

Governance of Transport Policy: Introduction to the Special Issue

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Transport policy only seldom reaches public attention. Election campaigns usually avoid references to transport policies. Party competition in Germany is concerned with other areas. At the same time transportation policy requires technical knowledge, is shaped by economics, ecological ideas, and social norms (Bandelow/Kundolf 2011).

Traditionally, the state plays a special role in transportation policy as it not only acts as a regulator but also provides transportation itself. The German state owns most of the infrastructure in road and shipping traffic. The German railway (Deutsche Bahn AG) is even owned by the federal state completely. Additionally the federal state is responsible for securing the public interest at the development of the railway system (Basic Law § 87 e). However, since December 1993 the Basic Law allows the introduction of competition. Formally the Deutsche Bahn has become a stock corporation even though the plan to sell parts of the company to private shareholders has failed up to now. Private companies still only provide trains on a few selected railway lines.

Another peculiarity of transport policy is the far-reaching influence of the European Union and multilevel policies in this field (Sack 2007: 176). The member states committed themselves to the common goals of the EEC already in 1957. Since then, the competencies and activities of the European level in transport policy have been enlarged significantly step-by-step. The multi-level strategies contributed to significant changes of the German transport policies (Teutsch 2001; Lehmkuhl 2007).

Even though the peculiarities make transport policy a very fruitful field of policy analysis it has been neglected widely by the majority of researchers in the German speaking countries.

There have been, however, two major approaches to German and European transport policies: The first approach is critical. It started by formulating policy advice for sustainable strategies (Canzler/Knie 1998). More recently, critical researchers have become increasingly disappointed with the realities of transport policies (Knie 2007). They evaluated the results of the policies against the background of official claims for “integrated” policies and present explanations for the failure of transport policies (Knie 2007; Schöller 2007; Schöller-Schwedes 2010).

The second approach is from positivistic policy science. Authors do not commit themselves to their own policy goals but try to identify rules that explain transport policy making. This perspective has up to now been dominated by authors from Switzerland (f.e. Sager/Kaufmann 2002; Sager 2007; Frey 2010).

There has been little exchange between both approaches in the last years (Bandelow 2007). Therefore research on transport policy has seldom affected the theoretical, methodological and political state of the art of policy analysis in German speaking countries. This issue has been scheduled to help close this research gap.

The first contribution is by one of the leading authors from the critical approach. Starting from his earlier findings that show a discrepancy between official goals and actual policy outcomes in transport policy Oliver Schwedes applies a combination of actor-centered and discursive analysis. Firstly he identifies changing power relations between the central actors that explain policy outcome. Secondly Schwedes identifies substantial conflicts within the policy discourse that formally is presented as consensual. The official policy discourse even works as “camouflage of real interests” and as a deliberate “symbol-policy” to react to public pressure without changing substantial policies (citations taken from Schwedes in this issue). The article results in a contribution to the political state of the art by developing a three-step-program to free transport policy from the dominance of single economic interest groups. This program goes behind the very field of transport policy as it could be applied to other areas with similar problems in the same way.

The second contribution to this special issue also starts with the finding of a discrepancy between the official claim to implement an Integrated Transport Policy (ITP) and the failure of adopted policies to fulfill this claim. Detlef Sack is a leading researcher of local governance and public private partnership in transport policy (PPP). He applies this lens to get a more detailed explanation for the failure of two selected ITP programs. The article shows a mismatch between the quick implementation of hierarchy and competition driven by the European Commission on the one hand and the slower adjustment of cooperation at the regional level on the other hand. Sack suggests a better flow of information in the interplay of different levels and forms of governance in the European Union. The article not only contributes to the political and theoretical discourse. Sack also contributes to the methodological state of the art of policy analysis by illustrating how a governance perspective can help to overcome shortages of the traditional view in German policy analysis that contrasts “the state” against “the society”.

Christiane Miethe uses the case of eCall to discuss a more general theoretical problem of European policy making. The general interest of her paper is the question which private interest groups gain access to expert groups of the European Commission. Miethe applies the “logic of access” by Pieter Bouwen to the case of eCall. The article clarifies which goods can be delivered by interest groups to gain access. Miethe also shows that non-business interests like member states also fall under the “logic of access”.

Nils C. Bandelow and Stefan Kundolf aim at explaining changes of the European Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) Galileo. They apply the Advocacy Coalition Framework of Paul A. Sabatier and others to the case by arguing that Galileo should contribute to the understanding of the development of belief systems, advocacy coalitions, and the role of policy-oriented learning in nascent transnational subsystems. The case study confirms most of the hypotheses of the ACF. It thereby argues that in transnational policy networks the general views on international policies might act as core beliefs that generate coalitions and shape perceptions of information.

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