and existing relationships with other participants. Organisations which could rely on prior knowledge had more influence on the process itself (through targeting Commission preferences) and therefore also had a much better return on their investment.

4.7 Network outcomes

The Task Force process had limits, from the outset, in two key dimensions: the organisation of the central Task Force by the Commission and the organisation of the consultation at the national level by the MTFs. As well as the problems of limited flexibility and accessibility of the agenda as already discussed, such constraints have more tangible outcomes in terms of the role and capacities of the network actors within the MTFs, as well as in terms of the organisation and distribution of policy expertise at the national and EU levels. Taking national network actors first, the reliance on existing, established networks of contacts had three key effects on the MTF.

(a) *Reinforcement function*: this refers to the links or relationships which exist between the network actors. It is clear that the ability to create new links within the network was very limited. Despite some new actors being brought to the attention of the core network actors, the experience of the new actors (universities) was of being very marginal and, as a result, they withdrew from the

network at the close of the consultation. However, those network actors who formed a part of the original list of contacts found the participation experience useful insofar as it brought those contacts into a common forum. In other words, it provided an arena in which those actors who were already known to each other in either a direct capacity, or by reputation, could have those relationships reinforced. The familiarity of the line-up will have re-assured those involved about who the key actors are in their policy domain, and who is recognised by external actors (for example the government, the Commission) as an expert in the field. Consequently the formation of future networks in the policy domain is likely to reflect the same composition of policy actors, pointing again to the tendency for networks to be rather more static than dynamic.

(b) *Established leaderships further limit dynamism*: this refers to network leaderships in established fora. This is a factor which arises from the fact that existing network relationships have been further reinforced. A consequence of a reliance on established links is that decisions about the direction of the network are likely to emerge from established, dominant groups or individuals. Being an established member of the network may deliver greater authority to the individual who manages and directs the work of the network. Another possibility, however, is that the dominant or core principles around which the core actors cluster, are unlikely to be challenged. By delimiting the scope of membership and deriving leadership from within the core, the dynamic or the potential for change within the network is limited.

(c) *Fit with pre-existing network locations*: A third factor arises from the obstacles to potential new actors becoming involved in the network. Even if the obstacles to membership can be overcome, for example resulting from an external shock such as the second call for Ideas from the Commission which effectively bypassed the UK national MTF framework, and which expanded the range of consultees in that domain, there are more difficulties in retaining (the desire for) meaningful membership. The central difficulty seems to lie in the ability of any new entrants to match (or 'tie up well' with) the ideas, proposals or direction of the established network. In other words, if the areas they represent seem to be marginal or too diverse to be integrated fully, those individuals or groups representing those interests remain marginal or withdraw from the network. So, even where new actors have the ability to gain entry to the network, if they cannot provide an easy fit with what's already there they are unlikely to remain a part of that particular network. In addition, if there are no other groups with which they can combine in order to increase their weight then the dominant network remains unchallenged.

Other outcomes:

In addition to the impact on the network of experience indicators such as those we have found in this particular case study, there are two further significant outcomes from this type of consultation.

(a) The possibility that strategic thinking (policy expertise) has moved to the supranational level. This may change the significance of certain types of knowledge, where an understanding of EU structures, processes and objectives is as important as policy relevant knowledge.

(b) This has the further consequence of the more limited resources at the domestic level being directed to areas with high public salience. This may undermine the impact of professional-industry networks within the UK as their analysis of what is required in future water quality and water management does not always match the public identification of water issues.

Taken together these additional factors may point to the changing terrain of network activity, as it shifts further away from the national level to European arenas. In addition it may indicate that, at least in the initial stages of this network shift, that different types of knowledge become as important as those already associated with networks. Not only does resourcing, professional cohesiveness, policy-relevant knowledge (or expertise) deliver influence within a network but it also increases understanding and familiarity with the 'rules of the game'. In addition, insider status is something which is being reproduced at the EU level, as the example of the Institute of Hydrology demonstrates.

The UK national MTF seems to have been of limited utility for the UK participants. Those who already had contacts with others in the network kept them, but the MTF consultations didn't provide the function of building any new

links for those outside the existing network. Also, much of the consumer and environmental concerns' input was limited in the UK submission. As well as the absence of key campaigning organisations, it was felt by organisations with an environmental dimension who did participate that without their involvement the environmental element of the submission would have been even weaker. In that sense environmental concerns did not form a part of the basic make-up of the network participants.

Despite the fact that the core network actors in this case (water industry professionals) can and do claim to have integrated consumer and environmental concerns into their own strategy, this Task Force demonstrated that recognition of what is important to different interests is limited. Not only do water industry professionals claim that the public misidentifies the most important issues for long-run water management, but consumers claim that water companies misrepresent their real concerns. This clearly creates difficulties in producing a coherent submission which represents the full remit of socio-economic stakeholders in the water policy sector. In the particular case of the national MTFs, the disadvantage to non-industry concerns is increased as a result. This arises from the fact that the consultation was dominated by water industry professionals with marginal input from consumer and environmental interests. The imbalance is then exacerbated by the misrepresentation of consumer and environmental interests by the industry.

It has also become clear that how much prior knowledge an individual or organisation had of the structures and objectives of the Task Force was also very important. One certain consequence of a high degree of prior knowledge of the

workings of the Task Force, was an increase in the leverage a particular organisation could have within the network and thus the ability to have a significant impact. This ability to have more of an impact manifested itself in a number of different dimensions. Prior knowledge could direct an organisation to:

- (a) stick to the framework as given (because know it isn't really open, so some suggestions will not make the final document);
- (b) operate in many fora, rather than be limited to one MTF. This spreads the impact any single organisation could have and makes it possible to find the most suitable MTF for voicing opinions;
- (c) be able to use prior knowledge as an indicator of the importance of that organisation. The fact that they appear to already be on the inside track provides a lofty perch from which to pass down their suggestions to the MTFs, for maximum impact on the central Task Force;
- (d) take note of spread of participants rather than be limited to their own individual interest (a proposal which is multidimensional is more likely to be represented in a pan-European forum than ideas which only directly impact on limited end users or in very particular contexts which cannot have more general applicability).

Again it seems clear that established network actors who have long experience of similar approaches, and have the appearance of 'insider' status, are set to benefit more directly from this kind of consultation than newer or more marginal groups

who can only represent a single or limited area of interest. So bigger organisations also stand to gain more from such an exercise than smaller, more targeted groups.

The exception would be where they have a particular (even unique) product or service to provide, such as Kaiak. Smaller, less coherently organised groups or individuals with ideas of unidimensional application are unlikely to reap the same reward from the consultation process. The consequence, of course, is that new or marginal interests do not remain in the network at the end of the consultation. Having only a limited impact and not gaining any tangible benefits from the experience encourages new or marginal interests to withdraw from the network, thus allowing the existing network to remain unchallenged. In addition there are disincentives to attempting to maintain contact, which do not apply to established network actors. That is, there are costs involved in investing the time in order to become a more established member of the network, costs which, on the experience of previously limited rewards for participation may not be considered a worthwhile outlay.

So one characteristic of this type of network is the *reinforcement function* for established network actors. In other words, because of the problems for new or marginal groups, the dominance of established network actors and pre-existing interrelationships are not challenged, but reinforced. The consequence is that the network will be further reinforced in the future as they call on each other again as the lack of challenge strengthens a belief in their coherence and ability to work together.

A second characteristic which develops in established networks is that, precisely because the networks are made up of clusters of like-minded water professionals, the leadership of the network is predictable. The leadership is not from an individual or organisation from outside the network, but from a dominant group inside that network. Particularly if we consider the role of leaders of the network as also of being the power brokers within that nexus, then this is likely to be proactive leadership on the basis of established ideas and practice. So we could characterise networks such as these as having *established leaderships which, thus, limit dynamism*.

A further characteristic, on the basis of the experience of the newer or more marginal groups to the network is that if they cannot easily fit with the overall direction of the network, they are less likely to be adequately represented in the outcome. In other words, it seems to have been the case with this particular network that new approaches needed to *fit with pre-existing network locations* – otherwise their views could not be adequately communicated.

In terms of internal network dynamics, there was very clearly a fragmentation of the groups or organisations representing the ‘needs of society’ versus a uniformity of those representing the ‘needs of the market’. This was manifested on four levels. Firstly, it was manifested in fragmentation within the environmental sector – as there are a multitude of issues for environmental groups to concentrate on and neither of the two umbrella organisations (Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth) were involved. Secondly, there was a lack of coherence across the green-consumer divide – despite both sets of interests fitting broadly into the

‘needs for society’ axis, identified by the European Commission. Thirdly, there was a fracture between the national and the EU level in both the environmental and consumer fields – particularly in the consumer domain as a result of the underdeveloped nature of European consumer rights organisations. Finally, the outcome of these three factors, was a certain fragmentation of the organisations representing ‘society’ versus the alliance building capacities of business enterprise and pan-European industry groups. This had a double effect: ‘society’ groups had weak representation in their own right and were also weak relative to the representation and coherence of organisations representing the industry.

4.8 Conclusion

It is clear that network analysis provides very useful insights into the behaviour of important policy actors in a given sector. It is possible, through this type of approach, to identify core and marginal actors and to look at the relationships between them in order to make judgements about the reasons for their core or marginal status. In this particular case study, the core groups can be identified as representing something of a professional network. The professional-industry bias was visible through the formation of both the professional and the national MTFs. The managers of the MTFs had a central role in organising the consultation and the submission of proposals to the central Task Force. These managers were derived from professional researchers embedded in the policy domain.

One limitation of network analysis, however, is that the significance and the operational details of networks vary from one policy sphere to another and over time within a single sphere. Certainly they may take on different forms than the professional-industry emphasis found here. In looking for policy networks in each and every policy domain and examining the differences between, say, a network of water professionals and a network of road transport lobbyists, the conclusion will always tend towards an emphasis on variability.

However, there is a more serious limitation. Network analysis provides only a limited kind of explanation of policymaking. In effect it treats some facts as simply given, and so not in need of explanation. It enables us to explain the particular course that policymaking takes within a given set of constraints, but it does not provide an explanation of those constraints themselves. This general feature of network analysis showed up in three features of our case study: the importance of the EU's existing agenda in prescribing a framework for the consultation; the almost complete neglect of environmental interests; and the less marked but still significant neglect of consumer interests.

These three facts had a very important effect on the outcome of the consultation, and yet network analysis can offer at best only a partial explanation of them. It can explain the omission of environmentalists, for example, as a slip on the part of Dr Packham; but this seems very superficial. It is difficult to believe that the policy outcome would have been significantly different had Friends of the Earth been consulted. To the extent that it would not have been different there was an unseen constraint on the process which network analysis simply cannot explain.

Similar comments can be made about the representation of consumer interests in the process.

The general point is quite simple. Network analysis takes many features of the modern political world for granted, relying on them in its explanations, and so it is unable to provide any explanation of them itself. Assumptions about general constraints on policymaking form part of the background theory which is used to apply network analysis. Whether this reflects tacit endorsement of these features, or instead modest explanatory aims, if we want to explain the general constraints we must look elsewhere. Moreover, as I have argued throughout, we ought to try to explain these general constraints. Without some appreciation of them there is a danger of over-estimating the power of individual actors. Chapters Five and Six will examine how we might explain them. Chapter Five will look at theories of the state as a distinct social actor, whilst Chapter Six will examine Marxist views of the state as an aspect of capitalist social relations. The Marxist view allows us to understand the role of the state as well as structural limits to individual agency.

Chapter 5. Statism

5.1 Introduction

The following chapter will consider the different contributions of pluralism and, in particular, statism to understanding the nature of political outcomes. These are two major strands of non-Marxist political science and they have polarised views of the state: pluralism does not engage directly with the state as a social actor with autonomous interests. By contrast, strong state-centred approaches focus on the state as a key actor with both its own preferences and the ability to implement these. In part these statist approaches provide something of a corrective to the society-centred approach of pluralism. Given the arguments made in the discussion of the case study, that the information about network actor interaction may be secondary given the possibility of macro constraints on the autonomy of actors at the meso-level, it is important to consider alternative interpretations. One significant criticism which has been made of network approaches then is their possible overestimation of the power of individuals and groups in society. This results from a lack of a theorisation of potential constraints on network autonomy. It is possible that that the state, in particular, could provide a constraint on the network: either in terms of it being a distinct social actor or as an aspect of structural constraint. The first of these propositions is considered in this chapter, in

providing a discussion of those theories which emphasise the central importance of the state as a social actor.

It is worth re-stating that the pluralism with which we are particularly concerned (policy networks) was a response to the strong state theories which preceded it. In other words, in contrast to the image of a strong state and formalised government-industry relations, the new pluralism concentrates on less formal connections within the political economy – in particular within the policymaking process. This produces a firmly society-centred approach. Consequently, inquiries into the state have never been a prominent feature of this type of approach. Rather, given that it is engaged in the task of elucidating the role of *non-state* actors and explaining political outcomes in terms of the interplay and interrelationships of networks of social actors outside of the formal organisation of the state, the state itself has been marginalised as a distinct actor. Therefore the state, in pluralism, is not conceived of as a constraining, shaping or dominant actor with autonomous preferences and power.

One can thus begin to understand the location of the state and other social actors within pluralist frameworks. The emphasis was consciously shifted away from the state in order to highlight the significance of non-formalised networks which seemingly had a powerful impact on the shape of political outcomes. Whilst this strand of neo-pluralism in particular has allowed a significant investigation into the power and impact of individual agency in creating and achieving political goals, a focus on the meso-level need not entail the omission of either the macro-level nor of formalised political relationships. This position has been discussed by non-

Marxist state-centred theorists as an important corrective to the dominant society-centred approaches within political science – which, for these theorists, includes both Marxist and pluralist accounts.

As Skocpol notes (1990), the response to the prevalence of society-centred accounts has been the further sophistication of alternative models, ones which highlight the continued importance of the state as a social actor. There are different types of non-Marxist statist approaches which vary according to their assessment of the extent of state autonomy. The core of all such approaches is a definition of the state in terms of the public officials who comprise the institutional organisation of the state. There is also basic agreement over ‘the state’ (state officials) having an agenda (preferences) which they seek to convert into political reality. In other words the state (state elites/state officials/ state managers) is a strong, autonomous actor with its own sets of interests. The variation then, lies in the *extent* to which the state can be understood as autonomous from the dominant economic and social groups in society, where that autonomy (state capacity) is understood as the state being able to override any countervailing preferences, or as being powerful enough to change the preferences of oppositional groups in society.

As these are non-Marxist accounts, any relationship found between the state and powerful economic and social groups or classes is not one in which the state reflects (or acts on behalf of) the needs or interests of sectional groups or classes. As noted above, the core of these approaches is that the state has its own interests which it pursues in a changing context of support or opposition from dominant non-state actors. In other words state preferences are not reducible to the interests

of any single social group or elite. It is far more likely within a statist approach to view the state as fragmented, with different sets of state officials' interests being represented in different branches of the state. But, how far you need to consider state capacity *in relation to* socio-economically powerful groups in society is a point of useful comparison between statist approaches. Thus in both definition of the state (as the sum total of public officials) and in the relationship between state and civil society, these approaches are essentially non-Marxist.

State-centred approaches may be considered as attempting to plough a middle way through the perceived difficulties of both pluralist and overly-structuralist accounts, particularly Marxism. There has been significant development of theory on state autonomy and this is considered not only to be a more accurate account of state activity, but is seen by some to avoid the pitfalls of both pluralism and Marxism. That is, it takes the state seriously as a powerful actor in the political process (unlike pluralism) but is encumbered neither by economic determinism nor instrumentalism (as is Marxism).

The aim of this chapter is to form the first part of a discussion on the relevance of the state to the policymaking process. It has been suggested in the opening chapters that a significant omission in the networks approaches to policymaking is a direct engagement with the state as a potential constraint. The solution to this weakness can be provided from one of two sources, a statist approach or a Marxist approach. Given the potential difficulties in integrating a Marxist theory of the state with a more general pluralist perspective on the meso-level, this chapter will concern itself with non-Marxist statist positions. Although

an easier fit can be found in using statism with pluralism, the critique provided of the statist approaches demonstrates that there remains a strong argument for adopting a Marxist approach to the state and policymaking. Consequently, Chapter Six will detail the evolution of Marxist contributions on the state.

This chapter will thus begin with a short overview of the pluralist treatment of the state as a basis for exploring the arguments developed to support the claim that, in fact, the state is a significant and autonomous actor. It will then consider the key contributions of statist theorists: Nordlinger, Krasner, Skocpol and Mann. It argues that state-centric approaches such as these can be integrated into neo-pluralist account of policymaking. Thus this type of state analysis can provide a solution to one central problem identified in the networks model. However, despite providing a strong theory of the state as a social actor, these approaches do not develop a theory of structure (capitalism) and, therefore do not locate the state and state capacity within any structural analysis. This, it can be argued, is a significant omission as, despite the advantages of a strong state approach for neo-pluralism, the formulation of the state and state capacity is such that it can provide useful information about the nature and activity of individual states within capitalism, but tells us nothing about capitalist states in general. Again this stems, in part, from the method of analysis. Strong state-emphasising theory interprets the variability of states in capitalism as evidence that there cannot be a universal, structural account of states and state capacity. Thus the method used tends to be comparative analysis of state capacity in particular policy domains, a method which highlight diversity rather than similarity.

A second area of weakness is that despite the concentration on state autonomy, much of the analysis is actually concerned with the relationship between the state and dominant social groups. As noted above, one variation in these type of state interpretations is the extent to which the state can be understood as autonomous from society. In fact then, this seems to indicate that the focus of political inquiry should be on *the relationship between state and society*, in order to understand the social dynamic, rather than concentrating either on the state or society to the exclusion of the other.

Before considering each statist contribution in turn, let us consider the arguments for statism.

5.2 Pluralism and the case for a Statist approach

If the notion of the state is to be at all meaningful, and not merely a ragbag synonym of government, it must be divorced from and even *opposed* to personal power – not in the legal but in the political sense.

Nettl, 1994: 11.

The state is most often described as a set of institutions which are distinct as a result of two main features, which are taken to be general comments about all states: firstly, they have a monopoly of legitimate force (violence and coercion); and secondly, they exhibit continuity of personnel (which distinguishes the state from

the government and implies that the government is not a part of the state). Other features of a specific state would be that it has clear geographical boundaries and, within that territory, it is the sole rule-making body (Hall, 1994: General Commentary).

There are variations within classic pluralism about the precise nature of the state, but most formulations see the state as the sum of public officials who comprise the central institutional arrangements and, where the state is discussed directly, conceive of it as being separated from civil society. The state in these type of formulations is subordinated to society and is thus seen as the backdrop of politics which, if it does intervene, does so in non-confrontational ways: not to represent a specific interest, either of its own or of a particular social group. The three standard interpretations of the state within pluralism represent something of an evolution within the perspective. The idea of the state as a weathervane responding to society has the concept of pressure group competition at its core, and this remains at the heart of pluralist analysis. In this particular formulation the state mirrors interest competition and so reflects the fact that the state is passive, yet responsive to the strongest pressure groups (Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1989: 43).

A second formulation asserts the idea of the 'neutral state', where in a proper polyarchy the state can (and should) maintain its neutrality. This has raised questions about the means (and thus the implications) of state intervention within this model, as clearly the nature of state intervention indicates more or less neutrality. The third model casts the state as a 'broker' or 'an interest group state', where 'public policy is the aggregation of pressure group activities going on inside

the state' (Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1989: 47). This is perhaps a more sophisticated view, in the sense that it accepts that the state does more than just respond to civil society and, through its intervention, can demonstrate preference.

Implicit in all these formulations however is the notion that the state is not an actor which can exercise a particular type of power for its own ends. Rather it somehow stands back from the main political arena and merely guards the framework of society. However, state-centric theorists have addressed the problems of the classic formulation of the state in pluralism. Here such theorists consider the state as a strong actor which is able to successfully pursue its own goals, even if opposed by dominant social groups. This is clearly a very strong interpretation of the capacity of the state *vis-à-vis* dominant social groups or classes, and indicates the importance of considering the state as an actor in its own right. Of significance also is that explicit in these type of contributions is the separation of the state from civil society. In other words the state is neither seen as a reflection of society as in pluralism, nor as a reflection of the needs of the capitalist class as found in Marxism.

The differences statist contributions exhibit can be considered as their strengths relative to classic pluralist and structuralist-functionalist approaches. In other words, the state-centred approaches considered here overcome the difficulties of networks approaches in being able to identify some of the potential constraints on individual agency which were discussed in Chapter Two. In addition, they avoid the criticisms which have been levelled at structural approaches, particularly Marxism. In considering the state as autonomous from civil society, the

relationship between the state and social groups (even if one accepts the idea of an economically dominant class) is neither a given nor a constant. The actions of the state then are not seen as being determined by, nor in the long-run interests of, the dominant social group.

Given the dominance of pluralism and Marxism as explanations of political outcomes, it is clear that there is critical space for a non society-centred approach to challenge these assumptions. Both pluralism and Marxism, according to state theorists, deny the state its place in shaping and directing political outcomes. By concentrating on either the interplay of competitive interests or the class struggle between bourgeois and proletarian, the state is marginalised and understood as a site of activity, rather than as a powerful social actor in its own right. Particularly through the development of international relations theory, which focuses on sovereign states and the interdependency of states, rather than sub-state groupings, then there has been something of a trend towards emphasising the state as a key actor.

Skocpol (1990) discusses this change within social science from society-centred to state-centred approaches, which she refers to as a paradigm shift. She notes that a common element of pluralist and structure-functionalist accounts is the perceived insignificance of the institutions of the state relative to the power and preferences of society: 'Government itself was not taken very seriously as an independent actor, and in comparative research, variations in governmental organizations were deemed less significant than the general "functions" shared by political systems of all societies' (Skocpol, 1990: 4). Further, Skocpol notes that the

research findings of pluralists cannot be easily accommodated within their own analytical frameworks. Consequently, an approach which can adequately account for autonomous preferences of public officials is, arguably, more compelling.

When pluralists focused on the determinants of particular public policy decisions, they often found that governmental leaders took initiatives well beyond the demands of social groups or electorates; or they found that government agencies were the most prominent participants in the making of particular policy decisions. Within pluralist theoretical premises, there were but limited ways to accommodate such findings
Skocpol, 1990: 4.

For state-emphasising theorists the problems of analysis are not only found within pluralism but also within structural accounts, in particular Marxism. The difficulty within these type of approaches again arises from it being an account which is essentially society-centred and thus similarly considers the state as being either controlled by or the 'guarantor' of society – specifically, class – interests.

. . . at the theoretical level, virtually all neo-Marxist writers on the state have retained deeply embedded society-centred assumptions, not allowing themselves to doubt that, at base, states are inherently shaped by classes or class struggles and function to preserve and expand modes of production.
Skocpol, 1990: 5.

State-emphasising theory, such as that presented by Skocpol, Krasner Nordlinger and Mann, then, is about the autonomy of state action – autonomy from dominant classes or other politically weighty social/political forces. Further, this type of theory seeks to avoid abstract generalisation about all states in capitalism: the view that they share common functions relevant to the mode of production. According to Skocpol, to work at this level of generalisation undermines the force of the theory. Such generalisation does not allow any discussion or analysis of the relative impact of differences in state structures and activities. Not only does this render useful empirical information but, for the purposes of state theory, the multitude of differences in state style and approach, and differences in political choices and outcomes which are evidenced through such an exercise, also serves to illustrate the impossibility of such generalisation. Consequently the preferred method is the comparative politics approach, precisely to highlight the differences between modern states.

State-centred approaches thus occupy the middle ground between pluralists on the one hand who do not discuss the state directly, and neo-Marxists (and other functionalist type accounts) on the other, who do not grant true autonomy to state activity. Statist approaches favour an interpretation of the state as a strong and autonomous social actor. However the main areas of weakness with statist approaches, which we can identify already, are two. Firstly, in shifting the emphasis away from society and onto the state, statist approaches do not truly illuminate the *state-society* relation, which seems to be most relevant. Secondly, the state is considered as a social actor which is unencumbered by structural constraints

on its autonomy, in a way similar to the networks of interest found in neo-pluralism. Without a direct engagement with structural analysis it is impossible to truly determine the 'reach' of the structural organisation of society, for example in terms of capitalism as a specific mode of production placing constraints on the autonomy of social actors, at the level of society or the level of the state.

5.3 Nordlinger on autonomy, democracy and the state

To be state-centred rather than agency-centred is not to claim the irrelevance of individual actors or agents, but is to attribute powers to the state (state officials in Nordlinger's case) which can be of greater significance than those of other societal actors. In other words the preferences of the state can be enacted irrespective of the range of opposing forces. The claim is slightly more restricted than that may imply, as Nordlinger (1981) notes that the state and state preferences must be understood as *at least* as important as those of social actors. He is concerned to refute society-centred analysis which sees the state as merely responding to or being colonised by societal preferences. Rather, Nordlinger claims, the state has its own preferences some of which will be compatible with, and some of which will diverge from, societal preferences. When those state-society preferences diverge, the state will tend to translate its own preferences into action. Additionally, the state will attempt to 'reinforce societal convergence' or realign societal preferences to prevent the emergence of preference divergence (Nordlinger, 1981: 7).

Nordlinger is part of the range of statist contributors who consider the state to be of central importance in understanding policymaking. Within Nordlinger's approach, the state is defined as '... public officials taken all together ...' (Nordlinger, 1981: 3) and focuses on the autonomy of public officials from the important social-political groupings in society. This has some points of reference with some Marxist contributions, notably those of Miliband and Block (see Chapter Six) who also focus on the relative autonomy of state personnel or state managers from the dominant class. The focus on officials is significant for statist as it is a means of avoiding reification of structure, a criticism which has been made about more structural-functionalist contributions on the state. Nordlinger writes:

... the definition of the state must refer to individuals rather than to some other kinds of phenomena, such as "institutional arrangements" or the legal-normative order. Since we are primarily concerned with the *making* of public policy, a conception of the state that does not have individuals at its core could lead directly into the anthropomorphic and reification fallacies.

Nordlinger, 1981: 9.

This highlights an important element of a theory of the state, which is that the definition of the state is key to understanding how it behaves.

In order to achieve as widely acceptable a definition of the state as possible, Nordlinger argues for the exclusion of both variable characteristics and invariable

functions and purposes. In other words, only those elements that ‘encompass all states and all of their components at all times should be included’ (Nordlinger, 1981: 10) and, in order to maintain theoretical neutrality, any definition should avoid statements about ‘the preservation of political stability or the reproduction of capitalism’ (Nordlinger, 1981: 10). Again, under the guise of theoretical neutrality, Nordlinger is making claims for his method which are open to direct challenge. It is not possible to be theoretically neutral and simultaneously imply that the context of capitalism is merely a given with no explanatory capacity of its own. In other words, as Marx argued, neutrality and the acceptance of capitalism are mistakenly conflated. This means that existing economic laws are considered to be natural laws and therefore require no independent analysis. This, according to Marx, conforms to bourgeois political economy insofar as capitalist rules of the game remain unchallenged, hidden by the guise of natural conditions. (see *Grundrisse* in McLellan 1990: 348).

What Nordlinger leaves us with then is a definition of the state which is close to that of Weber, in his assertion that, ‘Quite simply the state is made up of and limited to those individuals who are endowed with society-wide decisionmaking authority’ (Nordlinger, 1981: 11). That is, those public officials who can take decisions which are binding on private individuals. State preferences then are those decisions which have the support of a majority of public officials, particularly of those in the most influential offices of state and those with better personal and strategic resources relevant to the issue under consideration. The way in which public officials preferences are shaped is, according to Nordlinger, vastly

diverse – he cites: career interests, loyalties and professional knowledge (Nordlinger, 1981: 15) as just some of the shaping factors. This serves to highlight that there is unlikely to be a unity of purpose on the part of public officials, and rather a fragmentation of interests within the state.

It is clear that this is a strongly state-centred analysis insofar as the state is conceived of as being able to implement its own preferences (or the sum of public officials' preferences) despite countervailing social and political forces. In this way it is clear why Nordlinger refers to the state as both autonomous and democratic. After all, the assumption might well be that, if the state is always able to convert its own preferences, that the state is somehow acting against democracy and legitimacy. However, the fact that the configuration of preferences is neither guaranteed nor unified in purpose indicates that the full range of possibilities in policy are open. This, for Nordlinger, seems to satisfy a claim for the democratic and legitimate nature of state action.

This type of state formulation would not be difficult to reconcile with much of the networks approach, as this indicates only that there is a strong reason for considering the role of public officials and their relationship with different policy areas. This is *state*-centred but does not engage with structuralism, as the state is defined as the sum total of public officials. Consequently this effectively remains an issue of competing preferences, only at the level of the state – not a site for societal preference competition but a battle between state preferences and divergent societal interests. Again, in order to make the claim of theoretical neutrality and to avoid reification, Nordlinger argues that it is not possible to see

the state as having a specific role to play or, in Nordlinger's terminology, as having an invariable function. To consider the state in those terms would be to enter the difficult terrain of determinism and instrumentalism, and certainly not to consider the state as either autonomous or democratic.

Conceiving of the contemporary state as essentially legitimate and democratic (or, at the very least, the best available attempt at achieving these ideals), is a pluralist preoccupation. This effectively undermines any attempt to understand policymaking as anything other than the outcome of preference competition, either at the level of society or at the level of the state. Although the 'shaping factors' of public officials' preferences may admit hierarchies and vested interests, the divergence of these as between officials at different times and in different policy areas, is seen to be evidence of pluralism. Further, the definition of the state, state preferences and shaping factors in Nordlinger's work points to a fundamental of pluralist analysis: that these areas can be clearly investigated through the chain of decision making, through examinations of the hierarchies of public office, personal and strategic resources of individual officials and direct questioning their knowledge, loyalties and interests. This is not too dissimilar to Richardson's policy communities model which highlights the strategic significance of public officials in networks with other interested communities.

Nordlinger notes in the preface to 'On the Autonomy of the Democratic State',

It struck me as most implausible that the democratic state – the elected and appointed officials who populate this large, weighty, resource-laden, highly prized ensemble of offices – is consistently unwilling or unable to translate its preferences into public policy when they diverge from those held by the politically weightiest societal groups

Nordlinger, 1981: vii-viii.

Equally, it seems unlikely that the state's preferences will emerge solely from a battle of career interests, loyalty, official and personal resources. Further, it seems unlikely that the state's vested interests stretch no further than the ambitions of the officials and the offices they occupy. Indeed Nordlinger notes that state preferences are probably also shaped by societal factors such as socialisation, education and so on. However, he adds, 'But in all probability they do not overshadow the state's internally generated preferences. The democratic state is significantly autonomous in this subjective sense' (Nordlinger, 1981: 38). This separates the state almost entirely from its social context, in granting it such autonomy from the configuration of social forces and other powerful interests within society. The contributions from Skocpol and, in particular, Krasner are more certain about the relationship between the state and dominant socio-economic groups. These type of strong state approaches discuss state autonomy, but do so more in the sense of the *relative* autonomy of the state from dominant interests. In other words, the capacity of the state is assessed in terms of the context within which it acts, directly linking the analysis of the state to its relations with civil society.

5.4 Krasner's relational approach

In his work on foreign policy, Krasner develops a theory of the state which has a strong state configuration yet demonstrates a considerable overlap with key elements of structural Marxism.

A significant starting assumption which Krasner shares with other state-emphasising theorists is the distinction between state and society. This is elaborated in order to distinguish state interests from those of dominant social and economic groups. So the state is autonomous, with aims which are separate from the range of competing social interests. Krasner claims that these separate preferences can be material or ideological and, in combination, comprise the 'national interest'. So the state, in the form of public officials or 'statesmen', pursues the national interest which may be understood as economic expansion or stability or may be understood ideologically. The distinction between 'material' and 'ideological' is significant, as without the ideological dimension there may be little to separate Krasner's account from that of structural Marxists. Krasner provides the example of the Vietnam War as a policy choice which had no identifiable economic rationale. This was purely an ideological conflict with Communism and this can, for Krasner, explain the misguided decision to pursue this particular foreign policy.

Krasner maintains that the state acts democratically in pursuing the national interest as the decisions taken are related to the needs of society. It is clear however that the state will meet with varying degrees of internal and external opposition to its policy decisions, and its ability to overcome these will be a function of the

structure of the political system and thus the capacity of the state to achieve its objectives in the face of domestic or international opposition. Two things are most significant here. Firstly, Krasner claims that a policy domain such as foreign policy will exhibit more state autonomy than areas of domestic politics, as foreign policy is better insulated from societal pressures and interests. This indicates again that the state is not a unitary actor, but is fragmented with different parts having greater capacity (autonomy) than others. Secondly, the mechanics of the political institutions are relevant in most statist theory. In the same way that Archer discusses the capacity of pre-existing structure to shape the context of future agency, the political institutions of the state which may have been forged in a previous era, have a potentially constraining effect on the autonomy of the state. This point will be returned to in the critiques of statism, in section 5.8 below.

The important elements of Krasner's approach are that state aims are those pursued by state officials (managers), autonomous from the needs and preferences of wider society, yet will also reflect the broad concerns of civil society. These are formulated on the basis of material or ideological gain and thus represent, broadly, the national interest. There will be some conflict in the pursuit of certain policy aims which may arise from internal or external opposition to their implementation. The internal strength of the state, and therefore its ability to transcend opposition or to even change the aims and behaviour of oppositional forces, will depend partly upon the structure of the political system. In other words the nature and extent of state capacity differs as between states – hence the need for comparative political analysis. It is important for Krasner to distinguish between

the material and the ideological pursuit of the national interest in order to clarify the difference between his approach and that of structural Marxism. In other words, if one could explain state policy aims on the basis of material expansion, stability and so on, that is not so far removed from the state pursuing interests which serve the long-run interests of capital. As Krasner states,

Although it is much more difficult to distinguish structural Marxist arguments from a statist paradigm, the importance that American central decision makers have at times attributed to ideological as opposed to economic or strategic aims is more compatible with the theoretical image that guides this study than with any materialist interpretation.

Krasner, 1978: 34.

According to Skocpol, Krasner uses a 'Relational Approach' in his work on the state. That is, state capacities are seen as relative 'to dominant or transnational non-state actors and structures, especially economically dominant ones' (Skocpol, 1990: 19). On this view, the state is able to either change the preferences of non-state actors who may confront the state or it can successfully oppose such demands. In addition, Krasner claims that states have different capacities within their own institutional arrangements. In other words, they will be more able to translate their preferences into policy in some areas – notably foreign policy – than in others. This further extends to states in a general sense, that states of any given type will

demonstrate different capacities in different sectors: for example, not all states in capitalism will have more capacity in defence than in agriculture.

Krasner's approach seems to be preferable to that of Nordlinger as, in Krasner's work, taking the state seriously as an autonomous actor still requires a consideration of the state in relation to its social context. If we can take anything from the discussion of networks models it is that there are likely to be (informal) power relationships between public officials and dominant social groups and/or interest communities which need to be investigated.

5.5 Skocpol on state autonomy

Like Krasner, Skocpol sees states as sovereign holders of power both in terms of their own territories as well as their geopolitical relationships. The development of international relations theory has led much statist theory to be rooted in ideas of states interacting with other states in various power networks. In particular, the different economic development of states after world war two and the differences in development between NICs and the period of British dominance followed by the Pax Americana, seemed to demonstrate that states were actors in their own right, capable of shaping society, rather than the other way around. In addition, the notion of the state managing a territory 'leads us away from basic features common to all polities and toward consideration of the various ways in which state structures and actions are conditioned by historically changing transnational

contexts' (from work of Hintze, Skocpol, 1990: 8) In other words, for Skocpol, the state is shaped from without by its relationships of interdependency with other states in the international system as well as internally through national historical development.

Skocpol further notes that her definition follows from Weber and Hintze. She quotes Alfred Stepan, 'The state must be considered as more than the "government". It is the continuous administrative, legal, bureaucratic and coercive systems that attempt not only to structure relationships *between* civil society and public authority in a polity but also to structure many crucial relationships within civil society as well' (Skocpol, 1990: 7) This indicates that within the domestic context the state is a shaping force in society, it has a role to play in regulating relationships – again a view which is similar to Marxism. So, for Skocpol, the state is shaped from without through its international location; individual states shape their respective societies rather than vice versa (which contradicts pluralist notions of state responsiveness to preference competition) and state capacity will be partly determined by the historical development of the particular state under discussion. This implies both a strong state and one which can develop autonomous preferences:

States conceived as organizations claiming control over territories and people may formulate and pursue goals that are not simply reflective of

the demands or interests of social groups, classes, or society. This is what is usually meant by “state autonomy”

Skocpol, 1990: 9.

For Skocpol, state autonomy can develop from different sources. In some instances non-state elites who are unconnected to the existing dominant order can take the state over (for example in a coup). Having taken on the reins of the state it is then possible for that elite to redirect state power and destroy the existing social order. This indicates that power rests with the state itself rather than with the changing elites, and that the state is separate from the dominant classes or social order insofar as the state (or state policy) can be re-directed to achieve the ends of new elites. This has some similarities with some class-based analyses, in particular the debates around relative autonomy and Leninist notions of transforming the bourgeois state into a workers state (see Chapter Six.)

As noted, for Skocpol, the important dimension of states is their autonomy from dominant social groups or classes. But in addition she stresses the differing capacities of states, arguing that there is no uniformity of state capacity even within broad bands of state categorisation, for example, capitalist or western market economies. Allied with her point about the necessity of considering the state as a separate social actor, in order to discover the impact of the state on political outcomes, this points very clearly to her preferred method of comparative politics.

. . . such overall assessments are perhaps best built up from sectorally specific investigations, for one of the most important facts about the power of a state may be its *unevenness* across policy areas. And the most telling result, even of a far-reaching revolution or reform from above, may be the *disparate* transformations produced across sociopolitical sectors

Skocpol, 1990: 17.

Skocpol maintains a state-centred analysis and engages with notion of classes but, as a non-Marxist, she does not consider classes to be the product of the social relations of capital. Because Skocpol sees the state as an autonomous actor within a context which happens to be capitalist – in other words, she considers the state as the primary focus for analysis rather than the capitalist system – consequently, she sees the state as giving form to the organisation and consciousness of classes rather than vice versa. So the state is the shaping force, rather than society. In this way we can see how statist continue to turn society-centred approaches on their head, whether they be broadly pluralist or more structural-functionalist:

It is never enough simply to posit that dominant groups have a “class interest” in maintaining sociopolitical order in continuing a course of economic development in ways congruent with the patterns of property ownership. Exactly how – even whether – order may be maintained and economic accumulation continued depends in significant part on existing

state structures and the dominant-class political capacities that these structures help to shape.

Skocpol, 1990: 26.

In the end Skocpol indicates the two ways in which non-Marxist state-centred approaches conceive of the activity of the state: either it is a means by which officials achieve their goals relative to the social context; or it is a set of institutional arrangements which shapes political wants as well as the means of achieving them. On the face of it this is not a particularly contentious statement for inquiry which wants to consider the state as a significant social actor.

Underpinning this view however are several assumptions which may be open to challenge: that the state is autonomous (relatively) from the social context, that states in capitalism differ as between one another in terms of their capacities (power), that the state is the agent for social and political change, that the state is able to shape political engagement and the stratification of society. In other words it is possible that in the pursuit of a theory which consciously de-emphasises society and focuses solely on the state, we can end up attributing too many functions to the state – that it provides the major explanatory power for domestic and geopolitical outcomes.

5.6 Mann on multiple crystallizations

Mann develops an approach to the state which is somewhat different from the theories already discussed. He is particularly concerned that the state is understood as having more dimensions than either apparently reductionist explanations such as Marxism (the state is *only* capitalist) or the pluralist vision of state penetration by competing groups, allow. In other words, Mann is clear that the modern state is multifunctional and has 'crystallized' into different forms. Each crystallization responds to one of three sources of social power which Mann identifies as: 'capitalist, as moral-ideological, and as militarist' (Mann, 1993: 44) Further, as a result of political struggle, states have crystallized as either 'representative' or 'national' and as 'patriarchal'. His aim is to identify relationships between these different crystallizations and to assess whether one 'may ultimately determine the overall character of the state' (Mann, 1993: 44).

In this way Mann's account differs from the more obviously society-centred approaches as well as the state as autonomous actor explanations provided by Skocpol, Nordlinger and Krasner. In fact, Mann's approach to the state openly borrows from the full spectrum of different contributions, to arrive at a perspective which has the complex label of a *polymorphous theory of higher level state crystallizations*. Polymorphous conveys the multiple power networks, tasks and mobilizing constituencies at the centre of the state (Mann, 1993: 75) and 'higher level' represents the most fundamental crystallization(s) of a state. Mann's crystallizations therefore represent different 'pulls' on the direction of a polity,

representing as they do different power constituencies and capacities and so on.

The question becomes one of whether the modern state is dominated by one crystallization one (for example, the aims of capitalism) or whether it in fact responds to all possible crystallizations. In other words, for Mann, the nature of the state cannot be understood as only one type of crystallization.

To explain his intertwining of parts of existing theories we can start by outlining Mann's four major (or higher) crystallizations in the state: capitalist, militarist (domestic and geopolitical), representation (citizenship as contestation and participation) and national (the 'where' of citizenship, for example, centralisation or confederalism). Importantly, as noted above, these are non-contradictory (a state can manifest a combination of these crystallizations simultaneously) and each can effect a change in the other.

Clearly, the first higher crystallization – capitalism – is a reference to class theories, in particular Marxism. The problems which Mann finds in purely Marxist interpretations are the lack of state autonomy and the denial of the possibility that classes could have alternative (power) accumulation projects which do not have a capitalist logic. Together these place constraints on an understanding of the state, as they limit states to their relation to the mode of production. Thus states are only defined in this single dimension: ' . . . the vice of class theory is to regard this as their *only* fundamental property' (Mann, 1993: 45). Mann doesn't disagree that modern states are capitalist, but he argues that they are much more multi-dimensional than the Marxist conception of capitalist states allows. Class theories produce a wrong picture of a unified state which manages the class struggle to

maintain capital accumulation. That explains the state, society, the social dynamic and geopolitical interaction. For Mann, despite accepting that there are limits placed on states by the demands of capitalist accumulation and that the modern state is capitalist, the state has more functions than this alone and involves a wider diversity of non-class actors.

The example he gives of a further functional dimension which lies outside the singularity of the capitalist crystallization, is foreign policy. This he develops as his militarist crystallization which involves a variety of key actors: classes, particularistic pressure groups, statesmen, the military, nationalist parties (Mann, 1993: 70 -74); who intervene in the business of foreign policy to a greater or lesser extent, at different historical conjunctures and to differing extents as between states. Thus statesmen will behave according to context but states interact with other states (rather than other social actors) and thus are important in their own right. This borrows from elitism – the notion of an autonomous state elite – and, as Mann notes, is reinforced by realist international relations theorists. Autonomy is seen as more developed in this sphere as foreign policy is better ‘insulated’ from class and other societal interests which can permeate domestic politics. This is similar to Krasner’s argument which also notes differences of state capacity. He also picks up on the differences for foreign policy (relative to other policy domains), as he sees this area as being more easily detached from the pressures of dominant social groups who can have a much more significant input into domestic policy concerns.

The idea that domestic politics can be penetrated by societal groups is at least a partial reflection of the pluralist picture of democratic politics. Mann argues that modern states comprise both 'authoritarian and democratic-parliamentary states' (Mann, 1993: 61) where the former represents the 'domination of every day life in the territory' by the political institutions of the state (in particular the expanded and centralised bureaucracy which allows much greater control over a given territory); and the latter is the area in which civil society can gain control. In other words, for Mann there is an interpenetration of state and society. The state has multiple institutions which provide potential for access to these 'state spaces' by civil society. This re-emphasises his key point that states cannot be understood as either singular or necessarily cohesive:

The "power" of the modern state principally concerns not "state elites" exercising power over society but a tightening state-society relation, caging social relations over the national rather than the local-regional or transnational terrain, thus politicizing and geopoliticizing far more of social life than had earlier states

Mann, 1993: 61

According to Mann then, modern states can have multiple crystallizations and therefore cannot be understood or defined in relation to a single characteristic. The state is an actor as well as a site of action (for example, for classes), yet it is not a unitary actor as the state comprises multiple political institutions and diverse state

elites. The state can be seen as fragmented, with different parts occupied by different elites, each with different interests. The autonomy of state elites can be constrained in two ways: by the participation of civil society or by the political institutions which having ‘ . . . arisen in the course of previous power struggles, then institutionalized and constrain present struggles’ (Mann, 1993: 52).

Mann’s work is based in empirical studies of social power and state development over the whole period of history 1760-1914. On this basis it seems likely that any definite conclusions he might arrive at about states and society would be heavily contingent on time and place. This would immediately rule out the possibility of a singular vision of the state or a cohesive elite. In other words Mann is arguing that states have developed in different ways at different times at different speeds in different countries. Having discovered this, existing theories of the state which are consciously much more limited in their application, are likely to be inadequate. Consequently Mann finds it necessary to combine parts of all major theoretical contributions on the state to arrive at his polymorphous theory of higher level state crystallizations. What this seems to refer to in practice is that modern states do not represent a single interest and are not controlled by a single elite. The state can act autonomously but may be constrained by both the contestation and participation of civil society and/or the political institutions of the state. Mann layers this with fundamentally sociological inquiries about the nature of something like US welfare policy: he discusses that it is mostly framed with classes or economic sectors in mind, but it has also been patriarchal and racist.

The question for Mann then is of how these multiple crystallizations relate to one another (Mann, 1993: 78).

As with much state theory Mann's conclusion is essentially that states, along with society and social divisions, are important in shaping policy outcomes. The relative weight of each of these inputs is contingent on time and place. Theories which consciously undertake to improve the image of the state by making claims about its autonomy from society (whether as an actor or as both an actor and a site of action) all reach a point of conceding that the autonomy of the state is in fact contingent on the balance of socio-economically dominant groups or classes in society. The eventual distinction between the state and civil society is thus not quite as sharp as the intention. Does this make them equally society-centred? It seems relevant to take the state seriously, and to this end pluralism seems to omit such an analysis to its detriment. To resolve this through a focus on the state, however, does not seem to provide any real solution either, as all state theorists conclude that it is impossible to generalise about states at all, even modern states. In fact the clearest outcome from a reading of these different contributions is that is absolutely imperative to understand *state-society relations*. So statist commit the opposite mistake of pluralists, in thinking that the state is the primary explanatory variable. In the end both must concede that neither the state nor society is primary. Instead, as Marxists claim, historical categories are primary.

Thus it seems clearly advantageous to take Marxism as a framework for understanding capitalism (although it may be more plausible to subdivide this into phases of capitalist development) given that this should provide the best insight

into the relevant socio-economic groupings and their relationships with one another and with the state. In spite of the critiques ranged against Marxism by other theorists – reductionism, functionalism, determinism, defining according to a single crystallization and so on – a Marxist view need not have these features, as will be argued in Chapters Six and Seven.

5.7 Hay on levels of stateness

A final example of a theorist who claims that it is impossible to generalise about states is Colin Hay (1996). A dominant theme of non-Marxist accounts of the state, is that the differences between states and within states over time, necessitate a particularised elaboration of the state within its specific context. Further, the fact that there can be significant differences in state form and behaviour is an indication that generalising is without any real value. Hay has attempted to rationalise, as far as possible, the demands of particularisation and has thus elaborated a model of ‘levels of stateness’.

In starting with assumptions about the difficulties of generalisation, Hay feels that it is necessary to pull out three identities (Hay, 1996: 9) and four ‘levels of stateness’ (Hay, 1996: 12) in order to operationalise the concept of the state – that is, to rescue it from its wide-ranging, culturally-grounded meanings. Although characterising it as dynamic, and as a set of changing power relations, he quotes

Jessop on 'strategic selectivity', again (as with other statist) indicating that the realm of the state's institutional reach is not a level playing field.

Thus Hay elaborates three identities – state as nation, as territory and as institutions – and, although all three are bound together in different ways in different contexts, each denotes a key characteristic of the state: providing citizenship (which the state has the power to dictate the membership of); having administrative authority within the territory; and the apparatus of the state which impacts in both the private and public spheres. The extent of this 'institutional reach' (how the state intervenes, how centralised it is, for example) is one of the key examples of difference between states, states over time and so on.

Hay distinguishes four levels of stateness, which move from the general to the more specific. This allows him to make only one general point about all states, which is that they exhibit the three identities noted above, before moving on to make more particular points about the specific state under consideration. His levels of stateness are as follows: State as *category* (as already noted, this indicates that the state has the three identities); the state *form* (less general, a variable, but perhaps still quite a broad band particularly if we consider the importance which Hay attaches to the amount and variety of differences between capitalist states); the state *regime* (much more particular to the specific state under discussion – as it is a sub-category of state form – highlighting its 'particular stage in evolution', for example the Keynesian welfare state); and the state *structure* (the most specific level of stateness, at which we set out to describe the institutions of a particular state at a particular time).

This type of distinction may well be necessary if the task before one is to describe and discuss a particular state and is also useful in comparative analysis. However, as with all the contributions which have already been discussed, such an exercise does not provide any means by which we can attempt to understand or analyse more general aspects of state activity, even in a particular phase of political-economic development. It could be argued, for instance, as alluded to above, that there is an important dimension of the state about which we *can* make general points, irrespective of the dynamic and culturally specific differences in the outward layers of the state and in its principal functions (even taking those outlined by Hay). It could be argued that the on-going constraint on state activity and state autonomy is the logic of capital accumulation for all capitalist states. Mann, as we have discussed, argues that this is possible but that it should not be recognised as the only relevant characteristic of modern states. Perhaps not, but it may be the most relevant, particularly in recognising the state's role in society, specifically in relation to Hay's state identities, even more so his levels of stateness. Issues about the state as nation, territory and apparatus – that is: citizenship, administrative priorities, and state intervention – may well be explicable through the defining characteristics of the capitalist mode of production. Again, if we accept the state as a dynamic ever-changing network of power relations which, according to Hay's levels of stateness, evolve from one type of regime to another within a broader state form (for example, from a Keynesian welfare state to a post-Keynesian market led welfare system, both within the capitalist framework), then we need to know how

and why this change occurs. So, precisely because the state is dynamic not static, we require an explanation of this change.

5.8 Problems with statism

The discussion has identified some of the weaknesses of statist theory which, taken together, leave critical space for the introduction of alternative views of the state.

The main benefit of statism lies in the importance it attaches to the state as a key social actor. In this respect it solves one problem identified within pluralism of having no direct engagement with the state as a shaping force in society.

Statism also seeks to avoid the determinism which has tended to follow class-based society-centred approaches such as Marxism. It does this through attributing autonomous interests and power to the state as well as conceiving of the state as a more fragmented than unitary actor. It holds that it is not possible either to define the state in terms of one key characteristic (it is capitalist, it is Catholic) nor to see state interests as a reflection of the interests of the dominant socio-economic grouping or class. Rather the state comprises a multitude of branches populated by a diversity of interests.

In avoiding the mainstays of society-based accounts, statism tries to focus exclusively on the powerful, autonomous state but ends up having to qualify its interpretation of state action as being only relatively autonomous. In other words it recognises the need to understand the relationship between state and society, yet

fails to do so explicitly through its claim that the state shapes society rather than it being a dynamic, two-way relationship. Further, statism, despite being an approach which seeks to make claims about state capacity cannot produce any significant general statements about modern states. The emphasis on both the comparative method and the variability within and between states makes it impossible to characterise all states in capitalism. In terms of providing an heuristic framework then, statism is a busted flush.

The key areas of weakness can be considered as the following:

- (1) *particularisation*: the wide variety of actually existing states is taken as evidence that generalisation about states is not possible;
- (2) *variable functions*: states cannot be considered as having invariable functions as this would produce conclusions which would be rooted in either determinism or reification;
- (3) *agency-centred*: the emphasis in statism is on individuals as state personnel, officials, managers and so on, again as a means of avoiding any possibility of reifying structure, but with the result that statist do not engage with structure;
- (4) *preference competition at the level of the state*: the idea of a strong state simply indicates that preference competition occurs at the level of the state rather than only at the level of society – but the emphasis is still on contestation of diverse interests which can be uncovered through comparative analysis and methodological individualism;
- (5) *directly observable power*: state preferences are able to be investigated – a single dimension to power again;

(6) *multitude of elites*: the range and diversity of elites who occupy different branches of the state is claimed as evidence of a lack of singularity of the state which in turn is claimed as an indication that democracy is being served – no one set of interests dominates;

(7) *contingency*: concentrating on the state doesn't provide all the information we require as it is also contingent on time, place and socio-economically dominant groups and the existing political institutions of the state. All these have a constraining effect on state capacity. In fact, therefore the state is only *relatively autonomous*.

The state is not as powerful and autonomous as initially implied by statist. It is constrained by both its own political institutions which may have been forged in previous struggles, it is potentially limited from within its own territory by the constellation of dominant groups or classes and can be limited from without by the both the logic of capital accumulation and geopolitical considerations. This does not seem to be as strong a vision of a state as might have been expected. The outcome of the discussion of these contributions seems to be that what is needed is a theory which can explain more precisely the relations between state and society, rather than one which emphasises only one part of the relationship. Pluralists started out wanting to explain policymaking without reference to the state, but increasingly brought it back in; statist started out wanting to explain outcomes largely in terms of the state, but ultimately hedge their explanations with caveats about the contingency of state power. One way of reading this is to see each type of political analysis (pluralism and statism) as a welcome corrective to the other.

But it could equally suggest that neither civil society nor the state is explanatorily primary. This is the view which will be developed in the next chapter.

In addition, if we are to treat the state as another social actor – no matter how central – then it too could be subject to the same type of macro constraints which were discussed in Chapters One and Two. That is, statism helps with one particular difficulty of pluralism (that of a lack of analysis of the state) but does not provide a solution to the other weakness noted, the lack of a framework for understanding potential macro constraints on actor autonomy – whether that actor is a policy network or the state. This is where the benefits of a deductive approach become clear. Prior theorisation about the nature of the polity is a means of making sense of the way in which the macro functioning of the system (mode of production, in particular the logic of accumulation) might have an impact on the autonomy of social actors at the level of the state or of society. This is not necessarily to define state and society as being only capitalist and not, say, simultaneously patriarchal and racist. But it would claim that being capitalist is the most relevant characteristic for understanding the regulation of social relationships and the extent of actor autonomy, and therefore also the nature of political outcomes.

5.9 Conclusion

Statists have a purely inductive view of state theory, as of other kinds of theory.

That is, statist develop state theory from a set of generalisations from direct observation of states. One result of this is that they tend to emphasise differences between states. A further result is that this kind of state theory cannot provide the insights into structural constraints on political actors which, it is argued, is desirable and also necessary.

The claims of pluralism, including the state-centred pluralism (statism) discussed within this chapter, do not contradict the central tenets of Marxism – or at least they do not have to. Pluralists, it is clear, make some different assumptions about social and political phenomena than Marxists. In particular much of pluralist discussion focuses on the different development of actually existing political phenomena. This produces different assumptions and conclusions about the nature of power and its distribution and thus the explanation of political outcomes. Fundamentally, this difference in approach (and thus conclusions about the nature and functioning of the political economy) stems from a difference of subject matter: Marxists have at base an historical analysis, a theory of capitalism and the trajectory of social-political development. This, inevitably, produces claims about the constraints that capitalism produces as an economic framework – and thus structures both the political-economy and the actions which can take place within it.

Pluralism, by contrast, has no significant historical context and thus does not conceive of capitalism as a stage in economic evolution. Further, as pluralism is not an opposing theory of capitalism, it does not produce a means of understanding the capitalist project in any universal terms. In other words, pluralism is not bound by the complications of a class analysis nor any singular explanations of the transformation of the system. Rather it accepts the capitalist context, and seeks to demonstrate that differences in state formation, political outcomes and social transformation within nation states indicate the complex and variable nature of capitalist arrangements.

Significantly, although pluralism tends to set itself in opposition to Marxism through its method and initial assumptions, the emphasis on variation does not contradict a Marxist approach. The usual characterisation is of Marxism producing monolithic analyses (instrumentalist/determinist) full of intangibles (false consciousness, structural power) which indicate that it is unnecessary to engage in analysis of 'surface phenomena' such as policymaking. But, in fact, the diversity of capitalist manifestation should lead Marxists to investigate both the durability and flexibility of the system.

In the particular case of the state, it should be clear from the foregoing that the heart of non-Marxist analyses is the notion of the state in capitalism rather than the capitalist state and, in addition, that it stands apart from dominant socio-economic groups, or classes. The state is considered as a social actor in its own right but is defined in terms of its personnel. Focusing on public officials indicates, from the outset, two important elements. Firstly that within policy areas over time,

across policy sectors, and across territorial boundaries, outcomes will differ.

Consequently, state strategy will differ depending upon the make up of the public officials comprising the state. Secondly, and a linked point, given the autonomy of the state from dominant social groups, its actions and preferences are for its own maintenance. The capacity of the state to translate its preferences into policy despite countervailing social forces, or with the coincidence of support of dominant groups, will differ as between states and can, therefore, only be discovered through comparative analysis.

This perspective resonates with some neo-Marxist contributions on the state, although a significant difference which remains is that non-Marxist approaches do not suppose that the state will act in any particular way. Differences within Marxism tend to revolve around the way in which one conceives of the state's role in relation to the long-run interests of capital. The following chapter will consider the contributions of Marxism and neo-Marxism and will examine the potential benefits in utilising an approach which provides not just a theory of the state, but a theory of social structure – in fact, a theory of capitalism.

Chapter 6. Marxist theories of the State

6.1 Introduction

It has been established that there are two key problems with network approaches to policymaking analysis, which stem from a lack of investigation of the state as a potential constraint (either as a distinct social actor or a part of a structural constraint). Both the state and social structure could place significant limits on the actions of individuals at the meso level and, as such, both should be examined in political analysis. Without such investigations, approaches such as the networks models, are engaged in a different enterprise: a limited examination of policy fields. Such a limited focus in such approaches indicates that these frameworks cannot, in fact, explain the nature of the policy process generally, but simply provide information about specific cases.

The previous chapter discussed the enduring significance of the state in political analysis and pointed to the need to consider the state as an important actor with discrete preferences, and the power to convert those preferences into actions. As outlined in Chapter Five, the integration of a theory of the state into networks approaches, does not have to conflict with a neo-pluralist framework. There are two reasons why this is the case. Firstly, the definition of the state used by strong state centric analysts is one which retains individual agency at its core. The state is defined as the sum total of public officials, the personnel of the state. So, state

preferences are the sum total of personnel preferences, and they have the power to convert them into state actions through a combination of personal and professional resources. The nature of the definition of the state is important insofar as it explains not only the composition of the state but how its organisation may affect its capacity to act. However precisely because these approaches concentrate on re-emphasising the state as a (relatively) autonomous actor, they do not make confident statements about the relationship that state managers may have with dominant socio-economic groupings in society.

Secondly, as with pluralism, state-centred frameworks do not engage directly with structural issues. The importance of this lies in the fact that the conception of structure informs both the method of inquiry and conclusions about the nature of the state, state activity and state intervention. Both networks models and strong state-centric approaches use a comparative, empiricist method assuming that the social organisation of the system (as capitalist) is not a relevant variable. This indicates that within both types of framework capitalism, as the existing mode of production and thus the structural context of society, is not an explanation of political outcomes. This allows both approaches to fundamentally agree that the state is (perhaps relatively) autonomous from other social or economic configurations, consequently pluralism and statism maintain a similar world view. Each takes variability in state form and political outcomes as evidence that capitalism, as a particular mode of production, is not itself an explanation of political phenomena.

For these reasons there is no fundamental conflict between the neo-pluralism of networks approaches and a strong state-centred framework. It is possible, in other words, to integrate the two and thus improve one problematic area of network analysis. The second area of concern however, that of engaging with a structural approach, is not possible to reconcile within neo-pluralism and is not resolved with the integration of a non-Marxist theory of the state. If the criticism remains that, in addition to a theory of the state we need a theory of capitalism, then Marxism is the only theoretical framework which seeks to do so. Further, the way in which Marxism seeks to explain the nature of capitalism and its transformation, requires a different understanding of the state and state capacity. This reiterates the centrality of the type of state definition used and whether such a definition is drawn in a structural vacuum, or whether a definition of the state flows from prior theorisation of structural context. To discriminate in this way is the key to understanding the fundamental distinction between Marxist and non-Marxist approaches. To do so highlights why a choice between the two is necessary, and clarifies that attempts to integrate the two (or to talk of a convergence of pluralism and Marxism) actually results in pluralist Marxism which, in effect, undermines the stated benefits of a uniquely Marxist approach. This has significant implications for the way in which we might attempt to construct a 'dual approach', which can successfully reconcile the benefits of network investigations of specific policy domains with a theory of the constraints on the range of political outcomes which result from the logic of capital accumulation. This point will be returned to.

The following chapter considers the development of Marxist state theory, as it continues to attempt to find a formulation which avoids the charges of determinism and instrumentalism without simply recasting an essentially pluralist account. The chapter begins with an overview of the contributions from Marx and Engels and the strongly instrumentalist position of Lenin. It then moves on to discussions of relative state autonomy. This remains an area which provides the most difficulty for Marxist theory and still informs much contemporary analysis. Finally the chapter considers the more recent contributions by Block and Jessop. Jessop is considered by many to provide the most sophisticated contemporary Marxist state analysis. However, it is argued that although the Marxism of Jessop has the advantage of being able to be integrated into more pluralist frameworks, the way in which he achieves this may indicate precisely the type of pluralist Marxism which, it was noted above, we may also wish to avoid.

6.2 A non-pluralist framework

... we shall try to clarify the at least apparent inconsistency that the state, although not itself a capitalist, nevertheless must be understood as a capitalist state – and not, for example, merely as a “state in capitalist society”.

Offe, 1994: 104.

The very fact that Marxism is a theory of capitalism (as a mode of production with a unique set of social relations) seems to provide a distinct advantage when trying to make sense of political change. Marxism has an historically rooted perspective of the social dynamic. In other words it has an in-built capacity to explain change with reference to the dominant mode of production. It does not seem unreasonable to accept that the way in which the political economy is organised (which we can all agree is capitalist) has a significant bearing on how relationships function within it and also therefore the distribution of power within it. Marxism has an effective critical capacity about the consequences of the organisation of society for the attainment of the 'goals' of a capitalist system of production (the logic of capital accumulation), which makes sense within its overarching economic theory.

On the specific issue of a Marxist formulation of the state, because the state is considered as an integral part of the social relation of capital, it too has a class character. In this way it is impossible to conceive of the state as standing back from the political process or occupying a neutral position *vis-à-vis* other interests. As Offe notes,

. . . the state fulfils its function of helping to formulate a positive class interest [and] . . . it acts negatively, i.e. as an organ of repression against the articulation of opposing interests. It is the two together, the positive formulation and the implementation of a class interest by the exercise of power, which constitute the class character of the state.

Offe, 1994: 110.

The significant difference of approach between Marxism and neo-pluralist or state-centric theorists arises from the different analyses of the economic and political system. With a class-based perspective, it is impossible to conceive of political relationships between social actors and state-society relations in the way described in non-Marxist frameworks. This also arises from some fundamental differences of methodology which are informed by the use of an inductive rather than a deductive approach.

The prior theorisation of social structure by Marxists which recognises a set of social relations unique to capitalism is a significantly different point of departure from non-Marxist approaches. Marxist theory absolutely requires an investigation of the way in which capitalism can constrain individual autonomy at any level of the polity. Again, precisely because of the way in which Marxism conceives of capitalist social relations, the configuration of power relations between social actors, and between social actors and the state, is fundamentally at odds with non-Marxist approaches. In the particular case of the state, its definition and thus the identification of it as part of the social relation of capital produces a vision which conflicts with the perspective of both neo-pluralism and state-centred approaches. The type of Relational Approach outlined by Krasner makes some crucial associations between economically dominant groups and the state; but due to the way in which the state is conceived, this remains essentially a relationship between competing groups of social actors.

A distinctly problematic area of Marxist analysis however, is the way in which the state is defined and thus the extent of and, significantly, the nature of

state intervention in political outcomes. There have been two types of Marxist formulations of the state which have encountered much criticism for the way in which they conceive of state activity. These are, crudely, the determinist and instrumentalist positions. There has been general acceptance of the problems of both super-determinism and ruling class instrumentalism, and this has provoked new thinking within the Marxist tradition. Thus, there are a variety of contemporary Marxist approaches to the state which seek to avoid these charges but, arguably, do so to the extent that they arrive at positions not dissimilar to more pluralist approaches.

So, the distinct advantage of a Marxist approach is that it provides a theory of capitalism, one which provides an analysis of the social relations of capital. This type of framework allows us to identify points of potential constraint on meso-level (and micro-level) autonomy. However, it is claimed that traditional Marxist approaches encounter their own difficulties in terms of determinism and instrumentalism. If we accept the need to avoid such pitfalls within traditional Marxist accounts of the state however, we still need to pursue a solution to the question of the state within a Marxist framework, in order that we can retain a theory of capitalism as part of our analysis.

The proposal is then that only a Marxist analysis can provide a real solution to the two key problems of network models, that of lacking state and structural explanation in their accounts. It is possible to integrate a non-Marxist theory of the state into network models, but that does not eradicate the problem of theorising structure. The question of structural analysis cannot be reconciled

without stepping outside the dominant pluralist type frameworks, and effectively adopting a Marxist approach. In so doing, Marxism also provides a theory of the state, and so can offer a solution to both problems as identified. The challenge in the following chapter is to discover whether it is possible to adopt a Marxist framework and yet avoid the determinism and instrumentalism which have recently hindered the application of Marxism in political analysis, and in this way try to maintain a duality of structure and agency.

A fundamental element of a Marxist theory of the state would be the centrality of class struggle which is underpinned by an analysis of the social relations of production within capitalism. The drive towards the reproduction of those social relations is therefore also key. One can assume that the state is part of that system of relations and has an important role in the maintenance and regulation of the social relations. The actions and capacity of the state in this regard will differ because of the prior means by which states acted and interacted. Therefore it would be a mistake to expect all states either to look the same or to behave the same in actually existing capitalist economies.

‘Present-day society’ is capitalist society, which exists in all civilized countries, more or less free from medieval admixture, more or less modified by the particular historical development of each country, more or less developed. On the other hand, the ‘present-day state’ changes with a country’s frontier. It is different in the Prusso-German Empire from

what it is Switzerland, and different in England from what it is in the United States. The 'present-day state' is, therefore, a fiction.

Critique of the Gotha Programme in McLellan, 1990: 564.

This does not fundamentally alter the place all capitalist states occupy in the social relations of production. As already noted this means we must seek a definition of the capitalist state, rather than a state in capitalism. To engage in the latter is to concentrate on the variability and particularisation of states which thus dislocates them from their structural context. Such a disengagement allows two things. Firstly the disassociation of the state from the mode of production. Secondly, as a consequence of this disengagement, such a formulation permits statements about the nature of production as though it were a 'natural' process.

6.3 Marx and Engels on the state

It is often claimed that the difficulties for contemporary Marxists in formulating an unproblematic account of the state emanate from Marx's own writings. Such claims are based on the different ways in which Marx discusses the state in the course of the development of his own ideas. The evolution of his ideas saw the conception of the state change from a strongly instrumentalist vision to a much more determinist position through the application of his materialist conception of history. Later still,

however, it is possible to detect a yet further approach to the state which conforms, in a more sophisticated way, to his theory of the social relations of production.

Marx's original ideas on the configuration of the state were ones in which the state played no central role in the economic production processes of capital reproduction. It was thus treated, in his earliest writings, as a 'parasitic institution' separated from civil society (Jessop, 1990: 26). However, it is clear in the development of his own post-Hegelian thought, that the state had a much more explicitly class character which helped to produce Marx's very instrumentalist theory of the state:

The executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie

Communist Manifesto, in McLellan, 1990: 224.

The main critical point of this position is one which one can see as having altered in his subsequent writings. That is, the state is a bourgeois shell. This indicates that the state is somehow separated from the social relations of production. In other words, the executive works on behalf of the ruling class but, if the state is an instrument of class rule, then presumably it can be used for the ends of other classes, notably the proletariat. In the development towards his most determinist position in the *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), Marx's thought on the State can be seen in transition in the *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852). In his discussions of the state at this

point, Marx seems to provide a basis for two currents of thought on the nature of class rule, which continue to colour contemporary Marxist state theory. The first is the idea that the representatives of the ruling class, at the level of the state, act in the long run interests of that class. This has provided the core of contemporary Marxist theory such as Block's notion of state managers (see Block, 1987). Secondly, this seems to indicate a certain (relative) autonomy of the state such that the ruling class rules but does not govern. This admits an interpretation of state actions such that ruling class representatives are able to take political decisions outside of the class relationship but which are likely, in the long-run, to resonate with the interests of the bourgeoisie.

But under the absolute monarchy, during the first Revolution, under Napoleon, bureaucracy was only the means of preparing the class rule of the bourgeoisie. Under the Restoration, under Louis Phillipe, under the parliamentary republic, it was the instrument of the ruling class, however much it strove for power of its own. Only under the second Bonaparte does the state seem to have made itself completely independent.

Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, in McLellan, 1990: 316-317.

It seems that Marx's ideas about the state were, at this point, still continuing to develop as his materialist conception of history was completed. Although Marx's exposition of the relationship of base-superstructure has become a rather crude

characterisation of the core of Marxism, one cannot simply ignore a construct which formed the basis of his future economics.

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life processes in general.

Preface to Critique of Political Economy, in McLellan, 1990: 389.

This very determinist position has created one of the most difficult obstacles for contemporary Marxists to overcome. Both the instrumentalism of the Communist Manifesto and the determinism of the passage above, have provided critics of Marxism with great cause for resolutely developing non-Marxist accounts of structure and political outcomes. A perspective on the state and state power which characterises the relationship between the state and its economic context as one of a base-superstructure reflection encourages the kind of economic determinism which has encumbered Marxist theories and, in part, explains the

weakening of Marxism in the face of new pluralist challenges within political science.

The apparent crudeness of both positions which, in addition, seem to provide very limited explanatory capacity vis-à-vis late capitalism and variability of form and outcome, nevertheless retain the essential force of an economic theory. Despite the difficulties of application in each case, both positions have at their core the essential and distinctive elements of Marxist analysis: the centrality of class struggle which is underpinned by the social relations unique to the capitalist mode of production. In other words, in spite of the vagaries of contemporary Marxist accounts of the state, to retain their essential *Marxism* they must surely have their basis here rather than in the more vague allusions to an approach rooted in an understanding of a society divided by class.

In fact it is possible to retrieve Marx and Engels from the determinist entanglement and still apply these fundamental criteria. As previously indicated, the most sophisticated alignment of (political) phenomena with the social relations of production can be found in Marx's late writings. In his response to the unification of the German socialists into a single party, Marx criticised their proposed programme through an elucidation of the nature (and therefore the means of achieving) future communist society. In the opening paragraphs, Marx (in light of the failed revolutions) notes the existence of different forms of capitalist states and, significantly, the impossibility of creating a distinction between the state and society.

The German workers' party – at least if it adopts the programme – shows that its socialist ideas are not even skin-deep; in that, instead of treating existing society (and this holds good for any future one) as the basis of the existing state (or of the future state in the case of future society), it treats the state rather as an independent entity that possesses its own intellectual, ethical, and libertarian bases.

Critique of the Gotha Programme, in McLellan, 1990: 564.

So, the state should not be understood as autonomous from capitalist society and, in addition, the state must be seen as constituted from capitalist society, that is, indistinguishable from the social relations of production. This construct indicates that this is the essential basis for understanding the role of the state, but does not necessarily imply that state actions are determined by the economic base: rather that our understanding of the state must be one which is founded on an analysis of capitalism. Consequently, any Marxist analysis of the state must have class struggle at its core and this need not imply that state activity or other social action can be simply read from the economy in a crude way.

The post-Marx contributions to a theory of the state will be assessed on this basis. Firstly, instrumentalist and determinist positions are understood as being limited as they necessarily divorce the state from its location as an aspect of the capital relation. Secondly, the question of the relative autonomy of the state is considered something of a red herring insofar as it is based on methodological

individualism. Finally, more recent contributions are discussed in terms of their 'fit' with the stated criteria of a Marxist account.

6.4 Repressive state apparatus: Leninism

. . . democratic representation is the best political shell for capitalism and
. . . once this form of state is established, no change of persons,
institutions or parties can shake the political rule of capital.

Jessop, 1990: 28.

Invocations of the Leninist model, which were not infrequent, may have been particularly unfortunate. Lenin, as we have already seen regarded the state instrumentally and strategically, as a 'machine for the oppression of one class by another'.

Thomas, 1994: 142.

It has already been noted that this particular interpretation of the role of the state (translated into actually existing Communism) significantly constrained the evolution of a coherent theory. Importantly, its distinct functionalism is the focus of criticism of its lack of sophistication and lack of relevance in advanced capitalism. Building on the idea that the state is no more than the executive committee of the bourgeoisie, Leninism addresses the means by which the state

maintains the system of class domination, thus developing a framework for the method of state transformation from capitalism to communism. Essentially this is an argument which revolves around the notion of the repressive arm of the state as the maintenance of bourgeois rule.

An interesting dimension of this framework is that the state, given that it is an instrument for control (in capitalism by the bourgeoisie) has to be destroyed by the proletariat, it won't just wither away. In this sense, there is no point in reform. The route to communism is through smashing the capitalist state, as real radicalism would be suppressed by the repressive state apparatus. This development of theory reflects a split between the anarchists and the communists in the Socialist International over what kind of state should be aimed for. For Lenin, there was a need to build an organised workers state – the dictatorship of the proletariat.

There are perhaps two points which need to be made in relation to this theoretical development. Firstly, it does not locate the state in the context of the social relation, insofar as it is still seen as something which can be taken over – using the existing apparatus for different ends. Secondly, this kind of formulation inevitably ends up in the area of formulation based on the state as epiphenomenon, and thus the consequent economic determinist arguments which have been so criticised.

6.5 Relative autonomy of the state: Miliband and Poulantzas

If we are to understand the unique development of capitalism, then, we must understand how property and class relations, as well as the functions of surplus-appropriation and distribution, so to speak liberate themselves from – and yet are served by – the coercive institutions that constitute the state, and develop ‘autonomously’.

Meiksins Wood, 1981: 84.

Structuralist Marxism, particularly as expressed by Nicos Poulantzas, sought to update the work of Marx himself so as to allow attention to be given to the capacity of modern states to help capitalism survive by the provision of key functional needs, from education to welfare. Insofar as this approach went beyond merely instrumental views of the state, that is, beyond views insisting that capitalists controlled the state at all times, it suggested that the state had ‘relative’ autonomy. This notion was inherently unstable: either capitalists did control the state or – as many care to argue – the autonomy of the state was at times real or absolute. Hall, 1994: 3.

The debate between Miliband and Poulantzas on the nature of the state tends to be presented in terms of two polarised positions within the Marxist tradition. The exchange between the two has been described as representing structuralist

(Poulantzas) and instrumentalist (Miliband) points on the spectrum. Although contemporary writers have since claimed that the debate generated more heat than light, it is still necessary to briefly consider their arguments to gauge the impact they have had.

Miliband in *The State in Capitalist Society* (1969) attacks both democratic pluralism and traditional Marxism. His central claim is that the dominant class rules but does not govern. He continues: capitalist class rule is ensured by its *proximity to and manipulation of* the state apparatus. This allows a conception of the state as a separate construct from its wider political-economic context, as well as providing a gap for individual agency within the state itself. Thus, Miliband argues that we can discover the nature of the state through empirical investigation at the individual, behavioural level.

Poulantzas's initial response to Miliband's assertions was an attack on his method and its tendency to the descriptive rather than the theoretical (Poulantzas, 1969: 69). For Poulantzas, as a structural-determinist, statements about power must be about the effect of a structural formation at a particular moment – a snapshot of the class struggle – as for Poulantzas, power relations equal class relations: they are not an expression of individual motivations. Thus, Poulantzas attacks Miliband for using abstracted empiricism (Miliband, 1970: 54).

. . . Poulantzas criticises Miliband for analysing the state in terms of the

individual human subjects who control it, rather than in relation to its structurally determined role in capitalist society.

Jessop, 1990: 30.

It is perhaps an exaggeration to charge Miliband with ignoring structure altogether. Miliband does acknowledge a structural context – he views the socio-economic structure as a framework for action and sees individual acts within the context of a society divided by class. In response therefore, Miliband counters Poulantzas's argument by claiming that he takes his anti-empirical stance too far, losing sight of the necessity of empiricism and thereby reducing state officials to 'the merest functionaries and executants of policies imposed upon them by "the system"' (Miliband, 1970: 57). In addition, Miliband claims that the level of structure at which Poulantzas works has few points of contact with historical reality and, without supporting empirical evidence, there is no possibility of testing his claims against 'reality'. Thus, two criticisms are levelled at Poulantzas's analysis and method: that it is both structural super-determinism (Miliband, 1970) and structural abstractionism (Miliband, 1973).

Essentially the debate was articulated on a methodological level, as it is clear that both Miliband and Poulantzas were concerned with the 'relative autonomy' of the state and essentially disagreed over the means of promoting the most appropriate Marxist analysis. The difference between the two positions on the question of relative autonomy is one which turns on the different conception each has of power in terms of structure and individual agency. As already noted,

whereas for Poulantzas the structure of all power is class power, Miliband retains a concept of power which allows for individual agency. This latter power construct means that Miliband is arguing, in stark contrast to Poulantzas, that individuals can act in relative autonomy from the structure of class power. Thus, the state as a power holding agent, much as an individual, can sometimes be relatively autonomous from the class nexus. Miliband is therefore divorcing state power from the notion of class relations. In this way he is not too far removed from the strong state, non-Marxist perspectives discussed in the previous chapter. As Jessop notes,

Miliband does not advance the Marxist analysis of the state. Indeed he actually reproduces the liberal tendency to discuss politics in isolation from its complex articulation with economic forces.

Jessop, 1990: 30.

Poulantzas does not make the same distinction between state power and class power, instead he claims that the relative autonomy of the state is inherent in the structure itself with class struggle expressed within the state itself.

. . . the state according to Poulantzas is not an outcome or a resultant of class struggle but a cause of class struggle or a site where this can take place.

Thomas, 1994: 145.

Thus, this debate is essentially one which revolves around the notion of relative autonomy of the state from the class relations which underpin political economy.

In rejecting the instrumentalism of Miliband, Poulantzas ends up in a curious position, with references to class fractions and the relative autonomy of the state from the dominant class fraction, despite its role as a 'factor of cohesion'. For Poulantzas, the class structure is reproduced within the state (Poulantzas, 1973, 1976). The function of the state is to regulate the class struggle (without undermining the position of the dominant class fraction) through adapting public policy (concession) as well as through the repression of other class fractions. In addition to Jessop's criticisms of this position (in terms of a failure to elaborate the means by which this important function is realised as well as the problem that such an analysis produces a picture of the state which includes all institutions which aids social cohesion, Jessop, 1990: 27), the ensuing problems of state autonomy and complex class divisions further weakens his position.

Poulantzas argues that in order for the dominant class fraction to maintain its position, it needs to get the support of other fractions of capital and other subdivisions of class. In order to do this, the state requires some autonomy from the dominant class fraction and also needs to appear as an independent arbiter. The autonomy of the state is only *relative*, as the long-run needs of capitalism will always win out against contradictory state policy (Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1987: 243-245). In other words, Poulantzas's position not only divorces the state from classes (separating the economic and the political), but also relies on a complicated

division of classes (within-class conflicts, Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1987: 227).¹ Such a fragmentation of classes leads Poulantzas to be charged with admitting a pluralist analysis with Marxist language where his class fractions, strata and sub-categories could otherwise be described as interest groups (Dunleavy and O'Leary 1987: 227).

Given Miliband's instrumentalism and Poulantzas's charge of Marxist pluralism, it has subsequently been argued that both Miliband and Poulantzas were incorrect in their formulations as both contributions are guilty of failing to root the concept of the state in terms of materialist, historical analysis. It is clear that within Marxist theory, the state plays an essential role in the maintenance and reproduction of capital as a class relation. Further, the capital relation is an historically specific form of class relation (domination) in the capitalist mode of production. Given this as the starting point then, the separation of the state from the class struggle in the work of *both* Miliband and Poulantzas is essentially flawed, as the state should be seen as an integral part of the relation. What really needs to be explained then, is how the state within a capitalist mode of production gives the appearance of universalism and of somehow standing back from the antagonisms of a class-based society.

¹ 'Poulantzas asserts that all social classes can be internally sub-divided in three ways. *Fractions* are the deepest internal division of a class, where incompatible material interests show up in separate political organisation ... *Strata* are weaker but important lines of division, based on more temporary conflicts of economic interests which do not produce separate political organisation ... Lastly, there are a number of isolated *sub-categories* of social classes with distinct corporate interests which can be critical in particular circumstances' Dunleavy and O'Leary, 1987: 227.

The survival of the political institutions and hence of capital depends on the success of the struggle in maintaining this separation, by channelling the conflicts arising from the real nature of capitalist society into the fetishised forms of the bourgeois political processes. Thus the very separation of economics and politics, the very autonomisation of the state form is part of the struggle of the ruling class to maintain its domination. Holloway and Picciotto, 1977: 80.

The criticism, which is levelled at both Miliband and Poulantzas then, is that their work falls into the bourgeois political-economy trap of seeing the state as something political and autonomous which can thus be studied in isolation from the economic sphere; in particular, as something separate from the contradictions inherent in the capitalist relation. As Ian Gough notes:

For both Poulantzas and Miliband the capitalist state is a relatively autonomous entity representing the *political* interests of the dominant classes and situated *within the field* of class struggle.

Holloway and Picciotto, 1977: 83 (emphasis added.)

One benefit for so-called ‘bourgeois political economy’ of artificially creating this kind of separation between the two spheres, is that it allows such theorists to argue that the economic sphere is governed by ‘natural’ laws and is thus not subject to

the social relations which underpin it. This is arguably a problem inherent in the work of both these protagonists. In other words,

Marx's object is to criticise the mystifications of political economy which are achieved precisely by beginning with 'material production in general' and then proceeding to treat the process of producing *capital* abstractly as if it were the process of production *as such*.

Meiksins Wood, 1981: 71, emphasis in the original.

This points exactly to the claims developed here about the problems of non-Marxist approaches within political science generally, and in policy analysis in particular. Currently dominant analytical frameworks in political science accept the structure of capitalism as a given, rather than considering it as a *particular* mode of production which thus has consequences for the organisation and activity of society which are *specific* to this system of production. This will be returned to later in the discussion. Having reached this point however, what is still difficult to explain adequately is what is particular to the social relation in the capitalist mode of production which allows the state to appear to be disengaged from the economically dominant group, and thus appear to be universal, as opposed to class based.

6.6 Cultural hegemony: Gramsci

For it should be remarked that the general notion of state includes elements which need to be referred back to the notion of civil society (in the sense that one might say that state = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armour of coercion).

Gramsci, 1988: 235.

. . . [this] [I]mplies that the unity, coherence and capacities of the state depend on movements and projects with its other – civil society. This reinforces the arguments against the central assumption of the state-centred approach that one can draw a clear boundary between state and society. . . Thus, as Gramsci long ago emphasised, both the state apparatus and state power must be analysed in relational terms.

Jessop, 1990: 351.

It is here that Gramsci's concept of hegemony is instructive in its linking of state and society. Of particular use is the notion that through the dominance of a class based ideology (capitalist class hegemony) in society, the state does not need to resort to coercion or even legal/punitive measures to promote the long-run interests of capital. What underpins the state is cultural values. This inevitably leads to criticism of an overestimation of the autonomy of politics and ideology, and to

similar points about the dislocation of the state from an integral part of the social relation of production.

This point is further illustrated by Jessop, who discusses the question of the unity of classes. As Jessop argues, a significant difference between traditional Marxist theory and Gramscian and neo-Gramscian analyses is that the latter suppose that the state has a fundamental role in unifying the purpose of the bourgeois class through political and ideological domination, as such unity of purpose is not a given (Jessop, 1990: 42). This is a quite important contrast from standard Marxist theory in that it goes some way towards disassociating economic purpose and motivation as the class dynamic. Again the point can be made that this kind of disestablishment, or separation of, politics and ideology from economics may admit arguments of discretionary state action.

This can be further clarified when one draws a direct comparison between Gramscian constructs and those of an arch-structuralist such as Poulantzas. For Poulantzas, the bottom line is that class struggle is on-going:

Gramsci, by contrast, made and could afford to make no such easy assumption. The absence of class struggle is precisely one of the things his concept of hegemony is designed to explain, and might still explain.

Thomas, 1994: 146.

Wherever one stands on the contribution of Gramsci in terms of the relative importance of economics and politics, his work may have at least given a different

and potentially consequential explanation of *how* the state effects its (illusory) distinction from the class relation. However, it remains a central difficulty within any state-centred analysis of contemporary economy to account fully for precisely what is specific to modern capitalist relations of production, which is sufficiently sophisticated that it recognises the need to, and can provide a mechanism for, the state to appear to act as a neutral set of institutions.

6.7 Block: Revising State Theory

Block has contributed to discussions of a Marxist theory of the state through following the idea of ‘representatives’ of the ruling class found in *Marx’s Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (1852)*. In brief, Block’s argument (1987) is that there is a distinction to be made between the bourgeoisie and state managers. State managers have their own vested interests in the long-run survival of capitalism and this, coupled with the logic of capitalist accumulation, will condition state activity such that it serves the long-run interests of the ruling-class.

Block’s argument stems from a reaction against the kind of instrumentalism and determinism which has hampered Marxist accounts in the past. In particular he wants to emphasise that structures do not act, only individuals do and that state actors are more autonomous than traditional Marxism has often implied. Consequently he sees state actions as the outcome of ‘three-sided conflicts among capitalists, state managers and the working class’ (Block, 1987: 16). This corporatist

style decision making arises as a result of a combination of factors. Firstly, the ruling class does not have class consciousness and thus requires state managers as their representatives. State managers are, therefore, not necessarily of the ruling class but are part of the guarantee of the general interests of capitalism. State managers will serve the long-run interests of the ruling class through limiting the opportunity for anti-capitalist policymaking as well as actively promoting the general interest of capitalism, since they are in a relationship of dependency with the stability and effectiveness of the economy. In other words, they maintain their own position through ensuring the longevity of the capitalist system.

So, the first relationship he identifies is between the ruling class and state managers. The second key dimension to his three-sided conflict is based in the class struggle inherent in capitalism. Class struggle provides the dynamic for on-going capitalist development (capitalist advance resulting from any victories by the working class over wages, working time and so on). With advancing capitalist development comes an expansion of the role of the state, an association which draws the relevance of the working class into a relationship with both the ruling class (through class struggle) and with state managers, (as the dynamic of capitalist development increases the power of state managers).

According to Hay, Block manages to avoid the problems of instrumentalism and determinism. The reason for this seems to lie in the fact that Block's preoccupation is with state managers as utility-maximising rational subjects (Block, 1987: 16-17). It is therefore a *personnel-* or *agency-centred* account (Hay 1999: 169). Additionally, Block has further revised his model in light of new work in the field.

He claims that his own model is too limited in two dimensions, it is restricted to class actors (outside of the state) and cannot easily account for variability.

. . . my articles tend to suggest that the only important actors – other than state managers – are class actors - either subordinated classes or the capitalist class. I would now revise that to include many other collective actors organised around race, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion or, shared views about the environment or the arms race . . . secondly . . . this model will be of only limited use in making sense of any particular political outcome because it does not capture variations in political structures, political resources, and political ideas.

Block, 1987: 18.

The criticism of this position is clear: to allow other social struggles to be the focus of attention is to undermine the framework formulated by Marx and which is based on the social relations of production. That is, class struggle. Secondly, it has already been noted that Marx saw variability in state form but maintained that the essence, the significance of capitalist states, was the fact that they are rooted in bourgeois rule. Consequently, to be overly concerned with the variability of states such that the level of engagement is reduced to outlining the differences in actually existing states in capitalism is to move onto the terrain of general state theory and to distance it from Marxism.

Block recognises these difficulties and has thus chosen to label himself as a post-Marxist,

The idea of Post-Marxism is that the questions that Marx posed remain central for understanding and transforming our social world. However, the answers that Marx offered no longer suffice, and just as Marx sought to transcend Hegel, so too, those who pursue the Post-Marxist project seek to transcend Marx

Block, 1987: 35.

The problem for Marxist state theory thus far has been two-fold: an apparently confused picture from the original writings of Marx and Engels which has allowed different theorists to choose different parts of Marx's writings to validate their interpretation, and ignore those that do not provide such an easy fit. Secondly, there has been a continued response to the charges of determinism and instrumentalism, formulations which are considered to be crude and outmoded. It seems then that within Marxism, we are faced with one of two positions, a structuralist approach (Lenin, Poulantzas), which is fervently interpreted as determinist and thus invalid; or something much closer to pluralist formulations which centre on agency based accounts of the personnel of the state (Miliband, Block).

In the discussion in Chapter Two on structure and agency it was claimed that the best conceptual interpretation is one which sees the two (structure and

agency) conjoined in an on-going reciprocal relationship. It could be similarly asserted then that the enduring problem of the foregoing Marxist accounts of the state is that they also artificially disengage structure and agency. Thus, Marxist interpretations of the state and state power are similarly limited either by their reductionism to the individuals who comprise the state; or by their assumption that the state is an instrument of the dominant class; or by their more crude reification of the state: none of which have proved satisfactory. It has been argued that Jessop's work on the state has successfully addressed this issue – Hay writes:

More convincingly than any other Marxist theorist past or present, he succeeds in transcending the artificial dualism of structure and agency by moving towards a truly dialectical understanding of their interrelationship. (Hay 1999: 170).

It is to Jessop's contribution that we now turn.

6.8 Limits to state action and the circuit of capital: Jessop

Although Jessop accepts that the state is inextricably a part of the capitalist social relation, and thus essentially working in the long-term interests of the capitalist class (through its central role in the maintenance and reproduction of the dominant

mode of production), Jessop argues that the state is similarly constrained by the mechanism of the circuit of capital:

Its purse strings will be tightened and slackened from without. Since it does not directly produce its own sources of revenue, it is limited by the private accumulation process, and depends for its tax revenues on the circulation of commodities and the accumulation and reinvestment of capital. In Claus Offe and Volke Ronge's words, ' . . . the state depends on a process of accumulation which is beyond its power to organise . . . the state is denied the power to control the flow of those resources which are indispensable for the use of state power'.

Thomas, 1994: 152.

This implies then that state power is limited, that state intervention can be political (as opposed to simply economic) and not *overtly* capitalist and, significantly, that the state is not always capable of meeting or realising the demands of capitalism.

. . . [T]he state is just one institutional ensemble among others within a social formation; but it is peculiarly charged with overall responsibility for maintaining the cohesion and the social formation of which it is a part. For the latter is charged with responsibility for securing the conditions for accumulation when market forces fail and with securing social cohesion in a class-divided society. But, in pursuing these

responsibilities, state managers can only employ the strategic capacities available to the state and these are always limited relative to the tasks facing them . . . The state is both a part and whole of society.

Jessop, 1990: 360.

The important aspect of this stream of the argument is similar to Gramsci's thesis: this may be an explanation of the apparent lack of class struggle in not only the broader context, but also at the level of the state. In accepting that the single most important motivating force underpinning action is the contradictory nature of capitalism (therefore the state can only act within this framework) which has its boundaries drawn by the operation of capitalist forces of production, then it would appear that the state would at times take 'neutral' decisions, apparently unfettered by its class location. This would arise because,

. . . [C]apitalism is a highly dynamic institutional order and is continually undergoing major changes in organisation and operation . . . the continued reproduction of capital in general requires the destruction of economic, political and ideological structures sustaining the current pattern of capitalist relations and the introduction of new, untried structures that might sustain future patterns.

Jessop, 1990: 154.

Of course given this formulation of state action, one could expect that the markets, or capital generators, would have 'more equal' access and input into the decision making process, via the organisation of the state. Indeed, Jessop clearly indicates that the interests of capital are favoured through the organisation of the state. Without stating that this is a class-state relationship, it is very close to the more pluralist idea:

. . . [of] what Charles Lindblom has termed the "privileged position of business", a special relation between business and the state, which is a structural constraint upon the latter. Successful capital accumulation is bound to be an essential policy consideration, thanks to the state's dependence on capital for revenue and stability alike. What is of particular interest here is the state's ability, under these circumstances, to present itself as the guardian of society's general interest, the interest of all classes.

Thomas, 1994: 152-3.

Although Jessop is engaged in a very helpful exercise, the outcome of his discussion may leave us with a formulation which undermines the distinctiveness of a purely Marxist approach on which the argument against pluralism rests. The means by which Jessop arrives at his own conclusions about the nature of the state in capitalism, provide very useful insights into the problems of over-structuralism and over-determinism which can be manifested within Marxist approaches. His

concerns about these two issues seem to stem from excessive concern on his part about the ‘. . . wide variety in actual existing capitalist economies’ (Jessop 1990: 151). In this respect, his concern about particularisation of states is similar to that of Hay. It is arguable, however, that the existence of outward differences between capitalist states is evidence in itself that capitalism, as a distinct mode of production, forms no part of a general explanation of the nature of political outcomes.

Further, Jessop’s Strategic-Relational Approach makes use of the concepts of form-determination and strategic selectivity² but argues that such strategic selectivity within the state system does not always favour a particular class or set of interests. Again his concern for particularisation is relevant here as he once more emphasises the importance of ‘specific conjunctures’:

The state does not exercise power: its powers (in the plural) are activated through the agency of definite political forces in specific conjunctures . . . as in all cases of social action, there will always be unacknowledged conditions influencing the success or failure of their actions as well as unanticipated consequences which follow from them . . . the state comprises an ensemble of centres which offer unequal chances to

² ‘The emphasis here is on the ways in which the very structure of the state system itself ensures that the interests of capital are favoured in policy making and implementation. The structural selectivity of the state means that it is not a neutral instrument equally accessible to all social forces and equally adaptable to all ends. Instead it has an in-built, *form-determined* bias that makes it more open to capitalist influences and more readily mobilised for capitalist policies.’ Jessop, 1990: 147.

different forces within and outside the state to act for different political purposes.

Jessop, 1990: 367.

Through his concern about the differences between capitalist states and his desire to avoid the problems of structuralism and determinism, Jessop has lost much of the heart of a Marxist account of the state. To accept that the state is part of the social relation specific to capitalism, which thus involves the exploitation of one class by another for the extraction of surplus value (thus activating class conflict), necessitates an analysis which de-emphasises other social divisions, such as the social cleavages of race, gender and nationality, as admitted into the analysis by Jessop. In this sense the relationship between social relations and the operation of the capitalist system has to be maintained as a fundamental element of a Marxist analysis. If class struggle is removed from the heart of the analysis, this denies the central significance of the social relations which must underpin any Marxist perspective on political economy. Otherwise there is nothing distinctive about a Marxist approach, and the need for a deductive approach loses its force. Thus it is argued that to attempt to avoid determinism to the extent of permitting an analysis which effectively does away with the centrality of class struggle, is to do away with Marxism.

6.9 Marxism(s)

It could be argued (and has been, in particular by Hay) that Jessop provides a sophisticated Marxist account of the state, which avoids the problems of determinism and instrumentalism which have previously weakened other Marxist accounts. It could also be argued, however, that Jessop's account is not essentially Marxist. The similarities between this type of approach to the state and the sociological formulations of structure and agency (notably by Giddens, Hay and Archer) as outlined in Chapter Two, are clear. Interestingly, Hay's description of Jessop's contribution on the state uses strikingly similar (non-Marxist) language to that used in his own work on structure, agency and power. He writes,

All social and political change occurs through strategic interaction as strategies collide with and impinge upon the structured terrain of the strategic context within which they are formulated. Their effects (however unintentional, however unanticipated) are to transform (however partially) the context within which future strategies are formulated and deployed

Hay, 1995: 170

Further the idea that the state is the crystallisation of past strategies conjures up the time-space formulation of Archer's morphogenetic approach. That is, that the state is indeterminate and contingent rather than being structurally determined. If we

refer back to the broad outline of a Marxist theory of the state in section 6.2, we can see that some key elements are manipulated within Jessop's approach. This perhaps indicates that the distinctiveness of Marxism is lost in this particular account.

It is contended that a Marxist approach to the state would require at least one element which is not found in Jessop's account: the centrality/primacy of class struggle – as opposed to other social divisions; thus retaining the economic basis for understanding the nature of the structural arrangements as well as the method of transformation of the system. As Hay indicates, class does not have the same centrality in Jessop's work as we would understand from Marxist analyses of capitalism and its transformation,

For if we are to apply the strategic-relational approach, they (crises) are contingent upon the balance of class (and other) forces, the nature of the crisis itself and (we might add) popular *perceptions* of the nature of the crisis – in short, on the strategically selective context and the strategies mobilised within this context.

Hay, 1999: 170-171

and Hay adds that

The strategic-relational approach offers no guarantees – either of the ongoing reproduction of the capitalist system or of its impending demise.

(Though, given the strategic selectivity of the current context, the odds on the latter would appear remote.) It is, in short, a statement of the contingency and indeterminacy of social and political change. The casualty in all of this is the *definitive* (and very illusive) Marxist theory of the state.

Hay, 1999: 171.

So, the critique which Jessop provides is useful, but the positive formulation he offers as an alternative is less Marxist than his terminology implies. Consequently this type of state formulation can do two things which may explain its contemporary appeal. Firstly it can more easily be integrated into pluralism in political science generally. Secondly, precisely because of this fundamental lack of conflict with pluralism, this type of Marxist state theory can also be integrated with neo-pluralist approaches to policymaking. In fact in his work on the convergence of Marxism and pluralism, Marsh persuasively argues that the problems of network approaches can be solved through their integration with a strong state theory. The force of his argument lies in his claim that any theory of the state can be used in this way, including a Marxist one. However, the Marxist approach he uses to illustrate his point is that of Jessop (see Marsh, 1995: 273). This is contrary to the claims made here that a uniquely Marxist approach could *not* provide an easy fit with neo-pluralism. An approach which does fit pluralism, therefore, cannot meet the criteria for the distinctiveness of Marxism.

To criticise Jessop and others in this way is not to fall into the trap of economic determinism. The basis of the argument presented here is a recognition that adequate political inquiry requires an approach which can examine all actors within the context of capitalism. This requires a theory of capitalism, which only Marxism attempts to provide. Marxism has at its heart the notion of classes and class struggle, which is underpinned by an analysis of the mode of production. This is not determinism but a lens through which the political economy is viewed, which is lacking in all non-Marxist analysis. The reflex of non-Marxists still is to assert that such an approach is invalid as it renders investigations of the meso and micro-levels of the political economy useless. On the contrary, the differences in political outcomes within capitalism necessitate precisely that type of inquiry. Further, given the claims which Marxism makes about the means of transforming structure, it is clear that it takes the power of agents seriously. As Wright, Levine & Sober note,

We believe that tendencies to radical holism are better ascribed to intellectual sloppiness than to considered philosophical commitment . . .

But it is neither necessary nor helpful to frame the call for micro-foundations as a call for methodological individualism . . . Micro-foundations are important for macro-social theory because of the ways they enrich our answers. But there is much more to science than elaboration.

Wright, Levine and Sober, 1992: 126-7.

It seems clear that the advantages of making use of a combination of methods are great. The currently dominant frameworks for analysing the policymaking process are inadequate because they do not seek to, and cannot, elaborate a perspective on either the state or the structural context. There are a number of non-Marxist strong state approaches which can go some way towards balancing out the emphasis on non-state social actors. However, the definition of states in capitalism which underpins all such approaches means that they do not have the capacity to illuminate the structural context any more than neo-pluralist accounts can. A theory of structure, a theory of capitalism, is only provided by Marxism, and this has significant implications for the way in which we conceptualise the state. This is fundamentally at odds with the view exhibited in non-Marxist frameworks and thus indicates that an attempted integration of the two is not a real possibility. The only way that this would be possible would be to dilute Marxism. To avoid such a position should not invite charges of either determinism or instrumentalism, as the relationship between state action and the social relations of capital are far more complex than these imply. In addition, the implication of determinism and instrumentalism is that empirical inquiry is removed from the analysis. It has been argued throughout that this would be an absurd position to adopt. There is not a contradiction between a Marxist analysis of capitalism and micro and meso-level investigations. Thus the case becomes one of harnessing the benefits of meso and macro analysis through a dynamic and dialectical understanding of structure and agency.

6.10 A dual approach

Having made the case for a Marxist approach to policymaking in order fully to appreciate the structural constraints on meso and micro level autonomy, it is important to highlight the proposal for a *dual* rather than an *integrated* approach to analysing political outcomes. It is significant that this distinction is made, given that the discussion so far has indicated that it is not possible to *integrate* a Marxist theory of state and structure with existing neo-pluralist frameworks. The integration of the two is not possible for strong reasons of methodology: use of an inductive rather than a deductive approach. Rather, the ability to harness the benefits of a structural account with the need for empirical investigation of specific cases calls for a dual framework, one which is rooted in a dual concept of power.

Just as other theorists have made claims about the necessity of perceiving power in more than one dimension, a dual approach requires power to be understood as both a structural and an individual concept which thus may be exercised and distributed differently at different levels of the polity. Structural power takes its meaning from the Marxist interpretation of the means by which the social relations of capital constrain the autonomy of meso-level actors. Individual power is that which is exercised at the meso-level and can be key in shaping specific short-run outcomes in particular policy fields, at particular times. It is not however a power which ultimately shapes the macro context of future actions. One way of distinguishing between these different power dimensions is to refer to them as conduct- and context-shaping power (adapted from Hay, 1997).

Conduct-shaping power refers to the exercise of power by individuals or groups at the meso-level, which recognises that different types of actor can dominate in different spheres at different times. For example, epistemic communities may exert conduct-shaping power in a specific policy domain where scientific expertise is significant currency in being able to translate preferences into policy actions. Context-shaping power refers to the macro-level constraints on the autonomy of, for example, epistemic communities which seeks to explain those constraints through reference to the social relations of capital. In other words, conduct-shaping power is more limited and is delineated by the terms of context-shaping power.

Such an analysis of structure and agency requires that political inquiry is in fact conducted at both the macro and meso levels rather than reducing all political outcomes to either individuals and groups in society or to structure. A complete picture of long-run policy development can only be uncovered through an examination of meso-level interactions firmly rooted in an understanding of the constraining context of capitalist social relations.

6.11 Conclusion

In order to understand the policymaking process, it is essential to understand capitalism as the context within which policy decisions are taken. There may be factors relevant to the organisation of capitalist society which can illuminate more

precisely the mechanics of the policymaking process. It does not seem unreasonable to assume that the way in which society is organised (according to the mode of production) has an impact on the political outcomes generated within that political economy. This implies that there may be something significant about the institutional arrangements or the structures of the political economy which enhance or constrain social action within that context.

In that sense we can agree that one thing which may be a significant omission from the network model is an analysis of this macro-level of potential constraints on individual agency. Having established that we want to investigate the relationship between structure and agency for the purposes of clarifying the picture of policymaking, it is important to establish an approach which can account for structure, and also one which can be used in conjunction with meso and micro-level inquiry. The state seems to be key in this respect. As part of our understanding of capitalism as structural context, unravelling the institutional arrangements relevant to that context requires an investigation of the state. Further, it seems likely that, in accepting structure to be important, the state would have a role in mediating or regulating the context of social action.

The examination of a range of pluralist accounts of the state in Chapter Five showed that, although such approaches take the state seriously, there is no indication of either their clear added value for the networks approach or of their being a sophisticated means of analysing capitalism specifically. The main problems for a pluralist analysis of the state (statism) lie in their emphasis on particularisation. That is, pluralist analyses do not see beyond the differences

between actually existing capitalist states. It is suggested that the crux of understanding the policymaking process is to discern the extent of the impact of agents on structure and vice versa. We have claimed that social system analysis is a necessary part of understanding the nature of the policymaking process, but that in no way can a purely structural approach replace the need for the examination of agency also. In other words, we need an analysis of the duality of structure and agency, or at least one which recognises their relationship to one another, rather than judging each in isolation. In accepting that structure and agency are conjoined in a dynamic and reciprocal relationship, what is particularly important is to understand the *reach of the action* of each. On that basis, neither the discussions around social action provided by Giddens, Hay and Archer nor the non-Marxist theories of the state help to elaborate the reach of the specific, social organisation of the system.

Because of the emphasis on *difference* (particularisation) within non-Marxist approaches, there can be no significant contribution to our understanding of the way in which *capitalism*, as a specific mode of production, may impinge on agency. This results, at least partly, from the reliance on an inductive approach. This means that within these approaches it is impossible to generalise about the actual or potential impact of structure on agency, and vice versa, within the specific historical context of capitalism. This would require acceptance of deductive arguments.

If we were to accept the non-Marxist position, the most concrete thing we could say about structure and agency is that each affects the other. In terms of

conclusions about policymaking then, these would necessarily be limited to discussions of political outcomes (policies) as the result of the interrelationships of individual actors and, in some cases the intervention of structure, perhaps through the resource of the state.

It is suggested then, that this does not carry us very far forward in terms of our comprehension of political economy and its meso-level activity – policymaking. Here the clear added value of a Marxist approach is apparent. In its emphasis on explaining the nature of capitalist political economy, Marxism incorporates questions of structure and agency and the method of transformation of social structure, as well as having the capacity to engage in more limited observations of the means by which specific policy outcomes are produced.

If there is a clear advantage in taking a Marxist approach, then analysing the state is key as within Marxist theory it has an important role in the reproduction of the social relations of capital. As has been discussed in the foregoing sections, there are many perceived difficulties in adopting such an approach, in particular it invites charges of determinism or instrumentalism. Within existing accounts, it seems that we have needed to accept that either Marxism falls into one of these two traps or, in order to avoid such unhelpful structuralism, we accept that the Marxism of the future is that conceived in Jessop-type terms. The case seems to have been made that to have a dynamic, dialectical conception of structure and agency means effectively to do away with any perspective which attributes any general characteristics to capitalist societies.

The evolution of Marxism has seen the development of accounts of structure and the state which claim that the state is indeterminate and contingent, offering no guaranteed outcomes for the continued reproduction of capitalist social relations and so on (see Jessop, 1990). This is clearly a new direction within Marxism, but should not represent the only possible configuration. To maintain the distinct advantage of a Marxist approach for understanding the policymaking process, arguably requires maintaining something *distinctly* Marxist about the analysis. It is suggested that it is possible to avoid crude determinism and still retain a Marxist analysis through developing a more sophisticated framework. This would have a dialectical understanding of structure and agency, whilst investigating the general characteristics of structural constraints in the capitalist mode of production. Thus, the method of transformation of structure is more precise than either Giddens's 'theory of structuration' or Archer's 'morphogenetic approach' imply. Additionally, Jessop's contribution would not be appropriate as it in fact provides a relatively easy fit with pluralism: in its admittance of other relevant social divisions (for example, race and gender), and in its claim that, although the state may be strategically selective, there are no guarantees that state actions will work in the general interests of capital in the long-run (Hay, 1999: 171). Thus it has lost the distinctiveness of a Marxist analysis, even though Jessop continues to characterise society in terms of its class structure.

It can be also be argued that the charge of over-structuralism levelled at Marxism is an exaggeration, given that agents organised in the form of classes (rather than the more amorphous pluralist groupings) have the capacity to

transform structure. In order to do so however, there needs to be a broader coincidence/configuration of forces for that transformation to be successful (for the transformation from capitalism to communism). The elements required for a Marxist analysis then are the following: an historical method; an analysis which recognises the centrality of class struggle and defines classes in terms of their relationship to the means of production; and an understanding of the state as part of the social relation specific to capitalism.

It has been noted that to attribute needs or purpose to structure is to invite criticism of determinism, functionalism and reification. Whilst acknowledging these dangers, we can point out that avoiding them does not require abandoning the distinctiveness of Marxism altogether. We should be willing to claim more than that structure and agency are interrelated – who could disagree with any such claim? In order to attempt the more difficult task of answering ‘how and to what extent does structure limit social action?’ and ‘to what extent, and under which circumstances, can agents transform the structural context of political economy?’, it is essential to utilise a framework which is prepared to make statements about the character of structural constraints. We should be willing to adopt the hypothesis that capitalism entails certain *kinds* of structural constraint, which are distinctive to its mode of production. It is contended that Marxism is the only existing theoretical framework which can truly claim to do this.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

7.1 The limitations of pluralist theories of policymaking

The opening part of this thesis suggested that the application of network type approaches to policymaking is limited. The argument was developed in terms of the types of information which could be discovered about a policy domain, as well as the kinds of questions *not* posed within neo-pluralist models. There are two main aspects to the critique of network models which, it was proposed, are relevant to all network formulations. One problematic area was suggested as the omission of the state as a constraint, either arising from its status as a key social actor, or from its location in the structural context. The second area of weakness was argued to be the structural indeterminism of neo-pluralist inquiry.

The overview of network models in Chapter One found that although the application of these approaches could provide useful and interesting information about the actor composition and policy interaction of a given policy domain, this type of information may be secondary to that which can be found through alternative perspectives. In other words, any assessment of the impact of network actors on political outcomes may only have significant meaning if understood within a framework which can identify both network relationships with other key social actors (perhaps the state) and any more general, structural constraints on agency.

The case study presented in chapters Three and Four illustrated some of the benefits and stated weaknesses with these approaches. The Task Force Environment: Water was chosen as a typical network type case study in which a formal network consultation was created in order to produce policy proposals for the EU's water management agenda. In mapping out the organisation of the consultation and the key social actors, it was possible to test for some of the policy hierarchies which contemporary network models claim can be found, for example policy communities and epistemic communities.

Observations of the network found that there was some evidence of an increased weight of inputs by some actors according to key characteristics identified in certain network models. In particular both a professional-industry bias and a dominant insider organisation were found. The possibility of an epistemic community was more difficult to determine, as some policy relevant actors who may also claim to have expertise in this field were excluded from the consultation. These organisations were the environmental groups who may be considered as campaigning organisations and, as such, were felt by core network leaders to be less directly relevant to the process.

Application of a networks type approach then provided a useful overview of the range of actors involved in the consultation process. It was also able to identify those groups who were able to maximise their input through closer contact with policy implementors or were policy leaders owing to existing, established links in the sector. In this sense the core actors were perceived as those with the most policy expertise derived from long a association and strong contacts in the

field. This type of approach was also able to highlight the marginal status of other non-industry groups, in particular environmental and consumer organisations. In addition, it was possible to identify some of the constraints on actor autonomy, arising from the EU's agenda setting and the difficulty for new actors (and thus new thinking) to penetrate a well established policy network.

It was clear then that network approaches are able provide a wide range of interesting and useful information about a specific policy domain, at a particular time. What is more difficult is to establish is whether there are any further constraints on actor autonomy than those which can be readily identified from direct observation of the field. As already indicated, the very nature of neo-pluralism as a mode of inquiry places limits on the information it can provide. Although this does not necessarily negate the network outcomes discovered, the possibility that network actors are interacting in a more limited environment or are unable to pursue their own agendas exclusively, raises questions about the force of theories generated from their application. That is, without a direct engagement with potentially decisive factors such as the state and structural context, the accessibility of decision makers and the autonomy of network actors, it is claimed, may be overstated.

7.2 Power, structure, and agency

In light of the importance attached to the limitations of network analysis, the relevance of alternative perspectives on the power holding capacity of society-based groups and individuals *vis-à-vis* the state and social system is significant. It was suggested that the weaknesses identified in neo-pluralism had their root in the method of investigation used and therefore the ensuing assumptions about the distribution and exercise of power. Consequently relevant literature on power, structure and agency was considered, in order to provide a firmer basis for the argument pursued: the need to consider system type constraints as part of the explanation of political outcomes.

The contributions from sociologists on the importance of avoiding reductionism in social and political inquiry were found to be very persuasive. It is argued by Giddens and Archer that a mode of analysis which reduces explanation to either the individual or to the social system is not only undesirable, but is a misunderstanding of the dynamic relationship between the two. That is, there exists a duality of structure and agency such that each is formed by and generates the other. This indicates a more dynamic and reciprocal relationship than that found in the main schools of thought such as pluralism and Marxism. In each of these, the definition of the exercise and distribution of power as being either with individual agents (more closely associated with pluralism) or with structures (more closely associated with Marxism) misses the fact that the two are conjoined.

With a dual formulation then, power capacity in terms of the environment of social action, the social interaction within it and thus the ways in which either of these can be changed, must be explained through reference to both structure and agency. Two important points arise from this analysis. Firstly, that in explaining political outcomes it is necessary to consider the actions of individuals as well as the structure of the environment in which they take place. This requires a dual concept of power in order to identify the distribution and exercise of power at different levels of the polity. Secondly, existing dual formulations do not attribute any general character to social structure such that it shapes the rules of society and social action in particular ways. This, it was argued, weakened existing perspectives on the duality of structure and agency as it limits what can be said about the ways in which structure limits social action. The proposal then is, in order to embrace the duality of structure and agency and give it meaning, it should be an historically rooted perspective. This would allow us to be able to say more definite things about the (more specific) ways in which structure impacts on agency.

7.3 Statism

The next theoretical development of the argument concentrated on the omission of state theory from network analysis. It has already been noted that the state, may be a constraint on the shape of the network and network actor autonomy. In order to be clear about whether the state can have this type of influence, it was argued that a

theory of the state was required. Chapter Five provided an overview of statist literature which emphasises the centrality and autonomy of the state as a distinct social actor in decision making.

The contributions of Nordlinger, Krasner, Skocpol and Mann highlighted the significant shift away from society-centred accounts to state emphasising explanations of political outcomes. Although there are some key differences between these statist contributions, they all emphasise the autonomy of the state insofar as it should be understood as a distinct social actor which has its own preferences and the power to translate them into policy, despite countervailing social pressures. This strong state vision further emphasises the variability in state organisation and action such that it is necessary to consider each state independently, rather than to generalise about all states. In fact two things became clear in the assessment of statism. Firstly that state autonomy was actually relative, as all contributions indicated the importance of the strength of social groups as well as the organisation of the particular state institutions as potential limits to autonomous state capacity. Secondly the variability of states was taken as evidence that generalisation about states was invalid. Modern states exhibit fragmentation within the organisation of the state as well as differences in state capacity in different policy domains. Thus states are multi-dimensional and multi-functional. The claim made by statisticians then is that it is important to talk of 'states in capitalism' rather than 'capitalist states'.

This conclusion was considered very significant, and difficult to reconcile with the stated desirability of an historically rooted conceptualisation of structure.

Given the logic of capital accumulation and the social relations of production in capitalism, it was argued that a dislocation of the state from this type of structural context, as found in statism, is likely to underestimate the potential invariability of the capitalist mode of production.

In terms of the lack of state theory in neo-pluralism, it was felt that in this single regard, statism could provide a solution. In other words if the only failing of network analysis was its lack of state theory then the introduction of a statist perspective would alleviate this difficulty. It was further argued that an integration of statism and neo-pluralism is possible. The problem with this integration however, would still be the structural indeterminism manifest in both approaches. So the second condition for establishing a strong theory of policymaking, that of a direct engagement with structure, was not resolved by the contributions of statism.

7.4 The superiority of Marxist theories of the state

What distinguishes his [Marx's] analysis so radically from classical political economy is that it creates no sharp discontinuities between economic and political spheres; and he is able to trace the continuities because he treats the economy itself not as a network of disembodied forces but, like the political 'sphere', as a set of *social relations*.

Meiksins Wood, 1981: 68.

Given the two features of state and structure which, it is argued, are fundamental to policymaking analysis, and which are omitted from dominant policymaking models, it is appropriate to discuss Marxist theory as it directly engages with both.

The advantage of Marxism, it was proposed, is that it resolves the enduring difficulty of pluralist and statist approaches in that it locates the state and social action in their structural context. The fact that the state and social action are understood as aspects of capital and, thus, inseparable from structural context is considered as a distinct improvement on other perspectives.

The argument conceded that it is important to avoid the reductionism to structure which can be a feature of Marxist analysis, as this was identified as invalid in Chapter Two, following the argument of Archer. Chapter Six thus outlined the changing contributions of Marxism and neo-Marxism to state theory, highlighting the difficulties of functionalism and determinism which are found in some formulations. Given the significance which has been attached to understanding structural context is necessary for an analysis of action within that context, neo-Marxist theories which indicated a discontinuity of the economic and political (as functionalist and instrumentalist interpretations similarly disengage the state from context in the way that statist do) were rejected.

Having accepted the advantage of Marxism as an analysis of policymaking, precisely because it is a theory of capitalism (which therefore theorises social system and social action), it was considered important to retain the key Marxist concept of the social relations of production at the heart of the analysis.

Consequently, more recent formulations in the Marxist tradition, which do not

retain class struggle at the core, (in their admission of other social divisions and their potentially decisive relevance) were seen as weakening the value of a Marxist analysis.

7.5 A dual approach?

Overall, the argument pursued has been that the dominant method of policymaking analysis has limited utility. Network type theories produce useful and interesting information about network actors and their interaction. However, assessments of the extent of their impact on political outcomes are restricted by the exclusive emphasis on individual and group actors. It was argued that, as a result, the type of information gained through the application of network analysis may be secondary to a broader analysis of both other social actors and the structural context of policymaking. In other words, network analysis has little meaning if not understood within this broader context.

Although it is relatively easy to introduce state theory to neo-pluralist analysis in order to overcome the weakness of its very society-centred approach, statism cannot resolve the significant structural indeterminism of neo-pluralism. A direct engagement with structure is argued to be necessary in order to understand social action at either the level of the individual or at the level of the state. The difficulty thus becomes one of method rather than just style. The argument, then is for an approach which makes use of deductive as well as inductive arguments. This

requires a theory of capitalism and thus effectively rules out anything other than a Marxist analysis. One problem, however, is that Marxism can encounter its own difficulties of reductionism. So the problem is one of how to develop a method which recognises the duality of structure and agency and thus avoid *any* form of reductionism. In other words, the neo-pluralist inductive method cannot serve the need for structural analysis, but structuralist analysis has a tendency to marginalise agency. A method of inquiry which can account for both, therefore, is desirable.

The solution, in order to conform to our assessment that structure and agency are conjoined, is firstly to theorise structure (as logically prior) and couple this with investigations of social action in particular contexts. This is a dual approach for the following reasons. Firstly, a theoretical integration of neo-pluralism and Marxism is not possible due the significant differences in method. However it is necessary to have a dual concept of power in order to make statements about the 'reach' of structure and agency and, thus, the ways in which one can impact on the other. A dual power concept is needed as the exercise and distribution of power is different as between structure and agency. Hay's terminology of conduct and context shaping power may be helpful in this regard. Conduct shaping power can be used to refer to the power capacity of dominant individuals and groups in policy domains, who have the power to shape the behaviour of other network actors and effectively command meso-level processes. Context shaping power is a term which can be used to facilitate a description of the importance of the structural context, the mode of production, to political outcomes. To accept that capitalism as a distinct mode of production has no

explanatory force for political outcomes unique to this context, is to make a fundamental error. As Marx claimed:

But all is not what the economists are really concerned with in this general part. Their object is rather to represent production in contradistinction to distribution – see Mill, for example – as subject to eternal laws independent of history, and then to substitute bourgeois relations, in an underhand way, as immutable natural laws of society *in abstracto*. This is the more or less conscious aim of the entire proceeding. *Grundrisse*, McLellan, 1990: 348.

But don't wrangle with us so long as you apply, to our intended abolition of bourgeois property, the standard of your bourgeois notions of freedom, culture, law etc. Your very ideas are but the outgrowth of the conditions of your bourgeois production and bourgeois property, just as your jurisprudence is but the will of your class made into a law for all, a will whose essential character and direction are determined by the economical conditions of existence of your class.

Communist Manifesto, McLellan, 1990: 234.

7.6 Questions for further research

Some significant questions have arisen in the course of this discussion which have been beyond the scope of this thesis. These questions relate directly to the conclusions already reached, as well as to ways in which the work can be moved further forward.

It is clear that we need a Marxist theory of the state which avoids functionalism and determinism yet maintains the centrality of class struggle and the structural location of it within capitalism. The overview provided in Chapter Six argued that a precise elaboration of the state which meets these two conditions remains elusive. The problem is to locate the state in its structural context (as an aspect of capital) without conceiving of it as a distinct social actor which is an instrument of the ruling class, or in functionalist terms.

Also an attempt must be made to answer questions raised about macro constraints on meso level agency. That is, it has been contended that the meso level interactions emphasised in network analysis may be subject to constraints emanating from the state and/or from structural context. It is necessary to investigate the extent to which the state or structural context can and do have this impact on agency and the consequences, therefore, for our interpretation of social action. In particular it is relevant to pursue the issue of the impact of state action on agency, relative to the impact of social structure, as this would enable us to clarify a theory of the state which could conform to the model indicated above.

In addition, an elaboration of the distribution and exercise of power in terms of the notions of conduct and context shaping power capacity is necessary. It would be valuable to develop a model for understanding this relationship of duality between structure and agency, such that individual action is considered as having conduct shaping capacity, and the social organisation of capitalism is understood as having context shaping capacity. This would further enable an elucidation of the relationship between the two, to aid our understanding of how structure limits social action as well as the circumstances under which social action can successfully challenge the structural context and thus effect a transformation of the system.

Essentially we require further investigations into the policymaking process in order to provide more substance to claims made about the limited autonomy of actors at this level. In addition to providing a reservoir of important information about policy interaction, this type of inquiry may also allow the identification of trends within capitalism, which could have a predictive capacity for its future stages of development.

Appendix 1.

Research Methods

Research Methods

1. Sources

There were three main sources for the empirical work contained within this thesis. Firstly, EU documents relating to the operation of the Task Force, the Mirror Task Force monographs and documents outlining the nature and objectives of organisations involved in the policy process, were consulted. Secondly, questionnaires were sent to all participants requesting information about their experiences of the consultation, the operation of the Task Force more generally and the outcomes of the process – in terms of direct benefits of participation as well as longer-term outcomes for the policy domain. Finally, interviews were conducted with the core Mirror Task Force personnel of each of the UK-based networks.

1. *Task Force documents*: Key documentation was provided by the EU's Directorate General XII (for research), relating to the creation of the Task Force, the philosophy behind the development of this kind of policy tool as well as both the framework within which the national/sectoral submissions should be made and the intended outcomes of the process. Interim reports, which detailed the evolution of the Task Force from the perspective of the Commission and gave an insight into the intended 'means' and 'ends' of using this type of policy tool, were also used. Further detail on the precise nature of the process was uncovered from the reports of the two UK-based Mirror Task Forces. These provided information on the

structure of their consultations as well as their priorities concerning the problems of pan-European water management. Using the information contained within these documents, contact was made with the wide range of bodies and individual actors who had either responded to the EU's initiative directly, or who had become part of the Task Force via the UK Mirror Task Forces. This provided further documentation which gave supplementary information on each of the bodies involved in the consultation, their location in the policy domain and main areas of interest.

2. *Elite interviews*: Interviews were held with the main Task Force secretariat (chief officers) of both the professional and national Mirror Task Forces. The managers of each Task Force were interviewed, along with other employees of those organisations (Techware and the Foundation for Water Research) who were 'hosting' or coordinating the Mirror Task Force submissions. It transpired that the core actors within each Mirror Task Force were even more dominant than had been originally assumed. The key *individual(s)* within each Mirror Task Force were the locus of influence, and the broader team had a more marginal role in the formulation of proposals and the drafting of the documentation.

Telephone interviews were also conducted with the National Contact Point (NCP) at the DTER and with the key figure in the Scottish Office submission. The NCP provided very useful information about the nature of the bidding process by research organisations with the government in the UK. The NCP also indicated the extent of the DTER's detachment from the Task Force on a day-to-day basis, but in terms of investment of time and resources in establishing the national UK

response, they were concerned that there should be tangible outcomes from the consultation. Eight elite interviews were conducted with the core actors within the UK Mirror Task Forces. Each interview lasted for half a day, with additional time to consult documentation held at the offices of each. In all cases, subsequent telephone calls followed, in order to follow up points raised, or to request further relevant documentation. Each interview took the form of a semi-structured conversation. The reason for this is due firstly, to the need for clarification of precise dates of different stages of the Task Force process as well as to establish the secretariat's perspective on the formal structure and organisation of the consultation, managed by the EU. In other words, there was some detail which it was necessary to gain from the interview. However, it was not desirable to have a very structured technique, as both the internal dynamics and the very personal perspectives on the relative merits of participation would not be reproduced in any documentation. Further, it was clear that individuals had specific points to make about their experience and, thus, it was felt that these would give better insights into the dynamics of the process (and interrelationships), than very formal questioning.

3. *Questionnaires*: The bulk of the empirical detail on the interactions of the consultees within the established networks (their impressions of the operation of the Task Force process generally and their perception of what they could gain through participation) was gathered through responses to questionnaires with supplementary correspondence, where required, to clarify any points being made. All organisations listed as having been consulted, in the Mirror Task Forces

documentation, were contacted in this manner with the length and quality of the responses varying. Where no immediate response was made, follow-up letters were sent on two further occasions.

Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth were also contacted (as organisations omitted from the national/sectoral consultation) in order to gauge opinion on the reasons why they were excluded.

The DGs directly involved in the Task Force were also asked to respond to a separate questionnaire and, in the case of DG XII, this was followed up with further correspondence for the purposes of clarification.

A total of 44 questionnaires were sent (39 to Mirror Task Force participants and 5 to the relevant Directorate Generals in Brussels), using the national Mirror Task Force's list of consultees and the additional contact list which was drawn up after the Commission circulated its 'second Call for Ideas'. Responses were received from 21 Mirror Task Force participants and 3 Directorates General. In some cases these took the form of a letter detailing answers to questions posed, in those areas which they felt they had a particular insight or additional information to give. Again, in six cases, these initial contacts were followed up with further correspondence where it was felt that the organisation/individual could provide further context or detail relating to their participation. In two or three cases, the named individual or organisation from the contact list was not the relevant individual or was no longer available. In these cases, the response to the questionnaire received, was a copy of the UK Report.

A copy of each questionnaire can be found in Appendix 4 and Appendix 5.

2. Obstacles in the process

Due to the nature of the consultation process initiated at the national level, the majority of organisations and individual representatives of smaller bodies, were actually much more marginal to the process than had been indicated in the Task Force reports. As a result, those organisations which had a long-standing relationship with the core actors (Techware and FWR) were reluctant to express any opinions, without a clear statement by the researcher as to what had already been discussed with the core actors. Further, the researcher was always recommended to contact the managers of the UK submissions, as they could provide the 'whole story' without the need for further clarification by other actors. They felt they could add no more to the opinions already expressed by the core actors.

Those bodies who had no previous experience of working in this manner and with, therefore, no pre-existing links with those central to the consultation were more forthcoming about their experiences. The extent of the dissatisfaction with the organisation of the process and lack of return for their investment was very clear from the correspondence.

A further point of interest is in those organisations which had claimed greater knowledge and therefore authority in the Task Force process, than those in the position of managing it. The input of these groups and individuals was invaluable in their uncovering of the nature and inflexibility of the EU agenda, prior to the initiation of the public consultation.

The case study chosen was useful in that it was relatively easy to see the hierarchies of input, the limited nature of the consultation and close relationships which existed between the core members (notably between the two chairs of the respective Mirror Task Forces). The EU role was, however, less transparent. Much of this could be claimed to be the result of the level of bureaucracy involved in the Task Force process, as well as the reluctance of individual officials within the DGs to take responsibility for the nature of the organisation of the Task Force and the Commission's management of it.

It was expected, from the outset, that the case study could be of only limited utility in terms of the arguments made within the thesis about the relationship between theory and evidence in political science inquiry. Having clarified the nature of the theoretical approach which the researcher wanted to pursue, the task of choosing a case study was thought to be on the one hand very difficult and, on the other, that the exact nature of it was less relevant. In other words, it was accepted that, in light of the arguments made for the desirability of more structuralist type assumptions about the macro context of policymaking, no case study evidence alone could explain any such constraints to meso-level autonomy. It certainly would have no explanatory force in terms of any constraints attributable to capitalism, as a specific mode of production. However, it was important to find a case study which could demonstrate both internal network relationships (to identify dominant conduct shaping power actors) and one where it was possible to hypothesise about external constraints.

This particular case study then seemed, at the outset, to have those qualities (leaving aside the specific problems of demonstrating the validity of Marxist claims): it was a relatively new policy area, thus it was hoped there would be greater transparency of relationships. The ownership of policy relevant knowledge or expertise was also likely to be crucial in this particular case, given that the goal of the process was to improve the EU's competitive market position in water quality and management. Also, the overlap of EU and national competence in this policy domain was considered an additional benefit – in terms of gaining insights into the relationship between national and EU policy actors as well as having further evidence of the fact that research organisations now look increasingly to the EU for financial support.

Further, at the start of the fieldwork, the EU had not produced the final document which was supposed to both synthesise the range of European inputs, as well as to demonstrate the concrete links between the consultation process and the Fifth Framework Programme. There was certainly an extra twist in the story as a result of this bureaucratic delay, and the UK actors felt that this was a realisation of all their fears about making their ideas available to outside bodies. Their fears were not entirely realised, however, as the final EU document was eventually released at the end of 1998 (one year late).

By the close of the fieldwork, however, two things became clear. On the positive side (in terms of significant information gained), the investigations had shown that the EU had not intended to use the public consultation as an agenda-setting exercise, as this had already taken place prior to the 'Call for Ideas' being

made public. Secondly, within the framework as set by the EU, it was clear that the dominant conduct-shapers were those with pre-existing relationships, professional-water industry commonality and thus relatively developed shared expertise about the nature of the problems for water management, and the best means for their resolution.

The case study was able to test some of the claims made in network approaches and found that the policy community and epistemic community models were, at least partly, reflected in this particular case. This also pointed to the limitations of these approaches however. Firstly that having identified particular policy hierarchies here, this still would not enable us to say anything about the policymaking process more generally, as the outcomes are policy specific and time bound. Secondly, although the approach is able to identify that there may be constraints outside of the network, the model itself has no explanatory force in this regard. These two factors seemed to add weight to the proposal for a dual approach, which would be able to locate the empirical findings in their structural context such that more general statements may be possible about the nature of the policymaking process.

3. General comments on methodology and the specific case study

As outlined above, the methods of investigation used in this thesis were a combination of documentary sources, questionnaires and elite interviewing. A

problem for research in this (very) specific area was the lack of any other commentaries on the nature of the Task Force process. In addition, given the newness of the particular Task Force under discussion, which was intended to provide a more fruitful area for analysis due to the lack of entrenched relationships, in fact presented an area of investigation with very few documentary sources. Importantly, evaluating the influence of various actors was key to the analysis of the case study material, particularly in light of the theoretical claims made in the opening chapters.

Given the 'underdeveloped' nature of the area and the aims of the investigation there was, necessarily then, more reliance on primary sources (interviews, questionnaires and internal documents). This also resulted in the selection of contacts being general: all individuals and actors who had participated in some capacity in the Task Force consultation. The only limit which was placed on selection was (due to time and resourcing constraints) that they should be based in the UK. This constraint was justified, in that the focus of enquiry was the nature of consultation networks on a sectoral – rather than level of governance – basis.

Such a reliance on first hand accounts of the policy process, magnify the problematic issues of using interviews: limited and selective information¹. Despite using a combination of structured and semi-structured techniques, it was not always possible to cross-reference the information provided, with other sources. It became clear through the process of information gathering, however, that the distribution of questionnaires to non-core participants, gave a very useful reservoir

¹ See chapters by Bartov and Stedward in Burnham, P. (1997).

of information against which to consider the opinions and comments of the core actors.

The central problems of the information gathered from interviewing these core actors were: an underlying dissatisfaction with the outcome of their participation; a sometimes overblown account of their ability to manage the process successfully and a reliance on vague statements about a 'convergence of priorities' within the public consultation.

The information garnered from the questionnaires (and supplementary correspondence) completed by the consultees, thus provided very useful insights into the experience of the network consultation from the point of view of 'being managed' rather than 'doing the managing'. It was hoped that this would go some way towards counterbalancing the problems of certain biases expressed in the information from core actors. It was important, however, to also assume that the nature of those responses was highly subjective: perceptions of the success of the process based on individual expectations (which may have been unreasonable), of a greater claim to knowledge and authority in the field than those chosen to manage the consultation, of being considered (by the managers) as marginal to the process.

The volume of responses to the questionnaires and requests for interview was limited in a number of ways. The Task Force Environment-Water is a relatively narrow focus for study. Although it is a part of a much broader 'environmental policy strategy', as a *water* management policy tool it was only a small focus of interest for environmental and environmental-research organisations.

Secondly it is, clearly, an EU policy initiative. For those involved in a complex of policy arrangements, consultative networks and research activities, again it was only a part of a much broader set of national, EU and pan-European concerns. In other words, it was only marginal to the day to day business of many of those involved in the consultation.

Thirdly, many of those individuals and organisations who did not have their proposals reflected *directly* in the final documents did not respond. It was very important (and provided the most useful information) that some of those who had a poor experience of the UK Task Forces did respond. However, the broad categories of 'environmental-research' and 'academic interest' were underrepresented relative to water managers and water industry professionals.

Finally the Task Force process, despite the implied on-going policy and research links, was an isolated policy consultation that was completed in two years. Within that time, of course, those submitting their proposals would have completed their active role (as opposed to being circulated with updates on progress) at an early point. An additional problem then, was the feeling that the process was finished and concerns had moved on.

The outcome of these limitations, on the nature and volume of the responses from interviews and questionnaires, was that a majority of responses were from those who had something particular to say about the process. The managers of the UK Task Forces were dissatisfied with the conduct of Commission officials and the organisation of the process by the EU. From shifting deadlines and changes in procedure to long delays in the publication of the final report, the UK

managers were keen for someone to highlight the inefficiencies of the EU (as they had, after all, been spending tax payers money). Some consultees were motivated to respond either to indicate their poor experience of the UK consultation or to clarify the more dominant role they had, 'behind the scenes'.

Generally then the problems of limited and selective information were evident: those individuals and organisations who were concerned to make a particular point were more responsive than those who did not have any strong feelings about the process.

Appendix 2.

Organisations consulted by UK national MTF

Organisations consulted by UK MTF

Association of Independent Research & Technology Organisations (AIRTO)
Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council
British Water
British Waterways
Building Services Research and Information association (BSRIA)
Confederation of British Industry (CBI)
Chartered Institution of Water & Environmental Management (CIWEM)
CNS Scientific and Engineering Services
Council for Environmental Education
Country Landowners Association
Department of the Environment
Drinking Water Inspectorate
Economic and Social Research Council
Environment Agency
Environment and Heritage Agency, Northern Ireland
Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
Environmental Industries Commission
Foundation for Water Research
HR Wallingford
Institute of Freshwater Ecology
Institute of Hydrology
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Natural Environmental Research Council
Northern Ireland Water Service
Office of Science & Technology (Natural Resources and Environmental Panel)
Office of Water Services
Scottish Environment Protection Agency
Scottish Natural Heritage
Scottish Office
Scottish Research Liaison Group
Scottish Water & Sewerage Customers Council
UK Water Industry Research Ltd
Water Industry Suppliers Group
Welsh Office
Water Companies Association
Water Services Association
WRc p.l.c.

CEN
EURAQUA
European Topic Centre for Water
EUREAU
EWWG
TECHWARE

Appendix 3.

Organisations whose responses to the EU call for ideas
were copied to the UK national MTF

Organisations whose responses to EU 'call for Ideas' were copied to UK MTF

British Water
British Waterways
Building Services Research and Information Association
Department of the Environment
Drinking Water Inspectorate
Environment Agency
HR Wallingford Ltd
Institute of Freshwater Ecology
Institute of Hydrology
Kaiak Ltd
Office of Water Services
Scottish Environment Protection Agency
Scottish Research Liaison Group
Scottish water & Sewerage Customers Council
University of Hertfordshire
University of Hull
University of Leeds
University of Newcastle
University of Oxford
University of Salford
University of Sheffield
Water Industry Suppliers Group
Water Companies Association
Water Services Association
WRc p.l.c.

EURAQUA
EUREAU
EWWG
TECHWARE

Appendix 4.

Sample Questionnaire 1

Section 1: About the National Contact Point/Mirror Task Force

(1). Who is represented in the Mirror Task Force and how were they initially nominated?/ How were you nominated as the national contact point?

(2). How do you see your role in the Task Force network?

(3). Which organisations/institutions/associations/individuals will you be approaching for the consultation process?

Section 2: About the aims of the Task Force

(1). According to the documentation, the aim of the Task Force is to set up “an agenda for water research in Europe” - what areas do you envisage being covered by such an agenda?

(2). Given that the aim is for a consensus to emerge, how do you hope to ensure a broad consensus is achieved?

(3). Is it a priority to enhance the role of scientists and technology experts in this particular policy process or agenda setting?

(4). How do you see the Task Force moving policy forward in this area?

Please turn over

Section 3: About the operation of the Task Force network

(1). How can you ensure that consumer interests are effectively channelled into the consultative process?

(2). How can you ensure that ecological concerns are effectively channelled into the consultative process?

(3). How do you see the network operating?

(4). How is it intended that it will interact with national governments' policy priorities?

(5). Are you concerning yourselves with proposals for action which, it is felt, are better or necessarily achieved through a cooperative approach, or do they address identifiable gaps in policy at any level?

**(6). How would you prioritise these end goals, as identified by the Task Force:
(Rank each goal from 1 to 5, where 1 is the most important end goal)**

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| * socio-economic cohesion | [|] |
| * the achievement of a Single Market | [|] |
| * safeguarding Europe's position on the international scene | [|] |
| * promotion of competitiveness for business | [|] |
| * Europe's engagement in development cooperation | [|] |

(7). What are the current gaps in policy which you identify at the EU level?

(8). Will this Task Force resolve any of the problems you have noted in question 7 above?

— (9). **In terms of the actions to be considered, who pays? —

(10). In terms of the specific measures to be taken, in concert with the four proposed actions, how would you prioritise:
(Rank each from 1 to 5, where 1 is the most important)

* scale and urgency of the problems	[]
* prospects offered by science and technology	[]
* market opportunities	[]
* Europe's competitive position	[]
* potential applications of the research results	[]

(11). Any documents available? List of participants?

(12). Any other remarks:

Thank you very much for your time

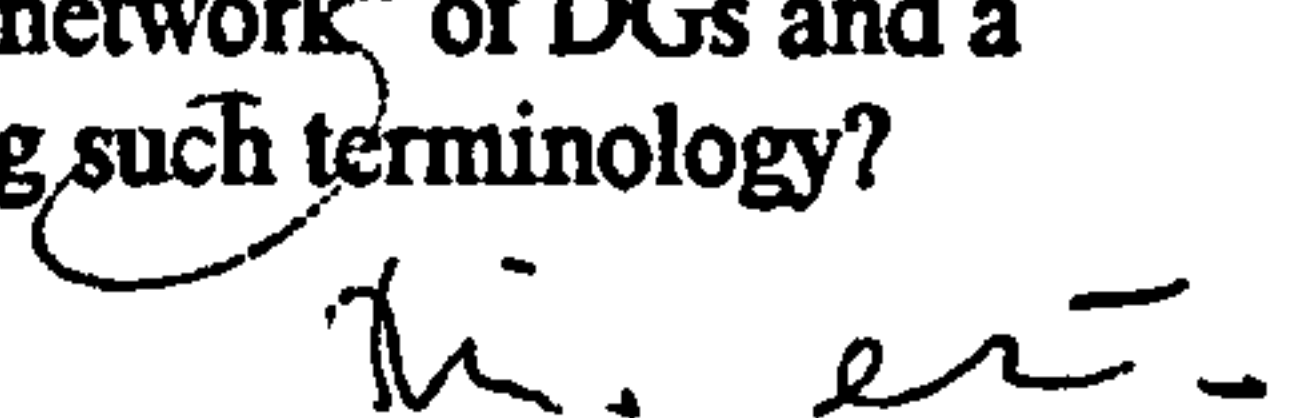
Appendix 5.

Sample Questionnaire 2

Section 1: About the Task Force

- (1). Who is represented in the Task Force and how were they initially nominated?
- (2). How do you see your role in the Task Force network? (e.g. manager, consultant)
- (3). Which other DGs and EU organisations/officials will you be approaching for the consultation process?

Section 2: About the aims of the Task Force

- (1). How did the Task Force decide on the priority areas for the framework of the Preliminary Report?
- (2). According to the documentation, the aim of the Task Force is to set up “an agenda for water research in Europe” - what areas do you envisage being covered by such an agenda?
- (3). In the schematic of the structure of the Task Force, it is described as a “network” of DGs and a range of socio-economic actors : What are you attempting to convey by using such terminology?

- (4). Is it a priority to enhance the role of scientists and technology experts in the agenda setting for this particular policy area?
- (5). How did the Task Force discover the principal preoccupations of citizens (noted as: combating pollution; rational use of water; combating chronic water deficits; prevention and management of crises)?
- (6). Do these priorities coincide with existing EU policy targets?

Please turn over

Section 3: About the operation of the Task Force network

(1). How can you ensure that consumer interests are effectively channelled into the consultative process?

(2). How can you ensure that ecological concerns are effectively channelled into the consultative process?

(3). Is the Inter Service Group (ISG), a representation of *the* Commission opinion, or a combination of the differing interests of the DGs involved in the process?

(4). How do you see the network operating?

(5). How is it intended that it will interact with national governments' policy priorities?

(6). Given that the aim is for a consensus to emerge, how do you hope to ensure a this is achieved?

(7). In what way is the 'level of support' from institutions and organisations in the proposals for action, important?

**(8). How would you prioritise these end goals, as identified by the Task Force:
(Rank each goal from 1 to 5, where 1 is the most important end goal)**

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| * socio-economic cohesion | [|] |
| * the achievement of a Single Market | [|] |
| * safeguarding Europe's position on the international scene | [|] |
| * promotion of competitiveness for business | [|] |
| * Europe's engagement in development cooperation | [|] |

(9). What are the current gaps in policy which you identify at the EU level?

(10). Will this Task Force resolve any of the problems you have noted in (question 9) above?

(11). How do you see the Task Force moving policy forward in this area?

**(12). In terms of the specific measures to be taken, in concert with the four proposed actions, how would you prioritise:
(Rank each from 1 to 5, where 1 is the most important)**

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| * scale and urgency of the problems | [|] |
| * prospects offered by science and technology | [|] |
| * market opportunities | [|] |
| * Europe's competitive position | [|] |
| * potential applications of the research results | [|] |

(13). Any other remarks:

Thank you very much for your time

Appendix 6.

Sample follow-up letter

Environment Agency
Rio House
Waterside Drive
Aztec West
Almondsbury
Bristol BS12 4UD

11 September 1997

Dear Mr. Bramley,

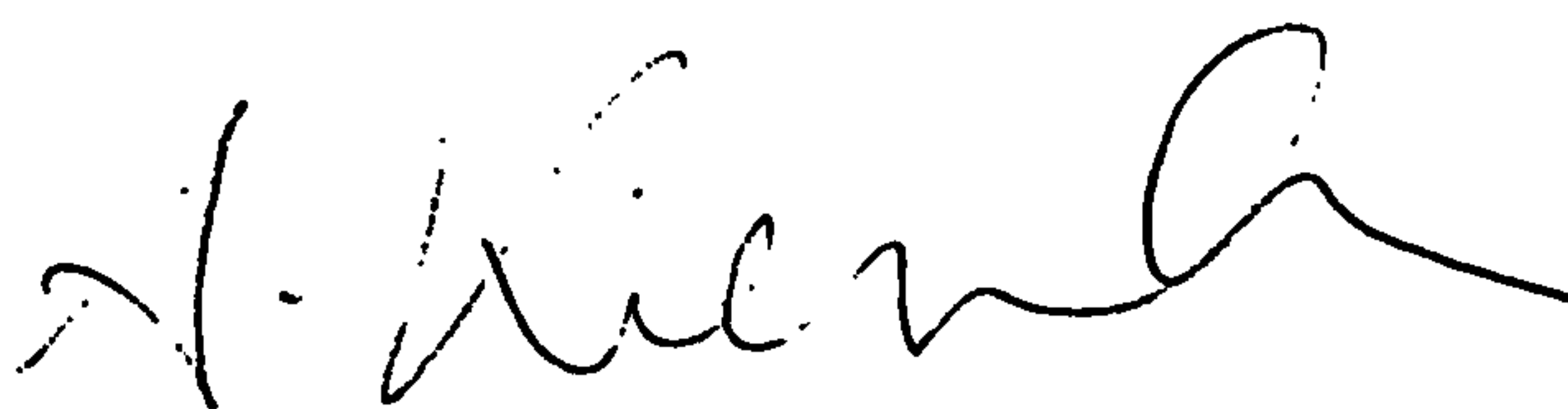
In May this year I originally wrote to you, enclosing a questionnaire, relating to your role in the EU Task Force: Environment: Water. I am researching this EU initiative in order to establish both the role of scientific expertise as well as the compatibility of EU and UK goals in this policy area. I am also particularly interested to learn the mechanism through which such a network is established.

Thank you for your response to my initial enquiry. I have now been able to read through some of the documentation which was sent to me by the MTF, in particular, the Report of the executive. Therefore, I am now in a position to follow up my initial enquiry to try to get a better picture of how the MTF set about organising the call for ideas and putting together the subsequent report.

I understand that, with other commitments, you may not have very much time available, but I would very much appreciate the opportunity to speak to you in person about the on-going work of the Task Force. Any comments made would not necessarily be 'on the record' or attributed, if that is your wish.

I must apologise for the delay in following up my previous enquiries and hope that we can arrange a meeting in the near future.

Thank you for your time.
Best wishes,



Annabel Kiernan
Jean Monnet Chair: European Integration and Public Policy
Dept. of Applied Social Studies
University of Paisley
Paisley, PA1 2BE.

Tel.: 0141 848 3953
fax.: 0141 848 3891
e-mail: kier-as0@paisley.ac.uk

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