1. Introduction: form and function in governance for sustainable development

William M. Lafferty

The relationship between form and function is an ongoing theme of the ancient discourse on political steering. Governments are never established in a theoretical vacuum. They reflect the exigencies of their time and place, as well as the conflicting interests and power bases of their major actors, both individual and collective. They also reflect the basic values and goals inherent in the interdependent social and economic systems that government is designed to 'steer'. The 'form' of government tends, in other words, to reflect the dominant 'functions' of the different systems and actors that are to be governed.

Political analysts have, for example, long debated the functional interdependence between the Western model of liberal-pluralist democracy and the dominant values and tasks of free market societies. American, Canadian and British theorists in particular have identified the Western model as 'competitive democracy', with 'competition' understood as a basic feature of politics viewed as a market analogy. From Schumpeter, through Dahl and Macpherson to Held – with continuous input from scores of comparative democratic empiricists – Western democracy has increasingly been portrayed as having taken on the distinct form and symbolism of 'market democracy'.¹ The established position of the model has also been strong enough to generate scores of alternative theorists. Debates between 'realists' and 'idealists' have been a dominant feature of academic political science throughout the latter half of the past century. The models of the realists have been criticized as being overly dependent on the exigencies of the capitalist-pluralist system; and the models of the idealists as being abstract, naive and even dangerous ('destabilizing').

The debates have generated considerable heat, and – for the purpose of the present volume – at least some light. They have served to illustrate the major theme of the book: that basic principles of instrumental efficiency require that the overall form of governance in a society reflect and serve the dominant functions of the system(s) to be governed. Further, the debates provide an alternative profile to the type of discourse aimed at here. **While the discourse**

among ‘realists’ and ‘idealists’ was primarily among academics and primarily theoretical, the discourse to be encouraged here is more pragmatic, applied and strategic.

The difference can be illustrated with reference to the most relevant current discourse: the attempt to develop alternative forms of ‘green’ or ‘ecological’ democracy.² The underlying notion here is that competitive or liberal-pluralist democracy is not adequate to the type of socio-economic transition deemed necessary to rectify major environmental and ecological challenges. To the contrary, as both an integral part of the dominant capitalist system of Western societies and an increasingly key feature of Westernization through globalization, the model of ‘market democracy’ emerges as a problematical adjunct to the relationship between economic growth and ecological degradation. To the degree that unsustainable production and consumption are a logical consequence of liberal-pluralist market societies, any change in the direction of sustainable development means that the dominant mode of democracy in these societies must come under scrutiny.

To be scrutinized as a functional adjunct does not mean, however, that the model must be completely replaced, either in the service of utopian democratic theory or anti-globalization rhetoric – the two leading strains of the ‘green democracy’ critique. The issue can – and in the present view *should* – be addressed within a discourse on pragmatic, functional governance: a discourse devoted to the adaptation of current democratic values, procedures and institutions to the functional prerequisites of sustainable development. Such a discourse was initiated by Lafferty and Meadowcroft in 1996, and has been subsequently followed up by these and other authors.³ The discourse has also been joined in a very specific and highly relevant fashion by the Public Management Service (PUMA) of the OECD through its programme on Governance and Sustainable Development.⁴ The programme aims to clarify the nature and role of specific governing mechanisms for sustainable development – institutions, procedures, policy instruments, etc – and is an important point of reference for the present study.

The general task of adapting democratic form to sustainable development function has thus served as a broad framework for the SUSGOV (Governance for Sustainable Development) project. At the outset of the project the working idea for structuring the individual studies was: ‘What works where, when and how for the promotion of sustainable development?’ The discussion initially focussed on policy instruments, but gradually evolved into the broader issue of ‘governance’. This thematic focus corresponded well with the purpose of the ProSus (Programme for Research and Documentation for a Sustainable Society) research unit. Defined as a ‘Strategic Research Programme’ at the University of Oslo, the purpose of ProSus is to produce knowledge that improves the effectiveness of Norway’s implementation of the commitments

made to sustainable development at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. With a strong emphasis on both comparative analysis and the demonstration effect of ‘best practice’, the object of SUSGOV has been to bring together an international team of policy and governance experts – each within their respective problem-related contexts – to address the challenge of better adapting current governance mechanisms, institutions and procedures to the functional requirements of sustainable development. The task is thus ‘normative’ in the sense that the project deals with a goal-related and value-laden programme for change. The specific valences of the programme, however, are taken from the United Nations programme for sustainable development, not from the opinions or preferences of either ProSus or the individual researchers invited to participate.

Each study thus aims to communicate insights into the relationship between the overall goals of the sustainable development (SD) programme and the form(s) of governance that might better promote the goals. This does not imply any form of programmatic commitment to sustainable development among the participants, nor even a common understanding of what sustainable development entails. It *does* reflect, however, a common acceptance of the ‘differentness’ of sustainable development as an overarching goal; though, as we will see, the ‘commonality’ here is hardly unison.

By highlighting the key issues that have emerged during the course of the project discussions, and as a preface to the summary perspectives put forward by the editor in the concluding chapter, the two major topics of the project will be outlined here: *rational democratic governance*, as both underlying logic and goal of the sustainable development programme; and the ‘*differentness*’ of *sustainable development*, as the key premise for identifying and analysing the specific topics, mechanisms and instruments taken up in each study. These themes have served as conceptual ‘touchstones’ for both anchoring commonality and highlighting differences of opinion and approach within the research team. They provide many of the key concepts and premises for the ‘form follows-function’ problematic, serving thereby to clearly distinguish the approach from related discourses on ‘eco-modernization vs sustainable development’ (see below), and more recent systematic analyses of ‘new instruments of environmental governance’ (Jordan et al. 2003).

RATIONAL DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

If the idea of ‘form following function’ is to be fruitfully applied to the task of adapting governance to sustainable development, it must build on a premise of rational democratic governance. One must believe that the task of achieving sustainable development is a rational one: a process that can, to a reasonable

degree, be ‘steered’ by governing procedures and institutions; and one must assume that governments committed to sustainable development are willing to alter existing governing systems in order to better achieve SD goals. As indicated above, all of the governments covered by the individual studies are committed to this understanding of rational democratic governance; as are all the major organizations – UNCSD, UNEP, EU, EEA, OECD, etc – working with strategies and implementation.

Democracy and Steering

The American political philosopher Carl Cohen (1971) has identified ‘rationality’ as one of two logically necessary ‘presuppositions’ for democracy (the other being ‘community’). For democracy to function as a system for public choice and directive ‘steering’, it must be based on normal principles of logic and rules and guidelines for public debate and decision-making. The root of the term *demo-cracy* derives from the Greek word *kratein* (*kratos*), indicating ‘power’ or ‘authority’; and the root of the term ‘govern’ derives from the Latin and Greek terms for ‘steering’ or ‘piloting’ a ship. The core notion of ‘democratic governance’ thus refers to the rational steering of a community in directions reflecting the power and authority of the community membership.

The etymology is important here for two reasons: first, to emphasize that it is a basic purpose of governance to *steer* a community in a stipulated direction; and, second, to focus the challenge of *democratic* governance with respect to rational norms for formulating and realizing the authority (‘will’) of the community. Together the two dimensions indicate that: (1) whether we call it ‘governing’ or ‘governance’, the purpose and responsibility of specific ‘governments’ is to direct and steer change; and (2) irrespective of competing schools of policy-process research (Sabatier 1999), democratic governance presupposes a sequential instrumental logic (ends and means), which is open to external evaluation and adjustment. While the first dimension highlights the *strategic responsibility of governments*, the second highlights the *normative basis for rational implementation*.

In the present work these dimensions will be associated with two key features of the political programme for sustainable development – features that have become manifest at all levels of government: the inherent nature of the SD programme as a strategic effort to achieve change, and a strong normative commitment to hold governments responsible for effective implementation.⁵

An initial guideline for adapting the notion of ‘governance’ to sustainable development is, therefore, an emphasis on the strategic and responsible nature of the steering in question. The notion of governance implied is thus both conventional in a linguistic sense, and politically ‘timely’ in a pragmatic sense of applied science. The term ‘governance’ has a long history in the political

science literature, and a relatively much shorter history in discourses on ‘partnership’ and ‘stakeholder cooperation’.

Governance

Linguistically, ‘governance’ has traditionally connoted ‘the act or process of governing’, with the latter primarily associated with governmental steering by regulation and sanctions. Modern theories and discourses on public administration and policy implementation have, however, expanded the connotation to include many other forms of steering.⁶ The evolution originally focused on economic policy instruments, but has in recent years increasingly focused on other instruments designed to alter and channel the behaviour of individual and collective actors. As a reflection of this latter trend, governance has currently come to indicate the totality of ‘mechanisms’ and ‘instruments’ available for influencing social change in preordained directions. It is interesting to note in this context that the social sciences (as well as the OECD and UN/EU policy ‘apparatuses’) still operate largely with technical analogies. This is perhaps not surprising, however, given that most of the issues discussed could reasonably be viewed as an updated version of ‘social engineering for sustainable development’.

Be that as it may, what appears to characterize the ‘linguistic shift’ in the use of governance over the past several decades is a general trend away from regulation as an effective means of achieving change. The entire debate within implementation analysis as to ‘top-down’ vs ‘bottom-up’ approaches mirrors a dual political trend in the West. On the one hand there has been a marked shift on the part of governments towards so-called ‘softer’ steering instruments; while on the other there has been a growing emphasis on decentralization and the mobilization of ‘civil society’. These trends have resulted in a significantly expanded list of potential steering mechanisms.

By way of illustration, the OECD originally operated with a list of three types of policy instruments (‘mechanisms to induce desired change’): ‘regulatory’, ‘financial’ and ‘informational’ (2001a). With the introduction of the idea of ‘policy mixes’, however, this list was expanded to cover six types of instruments; and, with a similar aim, ProSus has developed a list of six alternative ‘steering mechanisms’ (Table 1.1). Finally, we can mention that the recently reported project on ‘Innovation in Environmental Governance’ (see below), distinguishes instruments as ‘old’ and ‘new’: with the former very generally associated with ‘regulation’, and the latter encompassing ‘market-based instruments’, ‘voluntary agreements’ and ‘informational devices’ (primarily eco-labels) (Jordan et al. 2003).

The purpose of these lists is simply to illustrate the very broad nature of the steering concept that underlies the notion of governance being developed. Any

Table 1.1 Types of policy instruments and steering mechanisms

OECD

Command and control: licences/permits; ambient quality standards; emissions standards; process standards; product standards; prohibition bans

Economic instruments: charges; taxes; tradable emission permits; tradable quotas; environmental subsidies; deposit-refund systems; performance bonds; non-compliance fees; resource pricing

Liability, damage compensation: strict liability rules; compensation funds; compulsory pollution insurance; extended producers responsibility

Education and information: education campaigns for the general public; diffusion of technical information; publicity of sanctions for non-compliance; eco-labelling

Voluntary approaches: unilateral commitments; public voluntary programmes; negotiated agreements

Management and planning: environmental management systems; zoning; land use

ProSus

Rule steering: laws; regulations; guidelines; sanctions; redistributions of rights and advantages; public programmes

Economy and market steering: taxes; surcharges; fees; subsidies and other market-directed incentives

Normative steering: ideological direction; value campaigns; alternative scenarios

Educational steering: information campaigns; use of 'best cases'; consensus conferences

Motivational/emotional steering: advertising and the active use of symbolic communication

Cooperative steering: covenants; charters; voluntary agreements; negotiations; 'cooperative management regimes'

Source: OECD (2001b: 132) and working documents, ProSus.

democratically derived and sanctioned programme for social change can, in theory, employ one or more of the steering strategies and instruments identified. Governance through any one programme is then the totality of steering mechanisms employed, regardless of the seat of responsibility. Since several of the mechanisms are totally dependent on aspects of learning, cooperation, feedback and other forms of ‘non-governmental’ input, it becomes clear that the instrumentality employed in any specific steering initiative will vary considerably from a traditional understanding of ‘governing’ as command–control–compliance. Distinctions between ‘top-down’/‘bottom-up’ and ‘old’/‘new’ fade in this view (ideally) into a repertoire of pragmatically adjusted strategies and instruments. The ‘mix’ of mechanisms and instruments to be employed in any one programme will be directly dependent on the nature and goals of the programme, depending on the nature of the change that is trying to be achieved. This does *not* mean, however, that the programme itself is free of the rational constraints associated with the logic of strategic governance; nor – in the case of sustainable development – that individual *governments* are free of the overall responsibility for goal achievement.

Policy Implementation

The perspective underlying the form–function problematic can be further illustrated by a brief reference to the field of programme policy implementation. This area of studies focuses on the *modus operandi* of rational democratic steering; a vital scientific and pragmatic enterprise devoted to answering questions as to ‘What works, where, when and how?’⁷ It is also an academic discourse that has progressed far enough – theoretically and empirically – to enable a discussion of competing approaches and schools of understanding. There already exist comprehensive overviews of the field (Parsons 1995; Peters and Pierre 2003, Chs 16–19; O’Toole, Ch. 2, this volume), and one of the leading figures in the area, Paul Sabatier, has presented a comprehensive critical assessment of those theories and approaches, which, in his view, qualify as ‘scientifically promising’ theoretical frameworks (as well as clearly indicating those that, in his view, *don’t* qualify) (Sabatier 1999).

Sabatier’s work provides an important point of reference for any understanding of the policy implementation process. It is, however, directed primarily towards the task of assessing – and actually ‘certifying’ – alternative theories and approaches. While this may be an issue we want to return to later, it is important to point out that the studies presented within the SUSGOV framework have not been designed to represent any one ‘school’ of policy analysis; nor have they been designed to ‘test’ competing theories. The goal has been to highlight and address the ‘differentness’ of the implementation

problematic with respect to the goal of sustainable development, so as to draw out the implications for the governance- and policy-related discourses initiated by the UN, EU, OECD, etc. The contributors have responded to this challenge in their own way, emphasizing descriptive analysis and assessment rather than theoretical relevance (the continuation from Bressers is a clear exception).

For the sake of the broader discussion, however, it is nonetheless worthwhile to highlight the relevance of several aspects of the current approach for the more academic theoretical discourse being driven forward by Sabatier. In the hope of building better communicative bridges between the efforts of strategic and academic research in this area, we can briefly mention three points of potential interchange.

The logic of ‘stages’

First, it is worth noting that the ‘political’ programme for sustainable development – here referred to rather generally as the ‘UNCED process’ – specifically operates with what Sabatier identifies as the ‘stages approach to the policy process’. As presented (and specifically ‘defended’) in the Sabatier volume by Peter deLeon, it reflects a baseline processual logic similar to that expressed in the previous section on democratic rationality. The core idea, which is as old as policy research itself, is expressed in the following ‘sequentially delineated stages’ (deLeon 1999: 21):

- initiation;
- estimation;
- selection;
- implementation;
- evaluation;
- termination.

The importance of the stages approach is that it clearly emerges – in one form or another, though with very differing functions – in virtually every framework treated by Sabatier. As such, the idea serves as a common descriptive premise for the policy discourse itself.

More importantly, however, the general scheme has also been directly integrated into the UNCED process as a general scheme for developing and carrying through strategies for sustainable development. Partially this is surely due to a need for a simplified understanding of the ‘agenda for change’ as a basis for communication. But the scheme also characterizes the entire evaluative approach and task of the United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development (UNCSD). The work and publications of the Commission are steeped in strategic thinking, sequential implementation, monitoring, evaluation, revision, etc.

Table 1.2 Stylized ‘model’ for pursuing sustainable development through ‘Local Agenda 21’

Recognition of the existing planning and financial frameworks as well as other plans and programmes
The systematic identification, by means of extensive public consultation, of problems and their causes
The prioritization of tasks to address identified problems
The creation of a vision for a sustainable community through a participatory process involving all sectors of the community
The consideration and assessment of alternative strategic options
The establishment of a long-term local action plan towards sustainability, which includes measurable targets
The programming of the implementation plan towards sustainability, which includes measurable targets
The establishment of systems and procedures for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the plan

Source: Aalborg Charter, Part III, ICLEI website 1996–97.

One gets a clear idea of the basic approach from a typical ‘model’ for implementing Chapter 28 (‘Local Agenda 21’) of the Rio Programme of Action, *Agenda 21* (United Nations 1994). The version used here is taken from the so-called Aalborg Charter, which served to initiate and guide implementation of Chapter 28 in Europe (Table 1.2).

As the model clearly indicates, any attempt to either theorize on or evaluate such a policy for change presupposes a sequential stage approach. This does not imply an ontological commitment to the stages imagery as causal theory; merely a recognition that we cannot study implementation of sustainable development (in the given political frame) without taking the sequential logic into consideration.⁸

Top-down vs bottom-up vs ??

The second aspect of Sabatier’s work that warrants particular attention here is the well-known distinction between ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ approaches. At a critical juncture in the emergence of this issue, Sabatier presented a ‘minimum list’ of what he and his colleague Mazmanian viewed as critical factors in an implementation process whereby ‘an authoritative decision to change an

existing state of affairs achieves its goals' (Sabatier 1986: 28, originally presented in Sabatier and Mazmanian 1979).⁹

- clear and consistent goals;
- an adequate 'theory of causality' (the underlying logic of the implementation task);
- legal incentives, which secure a high degree of compliance from both public authorities and users, so as to avoid 'veto points';
- engaged and competent 'implementors' who apply their 'unavoidable assessments' to the advantage of the goals in question;
- support for the initiative from organized interest groups and other affected public authorities;
- stable socioeconomic and political conditions, which do not undermine the original political support for the initiative, or alter conditions underlying the 'theory of causality' (Sabatier 1986: 23–5, as presented in Kjellberg and Reitan 1995: 151, our translation).

The usefulness of this list lies in the fact that it was presented by Sabatier at a critical juncture in policy-process analysis, where he and Mazmanian believed they had taken a significant step towards a more unified predictive approach. It also represents a concise summary of evaluation benchmarks for the type of implementation task described here: the achievement of goal-related change through public decision-making and enactment under the general responsibility of public authorities. Finally, the list was strongly influenced by case-study materials of environmental policy application. Assuming, therefore, that the list *does* reflect the 'top-down' bias of *old style governmental* implementation (as claimed by critics of Sabatier), we can use it here as a converse benchmark for discussing the nature of *new style governance* for sustainable development. So as to indicate the type of comparative assessments that might be made, we can present a recent list from the OECD (2002) outlining 'recommended elements of a national strategy for sustainable development' (Table 1.3).

At a minimum, a comparison of the two lists indicates the extremely ambitious and much more diffuse nature of the SD implementation task. While the Sabatier–Mazmanian list could surely have been elaborated with sub-points, they would nonetheless be much more 'constrained' by the guidelines and steering mechanisms of the 'adequate causal theory' associated with more narrow policy goals. In the case of the OECD list the sub-points merely serve to emphasize the extreme openness and complexity of the strategic project.

One clear implication of this for further discussion is that the pretensions of the SD programme appear to presume the more 'authoritative' implementation guidelines of Sabatier and Mazmanian, while simultaneously endorsing the

Table 1.3 Elements of a national sustainable development strategy

a) Integration of economic, social and environmental objectives, and balance across sectors, territories and generations:

- linking local, national, regional and global priorities and actions
- linking the short term to the medium and long term
- linking the national, regional and global levels
- linking different sectors
- coherence between budgets and strategy priorities

b) Broad participation and effective partnerships:

- institutionalized channels for communication
- access to information for all stakeholders and effective networking
- transparency and accountability
- trust and mutual respect
- partnerships among government, civil society, private sector and external institutions

c) Country ownership and commitment:

- strong political and stakeholder commitment
- sound leadership and good governance
- shared strategic and pragmatic vision
- strong institution or group of institutions spearheading the process
- continuity of the national sustainable development strategy process

d) Developing capacity and enabling environment:

- building on existing knowledge and expertise
- building on existing mechanisms and strategies

e) Focus on outcomes and means of implementation:

- the means to assess and agree priority issues in place
 - coherence between budget, capacity and strategy priorities
 - realistic, flexible targets
 - linked to private sector investment
 - anchored in sound technical and economic analysis
 - integrated mechanisms for assessment, follow up, evaluation and feedback
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Source: OECD (2002: Box 3.2, p. 36).

extremely broad, interdependent and flexible guidelines of the OECD. To say that this appears to place the SD project somewhere between the ‘devil’ of top-down steering and the ‘deep blue sea’ of a bottom-up free-for-all, is hardly controversial, either within or without the SD persuasion. ‘Speaking truth to power’ is, however, a time-worn challenge for policy analysts; and the contrasting lists provide a useful point of departure for the discussion of ‘differentness’ below.¹⁰

Ideational vs institutional theories

Finally, it is interesting to point out that Sabatier’s most recent overview of policy-process theory awards the highest marks to ‘institutional rational choice’ (particularly the variant developed by Elinor Ostrom (1999) and her colleagues, designated as the ‘institutional analysis and development framework’ (IAD); and his own approach (together with Hank Jenkins-Smith), the ‘advocacy coalition framework’ (ACF).¹¹ Without entering into the metatheoretical discussion initiated by Sabatier here, it is both interesting and relevant to note that Jordan et al. (2003) – in their comparative analysis of ‘new’ instruments of environmental governance in eight OECD countries – indirectly accede to Sabatier’s judgement by choosing two major lines of theoretical approach to explain the ‘why’ of instrument selection and the ‘how’ of instrument application. These two lines are labelled ‘ideational theories’ and ‘institutional theories’, with Sabatier’s ACF singled out (along with Hall’s [1993] ‘social learning’ approach) as exemplary for the former. Ostrom is not given special recognition in their brief profile of ‘institutional’ theory, but their presentation of the major concepts of the theory clearly reflects similarities to Ostrom’s own persuasion.

This application by Jordan et al. – admittedly in generalized form – of the two frameworks designated as ‘front-runners’ by Sabatier, provides yet another contact point for discussing the implications of the SUSGOV studies. Since all of the studies presented attempt – in one way or another – to relate to the ‘differentness’ of sustainable development, we are operating within a topical area similar to the project by Jordan et al. on ‘innovation in environmental governance’ (2003). Given that the latter study has just appeared as the present work goes to press, there can be no expectation of systematic comparison – but the way should be open for interesting observations on both sides.

THE ‘DIFFERENTNESS’ OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Turning to the second major topic of the study, it has been a key assumption of the SUSGOV project that the task of implementing sustainable development is somehow ‘different’ – more demanding, comprehensive, challenging – than

the type of implementation task normally confronted by policy analysts. This is a premise that is: (1) clearly enunciated and broadly promulgated within the UNCED process; (2) has received widespread recognition in normative academic discourses dealing with the numerous demands of the ‘sustainability transition’ (for example, O’Riordan 1993, 1996; O’Riordan and Voisey 1999; Baker et al. 1997; NRC 1999; OECD 2001b); and (3) is clearly manifest in the records of those governments that have worked most seriously to realize the Rio commitments (Lafferty and Meadowcroft 2000; OECD 2002).

While it cannot be said that the contributors to this volume all accept the premise of ‘differentness’ in a standardized way, they have been willing to use it as a point of departure for the individual studies. It remains, therefore, to spell out in greater detail what the premise builds on, so as to determine the broader relevance of the studies for the discourse on SD governance and implementation.

Establishing the Conceptual Core

While issues of ‘sustainable harvests’ and the ‘sustainable use of natural resources’ have long been part of a broad discourse on resource management, it was in the United Nations’ effort to bring environmental problems to the fore of international attention that the term ‘sustainable development’ was first put forward.¹² The primary source for the concept is the concluding report from the World Commission on Sustainable Development, *Our Common Future* (WCED 1987). It is the understanding put forth here that laid the foundation for the UNCED process leading up to the Earth Summit in 1992, and that provides the normative framework for the conventions and agreements adopted in Rio. It is also the baseline understanding that supports and motivates the guidelines and procedures of the follow-up secretariat to Rio, the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), as well as the parallel activities of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the ‘Habitat’ programme, and other related UN initiatives.

The core definition of sustainable development from *Our Common Future* is stated as follows:

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:

- the concept of ‘needs’, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and
- the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs. (WCED 1987: 43)

Pointing out a near-universal tendency to cite only the first sentence of this definition – and thereby neglecting the crucial implications of the two ‘key concepts’ – Lafferty and Langhelle (1999) have attempted to express the core idea in terms of three interrelated semantic elements:

- *physical sustainability*: a normative principle that assigns moral prerogative to the need to protect and exploit natural life-support systems in a manner that secures the ongoing satisfaction of essential human needs;
- *generational equity*: a normative principle that requires physical sustainability to be achieved in a manner designed to guarantee essential need satisfaction for recurring future generations;
- *global equity*: a normative principle that requires physical sustainability to be regulated among countries such that the satisfaction of the essential needs of the world’s poor is given priority over the satisfaction of less-essential needs among the populations of wealthier countries.

Lafferty and Langhelle go on to point out that, beyond these core semantic elements, the idea of sustainable development is characterized by several different types of ‘semantic openness’. The implication of this is that:

As a principle to provide guidelines, or as an ethical code for human survival and progress, the concept is on a par with other high-minded terms such as democracy, freedom, human rights, and so on. The ‘openness of meaning’ of these concepts can never be closed. The content of sustainable development is thus not fixed once and for all. Its fruitfulness is linked to continued political discourse on the concept’s content and future goals; to continuing debates as to the instrumental implications of its normative aspirations. (Lafferty and Langhelle 1999: 26)

While this ‘solution’ may at first sound like a very open-ended point of departure for a project designed to highlight the ‘differentness’ of sustainable development as a programme for governance, this need not be the case. What the statement indicates is that we should not expect the definitional conflict over sustainable development to be ‘resolved’ by critical discourse alone. We can only enhance a more consensual understanding of the concept, and promote a more effective realization of its goals, by judicious analytic attempts to elucidate the instrumental consequences of applied uses of the general idea. Lafferty and Meadowcroft (2000), for example, were able to conduct a large-scale assessment of the implementation of sustainable development in nine countries and the European Union without taking a narrow programmatic stand on the ‘real’ meaning of sustainable development. Indeed, had the attempt been made to impose such a definition on the international research team, the project would surely have foundered at the start.

The key stipulation here is the notion of ‘judiciousness’: finding an analytic

framework that focuses the nature of sustainable development for the purpose of the project at hand – in this case casting light on the *particular* nature of sustainable development as a challenge to governance. This will be carried through by first outlining the distinctness of sustainable development as a political programme, and then following up with a stipulation of five ‘key characteristics’ of SD in practice. These characteristics are viewed as logically necessary ‘functional conditions’ – conditions that can be derived from the normative model underlying the UNCED programme – and which, if accepted, pose serious challenges to existing modes of governance in Western liberal-pluralist democracies.

The Distinctness of the Sustainable Development Programme

Despite a relatively large degree of ‘conceptual openness’, Lafferty and Langhelle conclude their explication of sustainable development on a note that points out significant differences between pursuing a path of ‘development as usual’ and pursuing a path of sustainable development. Lafferty and Meadowcroft (2000, Ch. 13) have pushed this perspective one step further by arguing that sustainable development also implies a path that is more demanding, both ethically and substantively, than ‘ecological modernization’. One can therefore imagine, at a minimum, four distinct modes of national development:

1. *market liberalism*: with little or no emphasis on either economic–social redistribution or environmental–ecological degradation;
2. *social-democratic liberalism*: which attempts to address the first concern, but has only marginal concern for the second;
3. *eco-modernization*: which may build on either (1) or (2), and which aims to ‘modernize’ these modes by adapting them to relatively narrow standards of environmental protection; and
4. *sustainable development*: which is committed to hindering and redressing environmental–ecological degradation within an integrated value framework of generational and global equity.

The essence of this distinction can be made more specific by trying to enunciate the logic of the political programme to achieve sustainable development. The interpretation presented here (Table 1.4) is based on a close reading of the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* and *Agenda 21: Programme of Action for Sustainable Development* (United Nations 1994), as well as a close monitoring of the work of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development over the past decade. The documents in question build on the normative–conceptual position put forth in *Our Common Future*, and have been unanimously adopted and continuously reaffirmed, by the members of the United Nations.

Table 1.4 The logic of the UNCED programme for sustainable development as interpreted by the ProSus research programme

Sustainable development is necessary because ‘over-development’ in the richest countries and ‘under-development’ in the poorest countries is causing harm to local, regional and global life-support systems

Levels of ‘under-’ and ‘over-’ development’ should be relativized to reasonable levels of satisfaction of ‘essential’ human needs

Poverty and a general lack of developmental resources (man-made, natural, human and social capital) are major causes of under-development in the poorest countries; and relatively minor indirect causes of harm to life-support systems

Changes in production and consumption patterns in ‘transition countries’ are contributing to both reasonable levels of development and more serious harm to life-support systems

Existing types and levels of production and consumption in the richest countries are the major drivers of harm to life-support systems

People living in poverty today are disadvantaged by both under-development and harm to life-support systems

Future generations are potentially disadvantaged by harm to life-support systems

Normative considerations of both human survival and global-generational equity require political, economic, social and cultural efforts to alleviate harm to life-support systems

By implication, the same normative considerations require efforts to alter conditions of over- and under-development

An effective and pressing implementation of these commitments is the major challenge of ‘governance for sustainable development’

The challenge must be addressed by governmental signatories to the United Nations accords: the responsibility for ‘governance’ rests with ‘governments’

The challenge has been specifically identified as one of national strategies, action plans and implementation, and the United Nations system is currently in the process of assessing progress on numerous aspects of the programme

Source: Working documents, ProSus and SUSGOV.

Clearly none of the three alternative paths of development listed above comply with the normative expectations of the programme as outlined. One may have very different opinions as to the overall *desirability* of the programme – and countries clearly *do* differ as to how the programme should be carried through – but the distinctness of the values and goals stipulated, and the marked activities of several leading nations (and the European Union) in pursuing the goals, would seem to be non-contestable. We are talking about a programme that requires effective political initiatives to ameliorate the negative impacts on life-support systems of over- and under-development within an ethical context of global and generational equity.

Key Characteristics and Functional Challenges

Accepting the core definition and political–strategic nature of the SD programme, the argument for functional ‘differentness’ can be made more specific for the problem of governance in terms of five ‘key characteristics’ of sustainable development. These characteristics (posited ‘exigencies’, ‘requirements’, ‘demands’) have been developed over a number of years, with presentations and discussions in numerous fora and evolving publications (for example, Lafferty 1996b, 2000, 2002; Lafferty and Meadowcroft 1996). The formulation here is designed to emphasize the functional aspect of the ‘form to follow function’ challenge, so as to indicate in more general terms the types of issues being addressed by the individual studies, as well as lay a foundation for the concluding discussion.

An exogenous – ‘outside-in’ – programme

It is a fundamental presupposition of democratic rationality, and a key empirical premise of policy implementation, that any programme to be realized by governance has its point of departure, and history of discussion and adoption, within the community of actors that is to be affected by the programme. Programmes and policies are ‘generated’ by indigenous interests; they arise to solve problems and distribute benefits and burdens among the members of the community. Nearly all case studies of policy processes begin with a presentation and analysis of the history of policy evolution, identifying specific backers and opponents of the initiative, and documenting the specifics of the decision-making stage.

In the case of sustainable development the history of the UNCED programme transpired largely outside of the realm of normal domestic politics. The number of actors involved was both very small and very professional, consisting predominantly of representatives of one or two governmental ministries and NGOs for environment and development. The specification of the programme took place over a period of five years (1987–92), mostly within closed committee sessions or working conferences for specially invited and certified representatives. The key issues of negotiation and the specifics of

the draft documents were known to relatively few people, and the vast majority of sub-policies were formulated as relatively abstract goals. Representatives from political parties were hardly ever represented as such, and the key issues being discussed and negotiated at the international level were generally not introduced into elections.

The distinctness of these features is, of course, relative. Many of the aspects are shared by other foreign-policy decisions and commitments; the visibility and politicization of the UNCED process was more marked in some countries than others (Lafferty and Meadowcroft 2000); and most countries had at the time some history of domestic 'environmental politics'. These qualifications do not detract, however, from the exceptional character of the programme as an 'outside-in' obligation. The implications of the key UNCED documents – the *Rio Declaration*, *Agenda 21* and the *International Convention on Climate Change* – were probably more comprehensive and demanding in their domestic socio-economic impacts than any other international agreements adopted prior to Rio. Section 3 of *Agenda 21*, for example, outlines the roles and responsibilities of the following 'major groups' in implementing the programme: women, children, youth, indigenous people and their communities, non-governmental organizations, local authorities, workers and their trade unions, business and industry, the scientific and technological community and farmers. Yet how many members of these communities were at all aware of what was being decided for them at Rio, and how representative of their interests were the negotiators on their behalf?

The agreements made at Rio had, in other words, to be 'brought home' for subsequent implementation. One of the first tasks of governments – virtually *all* national governments – was to decide how to communicate the results of the conference to their citizens and 'major groups'. Unlike most foreign-policy commitments this one required something from everyone. It was also a 'something' quite different from extant domestic politics on environment and development issues, and was so little transparent that it needed to be (literally) translated and transformed into realistic policies and sub-programmes. It was 'outside-in'; it was comprehensive; it was abstract; and it was explicitly normative. It defined its 'community' as virtually all domestic actors; and, for good measure, it added the interests of both 'future generations' and 'the world's poor' to the national political agenda. It was, in short, anything *but* 'governance as usual'.¹³

A trans-border, supra-national programme

At the same time that the UNCED programme made exceptional demands on domestic politics, it also presupposed new and more intense cooperation with neighbouring states, as well as increased coordination on a regional and global basis. Neither the consequences of environmental pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, access to clean water, or the protection of biodiversity can be effectively addressed within the realm of nation-state politics. As strongly argued

elsewhere (Dryzek 1987, 1996; Lafferty 2000, 2004) the intrinsic logic of ‘ecological rationality’ requires a systematic reworking of political cartography and the boundaries of democratic community. From a purely pragmatic point of view the language of UNCED and its numerous follow-up programmes is steeped in the language and prescriptions of ‘multi-level governance’. It is a fundamental premise of the ongoing work on SD strategies – whether under the UN, EU, OECD, or other regional bodies such as the Nordic Council – that the task cannot be achieved without a significant strengthening of bilateral cross-border agreements, multi-level coordination of political domains and multilateral supra-national steering. If there ever was a policy area that requires both a ‘pooling of sovereignty’ and a sense of ‘trans-national citizenship’, it is sustainable development. Both aspects acutely challenge existing images and institutions of governance.

A transformative programme

While there are considerable differences of opinion as to what an effective implementation of the UNCED programme entails, there can be little doubt that the ambitions enunciated in Rio – prefigured by the Brundtland Report (WCED) in 1987 – involve significant changes in economic, social and cultural institutions. Just *how* significant is, of course, a highly contentious topic. It is not necessary to go into the issue of ‘weak’ vs ‘strong’ sustainability (Daly 1992; Beckerman 1994; Beckerman 1995; Jacobs 1995; Dobson 1996); nor the issue of economic growth and sustainable development (Lafferty and Langhelle 1999); nor the more recent discourse on ‘sustainable development as eco-modernization’ (Jansen et al. 1998; Lafferty and Meadowcroft 2000, Ch. 13; Langhelle 2000). We can simply refer to the position taken by virtually all of the major organizations working with sustainable development as an implementation challenge to the effect that SD requires – at least of the OECD countries in focus here – a ‘decoupling’ of the ‘pressures’ of existing economic and social ‘drivers’ on natural life-support systems. Even though the call for decoupling is usually only one of many steering mechanisms prescribed for sustainable development, it is a mechanism with radical implications for ‘business as usual’. Whether under the UN, the EU, the OECD or the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) (see Lafferty, Ch. 7 and Ruud, Ch. 8, this volume), the endorsement of decoupling indicates that serious change is necessary to realize a transition to sustainable development.

Furthermore, the related calls by these organizations for ‘sectoral policy integration’ to achieve decoupling indicates that the change is to be comprehensive across all existing policy sectors, and that it is to involve a ‘balanced’ integration of environmental, economic and social concerns. Given that the aim of these bodies is clearly not to just decouple – and leave *uncoupled!* – the

overall goal is clearly a new environmental–economic–social constellation. Dusting off a Marxist analogy, the posited need to decouple imposes a burden on the governing ‘superstructure’ to both decouple and recouple the ‘means of production’ from/to the ‘means of nature’.

A holistic, interdependent and contingent programme

Were Marx and Marxism still ‘alive’, we can imagine how a ‘Marxist Strategy for Sustainable Development’ might ‘universally’ respond to the governance challenge. But they are not – and few are they who, under *any* guise, advocate a ‘one-size-fits-all’ understanding of the ‘recoupled’ SD state. By its very nature the totality of the UNCED programme presupposes a task confronted by holistic interactions, interdependencies and unpredictable results. In addition to issues of community responsibility and political coordination across domains – and as a direct challenge to decoupling through sectoral integration – *recoupling* presupposes radical new images and understandings of sustainability in practice. It requires such changes, moreover, across a multiplicity of interdependent environmental–economic–social–cultural constellations. The goals and principles are universally put forth. But the functional interactions among the new societal building blocks are extremely complex and unpredictable, and the ‘decoupled’ actors and their interests must be reconstituted within different ecological and natural resource settings. The goal of SD thus presupposes a transition that is on the one hand strongly value-laden and purposeful, while on the other being open, interactive and contextually adaptable. If it were not for the historical fact that the transition from a traditional agrarian society to a liberal free market society has been faced by similar, though less complex and holistic, demands, one might think that the SD programme *was* utopian! Be that as it may, the functional prerequisites for changing to, and maintaining, a sustainable society involve enormous educational and organizational demands.

A normative long-term programme

Finally, there is the characteristic that seemingly creates most controversy: the normative and long-term nature of the programme. From the Brundtland Commission onwards, the discourse on sustainable development has been steeped in a rhetoric of compelling urgency and long-term commitment. It is viewed as an idealistic programme that ‘must’ be implemented, and that ‘must’ have a degree of permanence that stretches well into the future. As pointed out elsewhere (Lafferty 1996a), the moral ‘demands’ of the UNCED programme appear to rest on two major types of ethical legitimacy: the posited objectivity of a ‘realist’ (natural law) argument, supported by scientific argument and evidence; and the moral compulsion of a ‘consensual’ argument, resting on the unanimous support for the programme among the member states

of the United Nations. While the first claims moral commitment in the name of preserving the natural basis for life on earth, the second claims commitment on the basis of the consensual rules of the ‘game’ – the only ‘game’ of governance in place on a global basis.

It is with this characteristic that perhaps the greatest challenges for governance for sustainable development arise, since they are challenges related to the nature of contemporary democracy itself. It was pointed out above (in the first characteristic) that the numerous aspects of commitment attaching to the Rio accords were never discussed in detail in domestic elections, and that this clearly creates instrumental difficulties for hands-on implementation of the programme. What is at issue with the present characteristic, however, is the degree to which the commitments *can and should* be subjected to ongoing democratic decision-making. Whereas on the one hand sustainable development has been identified with a need for widespread participatory involvement (Meadowcroft, this volume), on the other it is clear that many of the most crucial commitments – reversing the degradation of natural life-support systems; satisfying the essential needs of the world’s poor; securing minimal standards of development and well-being for future generations – require a form of robust continuity that is not easily achieved in liberal–pluralist democracies. Key decisions for sustainable development must, in other words, have a degree of ‘authoritativeness’ that is not subjected to changing political whims.

Does this imply that the SD programme *is* – as many of its critics maintain – inherently non-democratic? Of course not. The use of the term ‘authoritative’ (building as it does on Easton’s (1953, 1965) widely acknowledged functional understanding of a political system as providing an ‘authoritative allocation of values’) is distinct from the connotation of ‘authoritarian’. What is envisioned here (Lafferty 2000, 2004) is a form of ‘robust continuity’ that is secured within the normative ‘toolbox’ of democratic theory *in general*; a more ‘essential’, ‘generic’ understanding of ‘democracy’, which maintains the core values of liberal–pluralist ‘Western’ democracy, but which aims to create a constellation of values, instruments, procedures and institutions that in sum transcends the predominant model.¹⁴ At least two ways of generating such an alternative are available: (1) treating key commitments to sustainable development as ‘constitutional’ rather than ‘political’ issues; and (2) generating new mechanisms of governance within the general realm of democratic norms and concepts.

It is not necessary to go further into this discussion at this point (since it is an important facet of the project to assess the degree to which the different contributions advertently or inadvertently touch on the issue), but it seems safe to say that a serious analysis of the challenges facing governance for sustainable development clearly implies a challenge to existing democratic norms

and procedures. As stressed in an earlier publication by Lafferty and Hagtvet (1984, produced in the spirit of Robert Dahl's [1970, 1979, 1989] functionally pragmatic approach to democratization): democracy is an 'idea in history'. It must be continually assessed and reworked to meet the changing exigencies of human development. Any tensions between the values and procedures of liberal-pluralist ('modern') democracy and the values and goals of sustainable development can only be resolved through an open and empirically based dialogue. While the studies presented here have not been specifically designed to engage this problematic, they provide an excellent basis for initiating the dialogue.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The perspectives outlined above have served as a general framework for the ongoing discussions within the SUSGOV project. With the exception of the 'differentness' of sustainable development as an implementation task, however, they have not been adopted as a common analytic frame. The purpose of the project has been to give each contributor leeway to define the aspect of SD implementation that she or he felt was most interesting and relevant in a governance context. The interpretation of 'differentness' – the aspect to be focussed on – has been left up to each contributor. As the reader will soon discover, however, the internal discussions of the project workshops clearly have led to a greater degree of commonality than is usual for such projects. Drawing out the implications of this commonality for the issues raised will be the task of the concluding chapter, Chapter 11.

The contributions are presented in an order that leads the reader through successive stages of conceptualizing and working with the SD implementation challenge. In Chapter 2 Laurence J. O'Toole provides a comprehensive overview of the SD problematic within the context of American and European policy research. Accepting the prospect of 'differentness' as a point of departure, the chapter aims to draw out aspects of differentness with respect to current discourses on implementation research. Building on his own extensive knowledge of the field, O'Toole provides a nuanced insight into both the weaknesses and strengths of the research area with respect to more effective SD implementation. He concludes by placing greatest emphasis on the need for more ongoing interactive learning and the development of new participatory institutions.

In Chapter 3 Elizabeth Bomberg assesses the differentness of the SD challenge within the context of the European Union. She begins by providing a brief historical overview of the development of SD as a policy area within the EU, and then gives a point-by-point assessment of the role of EU institutions

in promoting SD. Attention is then directed to an assessment of specific steering mechanisms in EU governance so as to bring forth the tensions and potential synergies between SD principles and current modes of governance. She concludes with a probing discussion of the relationship between form and function in EU governance, whereby she reverses the direction of the form–function challenge: How do the functions of established EU governance impact the pursuit of sustainable development?

Lennart J. Lundqvist follows up Bomberg in Chapter 4 with an in-depth assessment of the Swedish strategy for achieving ‘ecological sustainable development’. He profiles the Swedish approach as a prototype of ‘Management by Objectives and Results’ (MBOR), emphasizing how the approach contributes to long-term ‘self-binding’ governance, a key requirement of the SD programme. His detailed description of the Swedish strategy provides a clear ‘benchmark’ for cross-national comparisons, and Lundqvist exploits the comparative potential by using the MBOR framework to look first at the Dutch system of ‘National Environmental Policy Plans’ (NEPPs), and then the EU strategy for sustainable development. Complementing Bomberg, he concludes by drawing out alternative positive and negative implications of a more conscious application of the MBOR approach as a mechanism for SD governance in the European Union.

Both Bomberg and Lundqvist stress the potential contradiction between the EU’s primary market-oriented function and the demands of sustainable development. This is also an aspect of Susana Aguilar Fernández’s assessment of the Spanish strategy for sustainable development in Chapter 5. Aguilar Fernández provides a critical view of governmental efforts in Spain to formulate and carry through an SD strategy. Though her major criticism focuses on what she perceives as a marked disjunction between rhetoric and practice with respect to participatory involvement, she also faults the strategy for failing to problematize (much less analyse) the existing negative SD consequences of the dominant free market economy. In Aguilar Fernández’s view the stress placed by the European Union on sustainable development is primarily exploited in Spain in a negative direction. The government has, she believes, used the signal effect of EU policy to play rhetorical games without serious follow-up or inclusive political involvement. Given that this is hardly a unique feature for Spain, her in-depth analysis of the Spanish SD effort provides important insights into the vagaries of ‘outside-in’ programmes.

The critical conclusions on participation by Aguilar Fernández for Spain provide an excellent ‘bridge’ for Meadowcroft’s more general treatment of participation in Chapter 6. Moving away from the more specific national and supra-national contexts of Bomberg, Lundqvist and Aguilar Fernández, Meadowcroft looks at participation from a broader conceptual point of view. His aim is to draw out both the normative and practical implications of three

different ‘traditions’ and mechanisms of participation: citizens, stakeholders and local communities. Having clarified the nature of participatory input in general, and further highlighted the positive and negative aspects of each of the traditions and their mechanisms, Meadowcroft goes on to provide a series of judicious conclusions as to what we should – and perhaps more importantly, should *not* – expect from participation for sustainable development. His treatment can be viewed as a comprehensive ‘guide’ to the potential positive and negative impacts of alternative participatory arrangements, thus serving to raise the level of awareness as to just how complicated this most widely touted of SD governance mechanisms is.

In Chapter 7 Lafferty takes up yet another of the posited key mechanisms for SD governance (OECD 2001b), sectoral policy integration. The chapter takes its point of departure in OECD efforts to clarify the governance challenge, with a particular emphasis on ‘decoupling’ as a crucial goal of sustainable development. It then goes on to identify sectoral policy integration as a key mechanism for achieving decoupling, and presents extensive documentation of commitment to the mechanism within the UNCED and EU programmes for SD. The analysis provides a critical overview of the conceptual development of the idea with the aim of clarifying its essential dimensions, and then applies the resulting framework to existing case studies of SD governance. Looking most particularly at Germany, the Netherlands and Canada, the chapter concludes by outlining a possible model for sectoral integration, which combines the key characteristics of each case.

Lafferty’s conclusions provide yet another bridge to Ruud’s analysis of business as ‘partner for sustainable development’ in Chapter 8. Taking up the governance challenge in one of its broadest – and most critical – aspects, Ruud goes directly to the heart of the decoupling problematic by asking how business has engaged with the issue. Relying on a combination of secondary analysis of case studies and original material from Norway, Ruud outlines and documents the crucial difference between ‘eco-efficiency’ and ‘eco-effectiveness’. Providing data that clearly shows that major industrial actors are willing to sign on to sustainable development in pursuit of greater eco-efficiency, he demonstrates that this does not always result in greater overall eco-effectiveness. That which proves ‘efficient’ in an isolated process or product characteristic, does not always prove ‘effective’ when assessed within a broader consequential framework. ‘Rebound effects’ can not only undermine piecemeal ‘green’ reform, but lead, on the aggregate and over time, to a worsening of the situation. Ruud’s analysis provides ample illustration – at the ‘cutting edge’ of business involvement for sustainable development – of just how complicated the governance challenge for business is.

In Chapter 9 the analytic perspective is raised from specific steering mechanisms to national SD involvement through processes of dispersion within the

international community. Building on the extensive work carried out by Martin Jänicke and his colleagues in Berlin, Helge Jörgens focuses his analysis on the spread of ‘green plans’ and strategies for sustainable development. Concentrating most specifically on the ‘outside-in’ nature of the SD challenge, Jörgens inquires as to the ‘when’ and ‘why’ of national engagement. Relying on extensive databases and time series, he carries out a series of longitudinal analyses whereby he tests out alternative hypotheses of ‘harmonization’, ‘imposition’ and ‘diffusion’. His conclusion is that the three processes appear to promote engagement in different categories of nations at different time periods. Whereas diffusion with gradual harmonization accounts for the spread of strategic planning within the most highly developed OECD countries, imposition through conditionality provides a better account of the spread to less developed and transition countries. As a direct contribution to the governance discourse, the analysis demonstrates how processes of diffusion and learning directly influence the adoption of different steering mechanisms. This insight then points further towards the potential for independently strengthening the infrastructure and procedures whereby diffusion and learning take place.

Whereas Jörgens’ chapter clearly rests on a presupposition of SD ‘differentness’ (as an ‘outside-in’ programme), Chapter 10 by Hans Bressers raises theoretical and practical issues that clearly nuance the ‘differentness’ premise. As one of the leading ‘instrumentalists’ in European policy research, Bressers and his colleagues have long been conceptualizing and testing the effectiveness of environmental policy instruments. In this most recent contribution Bressers presents a thoroughly updated version of what is now termed ‘Contextual Interaction Theory’ (CIT). The chapter elaborates the theory in detail, and provides specific case applications with respect to several aspects of Dutch initiatives for sustainable development. In addition to the substantive results reported, the chapter is significant for its forthright contention that: (1) policy implementation can and should be approached within a deductive–predictive frame of analysis; (2) while the pursuit of sustainable development has resulted in numerous calls for innovative approaches and governing mechanisms, the overall success of implementation will to a large degree rest on the same type of ‘end-point’ interactions and influences among strategic actors that has always been the key ‘sticking point’ of successful policy implementation.

In one sense Bressers’ very specific deductive–empirical approach to SD governance brings us full circle on the issue of ‘differentness’. One implication of his analysis is that, despite sustainable development being radically different in political origin, scope, transformative intent, complexity and moral urgency, it must nonetheless *also* be viewed as part of a deeper and ongoing challenge of the essential dynamics of achieving change through governmental initiatives *per se*. While such an interpretation is clearly a timely reminder

not to let the well-washed ‘baby’ of policy instrumentation vanish in a change of bathwater for sustainable development governance, it also opens for an alternative perspective.

The CIT approach rests on the proposition that there are three ‘core variables’ for predicting instrumental outcomes: ‘motivation’, ‘information’ and ‘power’. Assuming that these variables *are* core variables (in the succinct theoretical sense implied by the theory), the question becomes one of the balance between the general (deductive) and specific (contextual) aspects of the theory. Bressers’ approach may – and clearly, in the Dutch context, *does* – explain a large part of the variance of selected governmental instruments. But given the ‘embeddedness’ of ‘motivation’, ‘information’ and ‘power’ in both national systems and a broad diversity of sectoral policy sub-systems, there is no way to avoid the broader implications of SD ‘differentness’ – however ‘messy’ and ‘wicked’ they may be.

In short, if the major implication of Bressers’ position is ‘*plus ça change – plus la même chose*’, the policy sciences are, at a minimum, confronted with a massive new challenge of creative communication and contextual relativization. ‘Sustainable development’ is now like ‘democracy’: it is universally desired, diversely understood, extremely difficult to achieve, and won’t go away. What more could the intrepid cadre of international policy analysts ask for? ‘Speaking truth to power’ indeed.

NOTES

1. The classic texts are Schumpeter (1943) and Dahl (1956, 1971), with specific summary profiles of the model by Lively (1975), Macpherson (1977) and Held (1987). The term ‘market democracy’ was given foreign-policy prominence during the Clinton presidency in the United States.
2. Representative contributions here are O’Neill (1993), Buell and DeLuca (1996), Doherty and de Geus (1996), Mathews (1996), Faber (1998) and Lundmark (1998).
3. See for example Williams and Matheny (1995), Lafferty and Meadowcroft (1996), Lafferty (2000, 2002) and Lundqvist (2001, 2004).
4. See the OECD website: <http://www.oecd.org/puma>.
5. Both aspects are clearly reflected in the following statement by Gro Harlem Brundtland, head of the UN World Commission on Environment and Development. In her preface to the ‘short version’ of the Rio action plan, *Agenda 21*, she states that: ‘[The] Agenda for Change gives people a useful tool to hold their political leaders responsible for their acts and omissions in implementing what was agreed at Rio. The promises made at Rio can only be fulfilled in time to secure our future if governments are inspired and pressured by their citizens – by people willing to support difficult decisions and to demand change’ (Brundtland 1993).
6. The academic literature on ‘governance’ is growing rapidly. See Pierre (2000) and Pierre and Peters (2000) for comprehensive overviews. Of particular relevance for the substantive aspects of the present study is the extensive report from the project on ‘Innovation in Environmental Governance’ by Jordan et al. (2003). Other works of clear relevance for the applied aspects of the present approach are Rhodes (1997), Kettl (2002), Perri 6 et al. (2002), and Lynn et al. (2001). On the issue of comparative assessment of governance (the ‘what

works where, when and how' aspect), Bovens et al. (2001) provide highly relevant evaluative perspectives, though their analyses do not cover environmental issues. For an updated comprehensive survey of the traditional 'governmental' aspects of 'governance', see Peters and Pierre (2003).

7. Wayne Parsons (1995) differentiates the broad field of public policy research in terms of four major frameworks: 'meta analysis' (the analysis of the analytic process itself); 'meso analysis' (issues of defining and setting the agenda for public policy); 'decision analysis' (with a focus on how public choice is constituted and effected through decision-making); and 'delivery analysis' (the entire chain of implementation, including choice of instruments, application, evaluation, performance, revision, etc). The current study is principally oriented towards the last framework: delivery analysis. Reformulating the problematic of the study in Parsons' terms: given that the general goals and agenda of the sustainable development programme have been determined within the United Nations system (meso analysis) and that the overarching decision to pursue the programme has been made through national agreements and commitments (decision analysis), how are these commitments being followed up in practice, and what do the exigencies of the follow-up imply for the state of governance (delivery analysis)?
8. More explicitly, the view expressed here adheres to the position taken by Parsons in his comprehensive overview of public policy research: 'This book adheres to the stagist approach because, given the sheer range of frameworks and models which are available as analytical tools, we need some way in which this complexity can be reduced to a more manageable form . . . what needs to be accepted is that contemporary policy analysis is a multiframed activity. The strength of the stages approach is that it affords a rational structure within which we may consider the multiplicity . . . of reality. Each stage therefore provides a context within which we can deploy different frames' (Parsons 1995: 80).
9. The original list of 'conditions for successful policy implementation' has been re-presented and re-worked several times. The list used here is that condensed by Kjellberg and Reitan (1995). The original list reads as follows (Sabatier and Mazmanian 1979): '(1) The program is based on a sound theory relating changes in target group behaviour to the achievement of the desired end-state (objectives). (2) The statute (or other basic policy decision) contains unambiguous policy directives and structures the implementation process so as to maximize the likelihood that target groups will perform as desired. (3) The leaders of the implementing agencies possess substantial managerial and political skill and are committed to statutory goals. (4) The program is actively supported by organized constituency groups and by a few key legislators (or the chief executive) throughout the implementation process, with the courts being neutral or supportive. (5) The relative priority of statutory objectives is not significantly undermined over time by the emergence of conflicting public policies or by changes in relevant socio-economic conditions that undermine the statute's 'technical' theory or political support.'
10. A further perspective on the challenge lies in the fact that Mazmanian and Kraft (2000) have recently identified the 'sustainability challenge' as the third major generation of environmental policy implementation in the United States. Given the relatively low interest in the US for sustainable development in general (Bryner 2000), and the very low interest in the follow-up of UNCED in particular, this raises interesting possibilities for the 'American-European dialogue' referred to by O'Toole in the present volume.
11. In his own words: 'Both of these research programs would fit Lakatos's (1978) characterization of "progressive"; that is, they are being used by a variety of scholars and seem to be developing increasing coherence and scope' (Sabatier 1999: 264).
12. The evolution of the term is given thorough treatment in Lafferty and Langhelle 1999, Ch. 1.
13. Peter May (2003: 226-7) has identified this type of implementation problem as 'policy without publics'. He envisions two broad strategies for dealing with the phenomenon: (1) direct governmental provision of programmes without relying upon other intermediates; and (2) attempts to stimulate and mobilize publics. He has, however, little more of substance to report on the issue.
14. The notion of such an 'essentialist' model builds on the pioneering conceptual work of Carl Cohen (1971) and Robert Dahl (1970, 1979, 1989), and is further elaborated in Lafferty and Hagtvet (1984) and Lafferty (2002).

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