

Preface

This book sprang originally from a simple source. As we worked together on earlier academic projects we also talked about our national differences – of custom, language and, inevitably, public policymaking. Eventually opportunities presented themselves (with a little help, as usual) and we were able to tailor at least some of our curiosities into the shape of a joint academic project. And now, three years later, we have a book that compares the police service with the hospital service, Leuven with Brighton, Belgium with England, and ‘then’ (1965) with ‘now’ (more than 40 years later years). It focuses on similarities as well as differences, and on continuities as well as changes. It examines the national level and the local. It also interrogates a range of contemporary academic approaches to policy analysis and international comparison. If we have done our job properly, readers should be able to get at least a flavour of that original fascination that prodded us to begin. How can two countries, so close to each other geographically and historically, be so different? Then (after some more detailed observation) are they really so different, or is that just a superficial stereotype?

When would-be authors approach publishers with propositions for academic books the publishers always ask ‘Who is this for?’ Our answer on this occasion is, first, advanced students of public management and public policy, and second, their professors. Both these groups, however, already have a lot of reading to do, so the obvious further question is why they should add this book to their existing burdens. Here the answer is a little more complicated. Obviously *Continuity and Change in Public Policy and Management* should be of special interest to those who have a particular focus on Belgium and England, or on hospitals or the police. However, we have tried to make its relevance go far beyond these (worthy and legitimate) special interests. Our aim has been to make the book relevant for anyone who has a general interest in the study of comparative public management and policymaking. We have attempted to achieve this broad relevance by using the particular chosen topics as vehicles with which to examine the usefulness of some much more general theories and models of the policy and management. We have tried to make these larger sets of ideas ‘work’ with a lot of detailed material, and have reflected at length on the successes and limitations of this application.

Much of the public management and public policy literature falls into a few well-recognized subsets. There are books on 'theory'. There are case studies, often of currently fashionable policies. There are a few histories, looking back over decades. There are methods texts, which discuss the properties and limitations of different ways of gathering and manipulating data. One reason why we hope that the present work will be of wider usefulness and interest is that it offers all these things together. It engages with theory, it provides new and original case studies, it spans 40 years of history and it contains considerable discussion of sources, tools and methods. Indeed, teachers could use it as a core book for a course that sought to integrate these different aspects of the subject (we hope they will).

As we write this preface the mass media are full of claims that we are on the verge of a new era in public policymaking. We have a global economic crisis that seems to be prompting hitherto unthinkable degrees of government intervention in the business sector. We have a new American President who has achieved remarkable popularity through an extended, cleverly nuanced exposition on the theme of 'change'. We have a recently enlarged European Union which is attempting to play a larger part as a global actor, well beyond its existing competencies in trade and agriculture. In both Belgium and England – our two focal countries – we can witness high levels of public discontent with contemporary governments, and a sense that the way policymaking is done itself needs to be transformed. Much is to be gained, we would suggest, from detailed, longer-term studies of such apparent turning points and new departures. *Continuity and Change* is our attempt to provide such an analysis.

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Leuven, January 2009