18 Narrative Policy Analysis

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Given the ubiquitous presence of stories in every aspect of policy, it seemed inevitable that sooner or later, stories would become a central object of study within policy analysis. As it turns out, it was later rather than sooner. For a long time, the field of policy analysis treated stories as inferior forms of information and reasoning, to be passed over in favor rigorous scientific methods and objective data.

It took until the late 1980s before a policy analyst—ironically, one with a background in statistics—demonstrated that good policy analysis revolves around crafting an argument, rather than applying logic and science (Majone 1989). This insight was part of a wider development which has received many labels, but which many have come to know as the "argumentative turn" in policy analysis (Fischer and Forester 1993). According to Fischer (2003), this development has resulted in a set of new approaches that present a "postempiricist" alternative to the dominant technocratic and empiricist models in policy analysis.

Among these new approaches is narrative policy analysis—even if the leading book on narrative policy analysis (Roe 1994) does not subscribe to all elements of the postempiricist agenda. According to Roe (1994, 2), the key practical insight of narrative policy analysis is this: "Stories commonly used in describing and analyzing policy issues are a force in themselves, and must be considered explicitly in assessing policy options." Rather than stories per se, Roe (1994, p. 3) focuses on policy narratives, which he defines as: "those stories—scenarios and arguments—that are taken by one or more parties in the controversy as underwriting and stabilizing the assumptions for policymaking in the face of the issue's uncertainty, complexity or polarization."

This chapter first asks what it means to explicitly consider narratives in policy analysis. It then discusses the variety of answers that researchers have given to that question. Next, we turn to the use of narrative policy analysis as a methodological approach procedure to deal with controversial policy issues marked by conflicting policy narratives. An important concept in this procedure is the notion of the metanarrative, which we explore in some detail. The last part of the chapter presents two brief case studies of actual applications of narrative policy analysis, focusing on the last step: identifying a metanarrative.

NARRATIVE COMMA POLICY COMMA ANALYSIS

What does it mean to explicitly consider narratives in policy analysis? While Roe connects narrative policy analysis with a very specific approach, it is not the only way to take stories into account. Other authors have developed different approaches which could be shared under the same label. What they demonstrate is how the label can be read to imply different methods, units of analysis, and research goals. These approaches configure the terms in the label in different ways. For example:

- the *narrative analysis of policy*, where the methods of narrative analysis are applied to the world of policy, often showing the narrative and symbolic structures that operate in policy processes (e.g., Stone 1997);

- the *analysis of policy narratives*, where different methods—often from the social sciences—are used to reconstruct the stories that actors tell about a policy issues, often showing how the same policy terms or measures are given meaning in different and conflicting ways (e.g., Bedsworth 2004);
- the *policy analysis of narratives*, where different methods—both from literary theory and social science—are used to analyze the relations among conflicting policy narratives in order to develop policy advice on how to proceed, e.g., how to recast the policy issue (e.g., Roe 1994);
- the *narrative of policy analysis*, where narrative analysis is used to excavate the narrative foundations of policy analysis itself, often showing hidden ideological assumptions and power structures and calling for more professional reflexivity and pluralism (e.g., Fischer and Forester 1993).

This is by no means an exhaustive set of configurations, but it does make us sensitive to the diversity of approaches that could lay claim to the label narrative policy analysis. In the literature, we see different choices—or rather, trade-offs—being made with regard to the methods, unit of analysis, and research objective.

As far as methods are concerned, the term *narrative analysis,* strictly speaking, refers to the branch of literary theory knows as narratology.[1] Narratology has developed concepts and methods with the specific aim to study the characteristics of narratives—or more precise—to study texts, broadly defined, in as far as they are narratives. Of course, there is much more going on in any specific text than narrative only, but narratology focuses primarily on the latter. Narrative is, generally speaking, defined as the narration of a sequence of events, where an event is defined as the transition from one state to another (e.g., Bal 1998).

The field has developed concepts to study three key aspects of any narrative: story, text, and narration (Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 3). Story refers to the set of events that are being narrated, abstracted from their specific representation in the text. Here, narrative analysis focuses on events, characters and plot. Text refers to the telling of the story in spoken or written discourse, although narrative analysis has been extended to also study narratives in other media than text. When studying text, narrative analysis tries to make sense of how the story is told, e.g., timing (the narration may not follow the chronology of the story) and so-called "focalization." Focalization is the perspective or prism through which the narrative content is being represented. The third aspect, narration, concerns the act of producing the narrative. The analysis of narration focuses on the narrator(s) and narratees that may be explicitly present in the text, even as characters, or may be implied by it. Of the three aspects, only the actual text is immediately available to the analyst as a unit of analysis. Story and narration can only be studied through the text.

In narrative policy analysis, the term *narrative analysis* sometimes refers to the abovementioned set of concepts and methods from literary theory. An example is the use of Propp's folktale framework to analyze policy narratives around a flooding disaster (Van Eeten 1999b) or development projects (Roe 1989). In addition, the term is used as a loose label to cover a much broader set of methods—basically any method that focuses on language may be used. For Roe, for example, narrative policy analysis is not limited to narrative analysis per se, but employs a variety of methods and concepts from the much wider field of contemporary literary theory (1994, 2).

The term *narrative analysis* may also refer to a related field in the social sciences—a study of how narratives function in the interactions among individuals. Often, these studies employ an ethnographic set of methods. Wagenaar (1995), for example, has made detailed studies of the stories that public servants tell to make sense of the situation in which they or their organizations find themselves. The focus is on what the story tells us about policy practice, more than on the story itself. The stories contain metaphors, distinctions, and other sense-making elements that help the analyst to connect the language of actors to their actions. These types of narrative analysis are quite similar to approaches like frame analysis (Schön and Rein 1994), analysis of belief systems

(Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993), and discourse analysis (Hajer 1995). In terms of methods, this research may apply methods from narratology, but more often the term *narrative analysis* indicates primarily that narratives are taken as the starting point, as the unit of analysis, rather than indicating the use of specific methods.

With regard to the unit of analysis, we also see interesting differences in the literature—and these are related to the tradeoffs regarding methods. Given the origins of narrative analysis, the most straight-forward unit of analysis is an "existing text" of a specific author—e.g., policy papers, news reports, bureaucratic forms, speeches or the oral histories offered by respondents. Like their counterparts in literary theory, some analysts have extended these existing texts to also include other nonverbal artifacts from the world of policy and politics, such as buildings, television images, photographs, and paintings (e.g., Yanow 1995a; Edelman 1995).

While specific, individual texts are a natural unit of analysis, they do pose limitations regarding the kind of generalizations and conclusions the analyst can reason toward. Policy analysis is typically interested in studying processes of collective decision making. Individual texts can be used for this task, insofar as they can be shown to be representative of a certain position or phenomenon at the collective level. Usually, however, this is difficult. One official's speech or oral history is likely to be slightly—or not so slightly—different from that of another official, even if they belong to the same administration. One policy paper is unlikely to reflect perfectly the range of official policy statements made on a specific issue.

Therefore, the analyst often needs a more aggregate unit of analysis than individual texts. For this reason, when analysts write about policy narratives, they often are talking not about a specific text, but about a constructed narrative that is attributed to an actor in a policy issue—in other words, the position of a group, an organization, or even a coalition of organizations. Yanow (1995b, 113) calls this a "constructed text" as opposed to an "authored text," which is the same as the abovementioned existing text. Bridgman and Barry (2002), for example, reconstructed two key policy narratives from a set of unstructured interviews with key stakeholders. On the issue of number portability in the New Zealand telecommunication sector, they aggregated all accounts into two narratives: the dominant telecom's story and the story of its competitors. Others (e.g., Bedsworth et al. 2004; Roe 1994; Van Eeten 1999a) have followed a similar approach.

One step further brings us to even more aggregate units of analysis. Dicke (2001, 10), following Czarniawska (1997), speaks of "societal narratives," which she defines as a "similar lines of reasoning" that is shared by many "little stories"—the latter are what we have called specific existing texts or authored texts. Edelman (1977, 1988) has written extensively about stories and symbolism in the wider political discourse, only loosely connecting his analysis to specific texts.

How these "aggregated" policy narratives are constructed is to be decided by the analyst. Narrative policy analysis does not prescribe any method for this part of the research. The literature shows a variety of methods, including, but not limited to, content analysis (Linder 1995), actor or stakeholder analysis (Bridgman and Barry, 2002), network analysis (Hukkinen et al. 1990), semiotics (Van Eeten and Roe, 2000), and Q-methodology (Van Eeten 2001). In many cases, an explicit method may even be absent and the researcher relies on the plausibility and reconcilability of the positions (e.g., Bedsworth et al. 2004). Typically, this means that the constructed narratives are built on a (presumably) shared idea of what the relevant perspectives on the issue are—often following straight-forward distinctions among actors, along the lines of, say, industry, government, and environmental groups.

Whatever method is followed, the narrative analysis itself starts only *after* the narratives have been (re)constructed—or, in the case of authored texts—identified. How the policy narratives are reconstructed does have consequences for the methods one can apply to them. Many of the methods of narratology rely heavily on "close readings" (i.e., on the specifics of the texts being analyzed). The same could be said of the methods used in the ethnographic approach to narrative analysis. If the text is a highly aggregate construction, then it typically offers less meaningful specifics, providing a

less fruitful ground for these methods. The tradeoff is, of course, that the constructed, less specific narrative, allows for a wider generalizability of the conclusions coming out of the analysis. For many policy analysts operating in processes of collective decision making, that generalizability is a prerequisite for their work. So they adopt methods for their narrative analysis that can work with aggregated narratives. Roe's use of the semiotic square to compare and contrast policy narratives is an example of such a method (Roe 1994).

This brings us to the third set of tradeoffs: the research objective. Many of the tradeoffs regarding methods and units of analysis can be understood best by looking at the kind of conclusions the analyst is interested in. The type of conclusion that is preferred also guides what methods and units of analysis are suitable.

Much of the earlier work on narrative and symbolism in policy language set out to unveil and critique hidden ideological and power structures. Murray Edelman (1971, 1977, 1988) has published famous research in this direction. One of his book titles indicates his objective fairly clearly: *Political Language: Words That Succeed and Policies That Fail* (Edelman 1977). Typically, he shows how political and professional elites use language to reinforce the existing power structure and facilitate the quiescent acceptance of chronic poverty and large inequalities. Edelman explicitly admits not subjecting the critics of the current "regimes" to the same analysis, because he is interested in the regimes themselves precisely because of their power. "The whole point," Edelman (1977, 14) writes, "…is to examine the evocation of alternative cognitions." Often, these alternatives are overlooked or actively resisted by the powers that be, he argues.

In certain policy areas, Edelman's goal may have become reality, to some extent. Here, researches are confronted with multiple and conflicting perspectives on the same policy issue—often even on the same evidence (e.g., Throgmorton 1993). Many have turned to language in an attempt to explain how these very different perspectives are possible and what their implications are. Narrative has provided a natural way with which to describe and make sense of these perspectives. For many researchers, the main objective is to demonstrate not only to explain the dynamics of the policy process by demonstrating the presence of multiple and conflicting policy narratives, but also that each of these narratives is valid on its own terms and should be taken into account in the policymaking process. In the words of Bedsworth and colleagues (2004, 406): "These…policy narratives demonstrate how policy actors differ in their drivers for action, bases for trusting claims, and response to uncertainty."

Using narrative to explain action makes clear why most of these researchers do not adhere to a strict definition of narrative, but also incorporate argumentative forms of language. They are interested in what drives the action of actors, how they make the "normative leap" from "is" to "ought" (Schön and Rein 1994). Actors use both narrative and argumentation for this goal—where narratives in a strict sense are stories about a sequence of events with beginning, middle, and ends, as in scenarios, and where arguments are built from premises to conclusions. This is why researchers like Roe and others incorporate both forms in their definition of policy narrative—even if others have argued that arguments and narratives present two different modes of knowing and thinking (Bruner 1986).

Within this strand of literature, researchers explicitly reject judging the different narratives in terms of truth value or establishing the primacy of one narrative over another—though some do try to explain empirically why a specific narrative has become dominant (e.g., Bridgman and Barry 2002). Implicitly or explicitly, this research often critiques the dominant narrative, given the presence of equally valid alternatives often voiced by less powerful stakeholders. This point is equally important at different stages in the policy process—from competing problem definitions to competing evaluations of policies (Abma 1999). Along the same lines, this research critiques technocratic approaches in these cases, since issues can no longer be decided by appealing to "objective facts."

The end point of this strand of literature—demonstrating the presence of conflicting, but equally valid policy narratives with opposing implications for action—is the starting point for other research-

ers: Given that the presence of these narratives often makes issues intractable, how can we recast the issue? Their research objective is to come up with policy advice that helps actors to move out of the existing impasse. Here, the challenge is to deal with the fact that in these cases is no way to arbitrate between the competing narratives, either on scientific or on other grounds. Several researchers have concluded that in those cases, actors and analysts would do best to develop a new narrative that takes into account the existing narratives, but at the same time is more amenable to deliberation or policy making. This is what Roe (1994) has called identifying a metanarrative. Others have called it recasting or reframing (Rein and Schön 1993). Schön and Rein (1994) describe reframing as an attempt to shift the paradigm of a problem. The approach is an open, deliberative process grounded in argument, evidence, and policy debate where participants can critically reflect and reappraise their initial framing of the issue. Roe's breakthrough insight was to understand how narrative analysis could be used to support this difficult process. We will return to this insight shortly.

As stated earlier, the choice for a research objective influences the choice of methods and unit of analysis. This is not a mechanical or deterministic relationship, but we can indicate certain patterns here. In principle, the research objectives outlined above do not preclude each other. One could make a critical analysis of the hidden power structures of a policy narrative, do the same for the competing narratives, explain how they guide the actions of actors in different directions and try to come up with policy advice on how to proceed, given these conflicting narratives.

In practice, however, narrative policy analysis tends to reflect constraints on time and resources and focus on one of the objectives. Analyzing and critiquing a specific dominant narrative is quite amenable to close readings and the methods of narratology, because one has time to get into the specifics of that narrative—perhaps looking at a set of relevant texts in detail. Similarly, an ethnographic narrative analysis of, say, social service employees' stories about their clients, can devote attention to the oral accounts and specific phrasings of individual respondents. This is different for analysts who are interested in (constructed) narratives that capture the positions of stakeholders in a decision making process. Here, we see more effort going into identifying, constructing and elaborating these narratives, and less to detailed analysis of actual existing texts. We see a similar shift when the objective is to recast a policy issue that is intractable because of conflicting policy narratives. This objective draws resources and attention away from reconstructing the narratives—though that obviously has to be done here too, as the first step—and toward analyzing the relations between those narratives. We can now also see why Roe (1994) employs the semiotic square as a method: it allows him to analyze the relations between the different narratives, which hopefully points to a possible metanarrative. He spends less time applying methods of narrative analysis to the narratives themselves and even less time on methods to identify and reconstruct the individual narratives. Most of his cases simply present the policy narratives as if they are already given and can readily be divided in stories and non-stories. This has given rise to some confusion with researchers trying to adopt his approach. For this reason, we'll slightly revise his approach to make it more transparent and replicable. First, however, we turn to his notion of the metanarrative.

FINDING THE METANARRATIVE

The concept of the metanarrative has drawn considerable attention and, at the same time, generated considerable confusion. The confusion seems to relate to two issues: How is the metanarrative identified and what is its status?

Roe's approach follows four steps (1994, 3–4): First, the analyst identifies the conventional narratives that dominate the issue. Second, he or she identifies the narratives that do not conform to the conventional definition, i.e., "non-stories," such as a circular argument or those that run counter to the dominant narratives. Third, the analyst compares and contrasts the two sets of narratives—stories on the one hand and the non-stories or counter stories on the other—in order to

generate a metanarrative "told" by the comparison. Fourth, and last, the analyst determines if or how the metanarrative recasts the issue in such a way as to make it more amenable to deliberation, analysis, and policy making.

Quite literally, the metanarrative is a narrative about other narratives. For Roe, it is a story that can account how the conflicting policy narratives on a certain issue can all be the case at the same time. Furthermore, the analyst—or policy maker or stakeholder—is not looking for just any metanarrative, but for a metanarrative that enables the parties involved to recast the issue to make it more amenable to deliberation, analysis, and policy making. In that sense, the metanarrative is a proposal for a new policy agenda (Van Eeten 1999a). As with all policy advice, it depends on the actors if and how a metanarrative is adopted and indeed successful in recasting the issue.

The metanarrative is not a compromise or common ground. To use a simple illustration: if one narrative says the issue is "black ' and the other says it is "white," then the metanarrative is not "grey" but a term that is both "black" and "white" at the same time (i.e., "coloredness")—or neither "black" nor "white" ("colorlessness"). This is the logic of the semiotic square (Schleifer 1987). The two latter terms can be understood as metaterms which comment on the possibility of the first black-white opposition. Figure 18.1 presents a more interesting illustration of the semiotic square.

By comparing and contrasting the policy narratives on an issue, the relations among them become visible, which may point to a metanarrative. In that sense, Roe (1994, 4) describes the metanarrative as the story that is being "told" by the comparison. Needless to say, the comparison may point to different metanarratives or even to none at all. Furthermore, the comparison may be executed in different ways, leading also to different possible outcomes. This need not be problematic. In fact, more options are welcome. The search is not for the one "correct" metanarrative, but for *a* metanarrative that seems most promising in recasting the issue.

Roe's procedure is unclear in several important respects. First, how is the analyst to identify the stories and the non-stories. Most of his case studies simply present the narratives, as if it is self-evident which narratives are out there, as well as what their structures are—that is, whether they are stories or non-stories. Given the lack of methodological guidance on how the narratives are reconstructed, the first two steps become problematic.[2] If the analyst loosely reconstructs these policy narratives, then especially qualifying a narrative as a non-story runs the risk of being little more than an artifact of the analysis. For this reason, the analyst needs to incorporate more methodological support for the first two steps in his or her research design. The case studies presented in the next sections of this chapter show one way of doing this: by applying Q-methodology, a very appropriate and effective companion to narrative policy analysis.

The second problem with the procedure is that it is unclear why the metanarrative can only be generated by contrasting the stories with the non-stories. To be sure, this is an interesting and promising comparison. To understand the structural differences among the two sets is likely to tell the analyst something about the characteristics of the policy discourse. But the procedure need not be restricted to that comparison only. As we will see in the case studies, different comparisons can
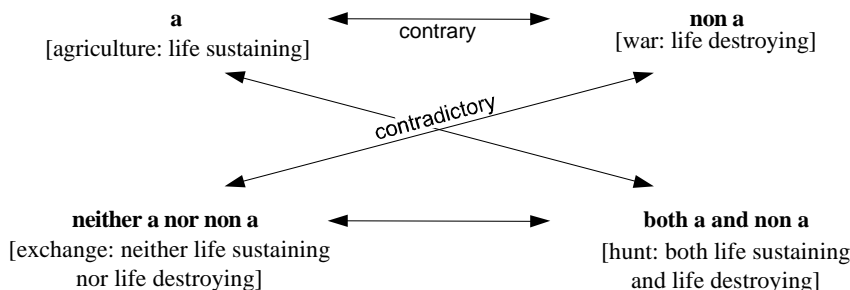

FIGURE 18.1   The semiotic square.

also generate a metanarrative. The semiotic square can help to unravel meaningful relations among the narratives in different ways.

Fischer (2003, 174–75) has lodged three further criticisms to Roe's approach. First, he states that Roe relies on the stories offered by the immediate participants to the story. This is problematic, according to Fischer, because "often the real problem to be dealt with in a public controversy is created by considerations outside the scope of everyday arguments." While Fischer raises a legitimate concern that there may be important perspectives outside the arguments currently present in the debate, his use of the term *the real problem* is awkward and does not seem to fit very well with the postempiricist approach. It is unclear how any consideration could lay claim to describing the "real" problem. While some may consider, say, a Gramscian critique of hegemonic social structures to be helpful and informative, stakeholders trying to influence policy making may find it more helpful to understand the different policy narratives and the relations among them. In short, Fischer's criticism should serve as a warning on the limitations of the method, but it does not seem to invalidate Roe's approach.

Fischer's second criticism is that Roe has failed to incorporate the participation of actors in his approach. While it is true that participation is remarkably absent as a theme in Roe's book, the approach itself seems to have no problem with it. All steps of the procedure could be done in a participatory way. Having the stakeholders actively contrasting different (sets of) narratives may indeed generate interesting results, as well as provide checks on the analytic process. Should a metanarrative come out of this process, chances are it will have more support that a metanarrative that is the product of a lone analyst. That said, the crucial contribution of Roe is that now the analyst at least has some methodological support to facilitate the process of recasting and finding metanarratives—in other words, the analyst can add value to the process.

The third and final criticism that Fischer brings forth, states that Roe should have applied narrative analysis to policy analysis itself. He also takes issue with what he sees as the technocratic orientation of Roe's approach. Roe explicitly acknowledges that a critique of the technocratic foundations of conventional policy analysis can and should be done. It is, however, not the objective of his book. There is already a rich literature that has argued "the argumentative turn" of policy analysis. Roe chooses a more instrumental orientation, aiming to contribute a new methodology to the field of policy analysis. Whatever one may think of these choices, they are not inherent to the approach itself, but rather reflect the agenda under which it is employed. Narrative policy analysis can be employed by different actors—not just analysts—and is quite compatible with different agendas, be they empiricist, postempiricist or otherwise.

This discussion brings us to the last part of this chapter: an application of the approach in two case studies. Given the constraints of the chapter, we briefly go through the steps to illustrate how the approach can be implemented in practice, with the abovementioned considerations in mind.

TWO APPLICATIONS OF NARRATIVE POLICY ANALYSIS

The first case study deals with the conflicting stakeholder views during the formation of the most recent Dutch National Transportation Plan. The second case concerns the controversial expansion of the Amsterdam Schiphol Airport. In both cases the first two steps of the narrative policy analysis were performed using Q-methodology—for more details on the case studies, see Van Eeten (2001; 2003).

How can stakeholders' arguments be identified without forcing a specific problem definition upon them? Q-methodology is especially suited to the task of uncovering positions really held by participants in a debate rather than accepting the predefined categories of decision makers, analysts, or participants. In recent years, Q-methodology has received increasing attention in the policy analysis community, particularly regarding its performance in supporting public involvement initiatives and

uncovering and representing stakeholder positions and their interrelations (Dryzek and Berejikian 1993; Durning 1993, 1999; Gargan and Brown, 1993; Maxwell and Brown, 2000; Pelletier et al, 1999; Steelman and Maguire, 1999; Weimer 1999). The method has proven to be fruitful in capturing rich understandings of stakeholder views and positions, thereby making the method an important tool for deliberative democracy, as recognized by Dryzek (1990) over a decade ago.

Q-methodology condenses the variation of views, opinions, and ideas into a set of underlying problem definitions. In a nutshell, the procedure is this: respondents sort a set of statements on the problem. Using factor analysis, the method then identifies factors, which are clusters of statements that are correlated in the sorts of some respondents. These clusters can be interpreted as policy narratives. The elegance of this method is that it is not sensitive to the narratives that the analyst a priori expects to be there—unlike open qualitative interview techniques that often end up reproducing a priori categories such as the different stakeholder groups. This makes the procedure more robust and reliable for the first two steps of narrative policy analysis. Q-methodology also manages to avoid some important drawbacks of surveys, as explained by Dryzek (1990).

Q-methodology was applied in both case studies through a number of steps introduced briefly here.[3] First, in an attempt to reflect the range of opinion, some 200 statements were collected from media archives, advocacy papers, stakeholder meetings, interviews, and policy reports. Especially useful were verbatim reports from several stakeholder meetings, because of the range of arguments and positions expressed in them.

From this collection, a sample of statements was selected to be used in subsequent interviews with stakeholders (75 statements for the case on the Transportation Plan; 80 for the case on airport expansion). To check the representativeness of the sample, a control question was added to the interview protocol: Subjects were asked if they missed any aspect of the issue they believed was relevant to their position. Answers given during the interviews raised no questions as to the sample's validity.

Next, representatives were selected from the stakeholders—24 for the case on Transportation Plan; 38 for the case on airport expansion. For the latter the sample of respondents included representatives of airline corporations, airport management, different levels and sectors of government, national environmental organizations, local citizens, and environmental interest groups, and commercial or regional economic interest groups.

Each representative was asked to perform a Q-sort, in which the respondent models her or his point of view by rank-ordering the statements from the sample along a continuum. The extremes of the distribution were coded "most agree" and "most disagree," with 0 indicating indifference. In standard Q-sort fashion, the respondents were also asked to place the statements in a quasi-normal distribution (Figure 18.2). This encourages the respondents to think about the relationships among the statements more systematically, as well as prioritize the statements in relation to each other. During and after the sorting process, respondents were interviewed to ascertain the reasoning behind their specific ordering.

Last, the Q-sorts were factor-analyzed to identify patterns and commonalities among individuals.[4] In the case study on the Transportation Plan, this led to four significant factors. The case study on airport expansion identified five factors. The policy narratives represented by the factors were
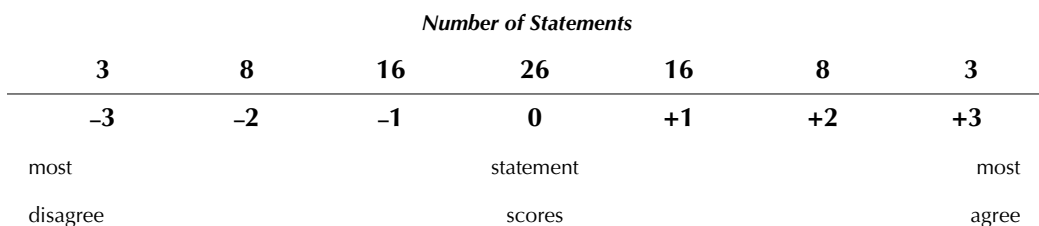
Number of Statements

3	8	16	26	16	8	3
–3	–2	–1	0	+1	+2	+3
most			statement			most
disagree			scores			agree

FIGURE 18.2   The opinion continuum for the Q-sort in the case of airport expansion.

identified by calculating the statements' scores, that is, the weighted average of the scores given to each statement by the Q sorts associated with the factor.

For each case, starting with the case on the Transportation Plan, we briefly summarize the policy narratives that were found and compare and contrast these narratives, in search of a metanarrative that allows us to recast the issue.

CASE STUDY: DUTCH NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

Dutch transportation policy had been controversial for years, with stakeholder chastising the last plan for its ineffectiveness with regard to reducing environmental problems, massive congestion, underperforming public transportation, and fragmented administrative relations, among other issues. The last plan, officially presented by government in 1990, had very ambitious objectives on these issues. It fell short on virtually all of its ambitions.

In the spring of 1998, the Ministry of Transportation, Public Works and Water Management initiated a deliberative process to inform the development of the new National Transportation Plan. After several brainstorm sessions with potential participants, the ministry identified eight recurrent themes in the discussion it saw as important for writing the new plan.[5]

Around these themes, eight deliberative platforms were organized with around ten participants each and chaired by the participants themselves. The invitation to participate was sent out widely, though for the most part to people who, in one way or the other, had a professional involvement in transportation. The result was a mix of representatives from different sectors of local, regional, provincial and national government, academics and consultants, and stakeholder representatives from environmental organizations, the transportation sector, labor unions, and industry. In total, over a hundred persons participated in the deliberative process. Funds were allocated to each platform so they could be fairly self-organizing.

Over the course of the summer, the process peaked in intensity. In just a few months, the eight platforms produced over 65 documents adding up to several inches of fact finding reports, opinions, problem descriptions, discussions, vision statements, recommendations, feedback from outsiders, and observations on the process itself. Although officially authored by each platform as a whole, the documents were actually multi-authored and multi-varied statements and recommendations on transportation issues.

The task to capture the outcomes of the platform deliberations quickly proved much more difficult than anticipated. There was a plethora of positions, recommendations and, more tangible, documents. The connections among the themes seemed elusive and the topic of much debate within the project. Beforehand, the project team expected that the stakeholders would form coalitions around different sets of policy measures, which could then be identified as alternatives to developed and prepared for decision-making in the plan. Things turned out differently. Many policy measures had support from a wide range of actors, but for different reasons.

In support of its task, the project team then commissioned a policy analysis using Q-methodology to distill the main perspectives underlying—or, if you will, overarching—the many views on the eight themes of the platforms. This way, it hoped to get a better sense of what the different directions were for transportation policy, as well as identifying the agenda for subsequent deliberations. Following are the main policy narratives that were identified by the Q study.

A. SCARCITY NARRATIVE

Starting from a market approach to transportation, the narrative takes note of all manner of "scarcities" in the transport systems (as reflected in, e.g., traffic congestion and externalities associated with

car pollution), whose costs need to be better allocated, i.e., the economic distribution of costs and benefits associated with these scarcities is asymmetrical. More rational allocation of transportation infrastructure and services is inhibited by the fact that the prices governing the transportation system rarely reflect the true costs and benefits of transport. The use of infrastructure, for example, is "free" after paying what is basically an entrance fee in the form of road tax. Moreover, the cost is fixed, no matter how much of the infrastructural capacity one uses or how much capacity is available. The demand for transport mobility is therefore not matched optimally to the supply of infrastructure for that mobility. Similarly, the externalities of transport, such as environmental damage and the use of natural resources, are not reflected in the price.

From this narrative, the policy answer is to implement measures that price transportation toward "telling the truth," i.e., reflecting the real costs. For example, government should stop treating road infrastructure as a collective good to be financed through public investments, and instead deal with it as a private good whose price structure more rationally matches individual willingness and ability to pay.

B. Logistics Narrative

Here the overriding concern is to optimize the logistical performance of the transportation system as a network. According to the narrative, the system generates all manner of socio-economic benefits, not the least of which is the crucial part the network plays in a Dutch economy heavily reliant on transportation and the efficient distribution of goods and services. "The Netherlands, Gateway to Europe," was the shorthand phrase for this narrative. The main problem is that there are logistical bottlenecks which cause inefficiencies and harm the environment. Transport arteries are clogged and economic centers become increasingly difficult to reach. In this view, the growing demand for transportation mobility is not intrinsically problematic. Quite the contrary, the real problems—the bottlenecks—accordingly require better governmental management and interventions.

Policy answers to reduce or otherwise alleviate bottlenecks include building new infrastructure and measures aimed at more efficient use of the existing network infrastructure. These latter incorporate proposals aimed at enhancing traffic flows as well as ensuring the economically most beneficial road uses, such as cargo transport, get priority over uses deemed less important, such as commuter traffic. The instruments used depend on the specific bottleneck and may include regulation, pricing, and changes in road design, among others.

C. Pragmatic Narrative

In contrast to other narratives, the dominant storyline here is not about the state of transportation, but about the lessons from past policies. Past experience has taught officials that transportation problems are complex, manifold and cannot be understood from a single, coherent perspective. In this estimation, our understanding is permanently incomplete, best reflected in the fact that the track record of the answers proposed by the other narratives has been very mixed. Anyway, what works has proven to be highly context-dependent. The officials and stakeholders advocating this narrative are weary of any "new" transportation policy or framework and instead argue that what is needed are not "new" answers (assuming they are even possible), but more intelligent and flexible uses of what is already known pragmatically.

In principle, the policy answers to problems in the transportation system include the whole repertoire of known measures. The real challenge is customize case- and region-specific, tailor-made policy packages for the panoply of transportation issues. One instrument, like prices, may

work for one problem and region, but you need different sets of instruments for other problems and regions.

D. TECHNOLOGICAL NARRATIVE

The transportation system faces serious problems, including congestion and environmental harm. The system, however, is a highly valued public service, and what is needed to address its problems are major technological innovation and experimentation. The large-scale adoption of new technologies will result in a high quality transport system that is, moreover, sustainable and accessible to all social groups, the two core values in this narrative. One example is to transform public transport systems into "individualized collective transport systems," i.e., electric cars for the city combined with parking lots and connections to other transport modes at the periphery. Many technologies, in the view of this narrative's advocates, are already available but remain unused because of a variety of institutional and economic barriers. The task of government is to eliminate these barriers.

Here the policy answers are a variety of measures to bring about technological innovation. Such measures may include governmental investments in the technologies as well as other policy instruments such as pricing and regulation.

Each of the narratives has very different policy implications, even when they appear to ask for the same measures. Take the issue of ameliorating congestion by reducing the number of cars on the road—a major objective of the previous plan which it had spectacularly failed to achieve. From the scarcity narrative, reduction in car numbers would never be a goal in and of itself, but rather would only be a byproduct of full-cost pricing. From the logistic narrative, it already is current Dutch policy to reduce the number of cars on the road, but only at certain times and places. Cars are a problem in so far as they are linked to certain logistical bottlenecks. From the pragmatic narrative, reduction in car numbers is always a live policy option, but its relevance would have to be judged on a case-by-case basis and would certainly never be a system-wide goal or priority. From the technological narrative, reducing the number of cars on the roads means a technologically different kind of car or a solution which may not even be car-based. The real goal is not to get fewer cars on the road but to develop technology to get the right cars on the road.

What can narrative analysis tell us about the relations among these narratives? Here, the semiotic square appears to be helpful. A first starting point is the opposition between the logistics narrative and the scarcity narrative. These two captured the main division in the public debate at that time.

The logistics narrative had been the main rationale behind the existing policy and had driven implementation programs for years. The scarcity narrative, on the other hand, was the new contender which had rapidly gained support. Its emphasis on pricing and markets was more and more underwritten by different governmental agencies as the future direction for transportation policy. Actual attempts to implement it, however, faced fierce resistance and failed almost without exception. It took about ten years for government to develop and agree upon an initiative for electronic road pricing around the three largest Dutch cities, only to see its political support crumble as soon as the system moved toward implementation. So far, the scarcity narrative is by and large policy and very little implementation. The overall result has a completely inert transportation policy, notwithstanding the broadly-felt need for change in light of the current problems.

Taking the scarcity-logistics opposition as the starting point, we can see how the complex terms that rises out of opposition (both policy and implementation, neither policy nor implementation) denote the two remaining narratives. In an important sense, both are alternatives arising from the opposition between logistics and scarcity. Together, the four narratives form a semiotic square about interventions, i.e., the way they relate to the day-to-day implementation of policy (Figure 18.3).
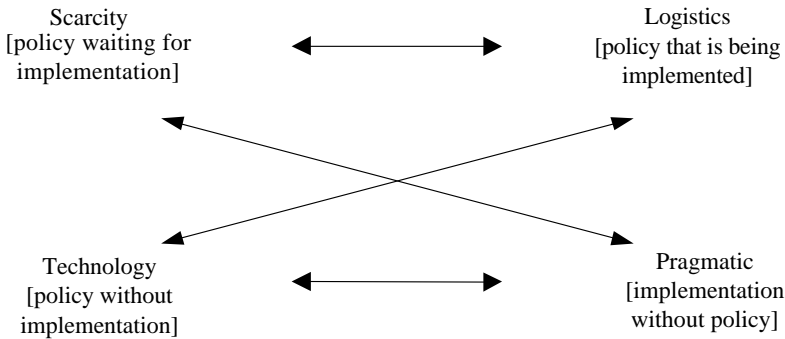
Scarcity
[policy waiting for
implementation]

Logistics
[policy that is being
implemented]

Technology
[policy without
implementation]

Pragmatic
[implementation
without policy]

FIGURE 18.3   Semiotic square on future transportation policy.

If we read the first opposition to be about policy that is being implemented or not being imple-
mented, then pragmatic argument clearly signifies the position that is both implemented and not
implemented. Here, it is all implementation without policy. Or rather, whatever happens in imple-
mentation *is* policy. Some of its proponents even expressed hostility regarding what they felt was an
overkill of "new" policy that never made it to implementation. In fact, many respondents indicated
they saw the national transportation policy as a major obstacle, not a source of support, to getting
effective and innovative regional initiatives off the ground. The reason that it does not propose a trans-
portation policy in the way the others do, also explains why this narrative has a marginal presence,
if any, in most formal documents—indeed, why it is hardly recognized as a policy narrative at all.

In sharp contrast to this stands the technological narrative that neither is accepted as policy,
nor guides implementation. Narrative D has an aura of science fiction around, ironically by being
too specific. That is, there are futuristic videos and computer presentations of major technologi-
cal innovations that, according to this narrative, need to be adopted by government. The imagery
is almost too operational, while for many the systems portrayed seem far removed from current
transportation policy and practice. As a result, the option seems all the more unbelievable. In fact,
proponents of D have tried to come up with proposals that connect with existing government pro-
grams, in order to get out of the sci-fi realm, but many people think the government will never get
there. It's simply too far fetched. But if far-fetched is measured by government adoption, then the
real issue is how unbelievable it would be as a government policy.

As a whole, the semiotic square raises another opposition: between policy narratives that tightly
couple policy to implementation (A, B) and those that decouple them (C, D). Narrative C argues that
innovation—defined as the implementation of change—is only possible if the constraints of policy
on operations are lifted, while D argues that real innovation has to be freed from the constraints of
here-and-now feasibility and implementation in a fragmented policy sector. This could be cast as
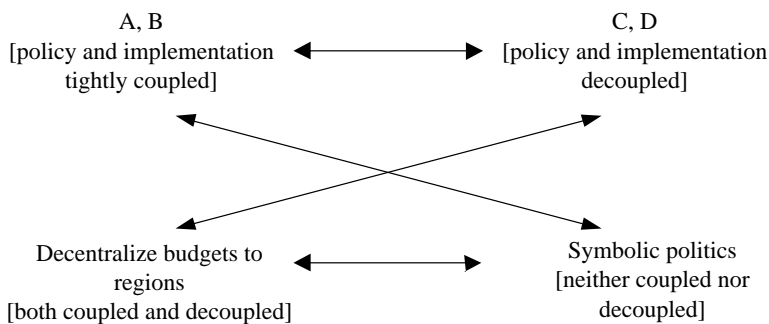a new semiotic square (Figure 18.4).

A, B
[policy and implementation
tightly coupled]

C, D
[policy and implementation
decoupled]

Decentralize budgets to
regions
[both coupled and decoupled]

Symbolic politics
[neither coupled nor
decoupled]

FIGURE 18.4   Semiotic square on future transportation policy.

The metanarrative this may point to is to massively decentralize the transportation budgets. Such a move would by and large decouple between national policy and regional implementation, but at the same time it would couple regional policy—which is now the policy that matters in terms of funding—to regional implementation. This puts in a different light the failure of the road pricing initiative around the three biggest cities taken under the scarcity narrative. If the congestion of these cities is indeed as problematic as many argue, why did these cities themselves not initiate a road pricing scheme, irrespective of the national support for such a measure?

The neither/nor term points to an alternative that could never explicitly become official policy, but is nevertheless a real live option: national transportation policy becomes a game of symbolic politics. The transportation ministry sees its policies as a symbolic means to influence regional activities. Whatever implementation efforts may occur in practice, when needed, the ministry would try to appropriate them as belonging to the policy.

CASE STUDY: THE CONTROVERSIAL EXPANSION OF AMSTERDAM AIRPORT

Since the mid 1980s, the Dutch government has struggled with the trade-off between the economic importance of Schiphol and the environmental impact of the increasing air traffic. It took some ten years to forge the difficult political compromise the cabinet eventually agreed upon. The plan set out a twofold objective: expand Schiphol Airport with a fifth runway, and reduce the airport's environmental impact. New and more stringent standards were established for noise pollution. One intent of expansion was to reduce the number of people experiencing aircraft noise as a severe nuisance by spreading aircraft movements over a larger area. Besides reducing noise pollution, the plan adopted a standstill policy for safety, local air pollution, and odor nuisance (meaning their levels may not increase beyond 1990 levels).

Parliament reluctantly accepted the plan in 1995, but not before significantly amending it. Members of parliament were afraid that if the rate of growth exceeded predictions, the Civil Aviation Authority might grant the airport too much leeway regarding the noise standards. Therefore, they added an amendment limiting Schiphol's growth not to exceed a maximum volume of 44 million passengers and 3.3 million tons of cargo per year. Unfortunately, in the very year the plan was published, 1995, the actual passenger and cargo volumes equaled those the model predicted for 2004. Equally unfortunate, economic growth had actually been lower than the model assumed. The limit on Schiphol's growth was rapidly coming closer.

So once again, government faced an expansion decision for the airport. In 1996, at parliament's request, the central government set up an interagency project called Future Dutch Aviation Infrastructure (TNLI). TNLI was to address the issue through extensive deliberation with stakeholders, answering the core question (TNLI 1997, iii): "Do we want to accommodate further growth of civil aviation in the Netherlands? The central question is whether further growth is beneficial and necessary. What are the advantages and disadvantages, the costs and benefits, the challenges and risks?"

This framing of the problem mirrored the debate's polarized agenda. Stakeholders clustered around the positions for or against further growth, along well-established lines. The positions marked the ends of a continuum of available alternatives, placing more moderate policy arguments, such as "selective growth" and "mitigate negative effects," somewhere toward the middle.

Stakeholder deliberations were already underway, when the TNLI-project commissioned a policy analysis using Q-methodology in order to map the stakeholder positions and find leads on how to proceed with the controversial expansion decision. The analysis identified five policy narratives.

A. Societal Integration Of A Growing Airport

This narrative argues that the societal benefits of the airport are highly valued. On the other hand, the problem of noise pollution is of utmost importance. In no other policy narrative are costs and benefits articulated so clearly alongside one another. Balancing the two is at the core of the narrative. Furthermore, the costs and benefits are conceptualized mainly from a regional, spatial perspective, that is, in terms of their effects on the region surrounding the airport. Respondents consider noise pollution a much more important costs of the growing airport than, say, carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions. The benefits are also recognized to have this regional spatial ambit—society must provide space for civil aviation because it greatly contributes to the region's international business climate.

In sum, this policy narrative insists that in the region a positive balance must be struck between these costs and benefits, if integration of the airport into the wider society is to succeed.

B1 Expansion of Aviation Infrastructure as a Necessity In the Face of International Economic Competition

B1 is the narrative driving the original Schiphol Airport expansion proposal and its continuing support. Like policy narrative A, this one values highly the economic benefits of civil aviation, albeit the focus is now international rather than regional. B1 emphasizes the international context of civil aviation and the need to invest in the sector to retain the socioeconomic benefits.

If the Netherlands does not invest in expansion, it will lose its strong position in this sector, so this narrative claims, because other countries do invest and with substantial effect. Since transport and infrastructure are considered to be the backbone of the Dutch economy, the international position of the national economy as a whole will suffer accordingly. This will lead to a variety of negative consequences, most notably, loss of jobs and its multiplier effect.

All in all, this narrative calls for investment in expansion while there are still opportunities to do so. Respondents recognize the environmental problems of expansion, but in this narrative the environmental problems do not affect the perceived necessity for growth. Expansion can occur within noise and safety standards because airport growth can be accommodated at a new location where the effects on the human population are considerably lower, e.g., on a artificial island off the coast. As far as the global environmental effects of aviation are concerned, it agrees with the preceding policy position: No expansion in the Netherlands will lead to a displacement of pollution elsewhere or even an increase in pollution overall. In other words, whatever happens, the effects of further growth are unavoidable.

B2 Expansion of Civil Aviation Infrastructure as an Unjustified Use of Public Funds

Since the current controversy is polarized, interviewers would expect to find a passionate narrative against airport expansion, and, indeed, the Q analysis strongly confirms this. Policy narrative B2 is B1's opposite. The same cluster of statements from the Q-sort articulates both narratives. As would be expected in polarization, they treat the same aspects as central, but their assessment of these statements is diametrically opposed. Where B1 claims that infrastructural expansion is a necessity from the perspective of international economic survival, B2 casts serious doubt on the importance of the civil aviation sector for the Dutch economy.

Investing in the expansion of aviation infrastructure is not only unnecessary, it is an unjustified use of scarce public resources. The policy of "The Netherlands, Gateway to Europe" entails costs that are too high in terms of infrastructure and environmental damage, while its socioeconomic

benefits, if real, are fairly low. The capacity problem for Schiphol Airport is not considered real, but rather a self-inflicted difficulty. It is therefore nonsensical, according to this policy narrative, to claim that the current growth of civil aviation somehow forces the Netherlands to expand. Because the benefits of and necessity for expansion are absent, it is much better to refrain from, if not actively resist, accommodating further growth. Much better opportunities for investment are available, such as information and communication technology. These show more economic promise while entailing fewer disadvantages.

C. ECOLOGICAL MODERNIZATION OF THE CIVIL AVIATION SECTOR

The narrative advanced by position C, as in B2, is critical of civil aviation in the Netherlands. But unlike B2, the critical stance does not stem from an assessment of the disadvantages of further growth. Growth or no growth is a secondary issue here. Instead the narrative focuses on the conditions under which civil aviation as a sector and its key industries operate.

Civil aviation is controversial in this narrative because the conditions are absent that would ensure that the sector functions in a sustainable way. A central point in the line of narrative is that the sector has not internalized the real costs of aviation, particularly environmental externalities. This is partly because government treats the sector differently from other branches of industry. Standards for noise pollution and acceptable risks are less stringent than for other industries and there is no levy on kerosene or value-added tax on tickets and related services. There are also hidden subsidies.

The sector needs to take the real costs of its operations into account. When done, this will more or less automatically lead to a sustainable mode of operating. In this way, civil aviation will become more like other sectors, such as the chemical industry, in undergoing what has been called ecological modernization (Hajer 1995). The price structures of air traffic should start to reflect the true costs of aviation. Implementation of a levy on aviation fuel and a value-added tax on tickets is a good starting point, as are upgrading noise and safety standards. According to this policy narrative, what hampers ecological modernization, and what needs critical evaluation, is government's multiple roles in the civil aviation sector.

D. SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS TO A GROWING DEMAND FOR MOBILITY

Narrative D approaches the issue mainly as a problem of the growing demand for mobility; that is, people want to travel more, whatever the means of transportation (land, air, or otherwise). On the one hand, the regional and global environmental problems of civil aviation are deemed severe. On the other, the growing mobility—of which increased air traffic is an important part—is a largely independent development that has proceeded irrespective of government policy to intervene.

Accommodating further growth of mobility, and the demand for it, is less an option than a necessity according to this narrative. Mobility will increase one way or another. At the same time, the narrative underscores the severity of the environmental problems associated with mobility growth. Combining these two elements, leads this narrative to emphasize the search for sustainable solutions to the growing demand for mobility. No other narrative pays so much attention to the need to substitute air traffic with other forms of transportation that have fewer environmental consequences. Also, the narrative calls for "greening" the design and management of the aviation infrastructure needed to accommodate growth.

We are now in a position to determine whether and how these narratives recast the issue. Arguments B1 and B2 reflect the prevailing polarization for or against further growth and infrastructure expansion. Arguments A, C, and D, however, define related but different problems and call for different measures. The analysis indicates that these narratives are relatively independent.[6]
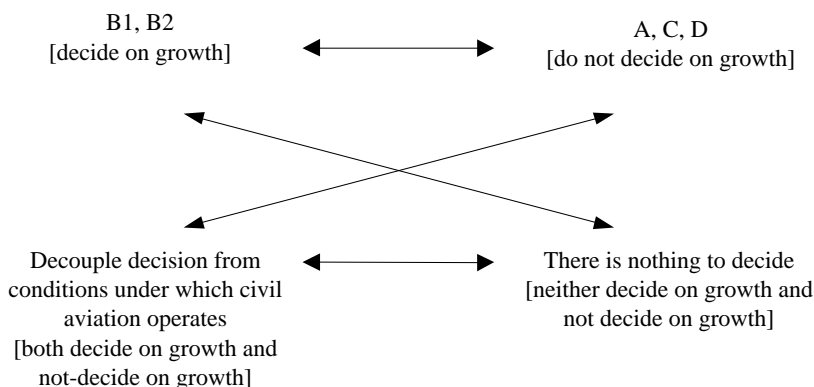
B1, B2
[decide on growth]

A, C, D
[do not decide on growth]

Decouple decision from
conditions under which civil
aviation operates
[both decide on growth and
not-decide on growth]

There is nothing to decide
[neither decide on growth and
not decide on growth]

FIGURE 18.5   Semiotic square on airport expansion.

However, A, C, and D are habitually collapsed into and treated as part and parcel of the positions for or against growth. In that sense, we can qualify them as non-stories. Instead of conflating the non-stories into B1 or B2, the data insist that they can be more sensibly viewed as relatively independent from (indeed orthogonal to) the continuum of for-or-against further growth. For example, three respondents subscribe to both narrative C and B1, while five others subscribe to C and B1's opposite, B2.

When we contrast B1 and B2—the dominant narratives—with A, C, and D—the non-stories—we get a semiotic square that points to a metanarrative (Figure 18.5).

In opposition to the dominant narratives, it is clear that non-stories do not see the decision on growth as the key issue for policy. To illustrate: Evaluating the costs and benefits of further growth is a non-issue in the ecological modernization argument (C). The argument is chiefly concerned with the conditions under which the civil aviation sector operates and the conditions needed to bring about sustainable development. Whether further growth will occur under these conditions is another question—one that does not need answering—according to this policy argument, since the market will answer it after the fact. Similarly, A and D do not see the decision on the expansion itself as the core issue.

This opposition points to a metanarrative: decouple the expansion decision from the issues articulated by A, C, and D. Give the latter narratives their own policy agendas. This way, whatever the outcome of the expansion decision, the government can still make important advances with regard to A, C, and D. It could, for example, begin to put into place "normal" operating conditions for the civil aviation sector: fuel taxes, enforceable noise standards that actually offer legal protection to citizen, and the dismantling of hidden subsidies. This would cut across the polarized stakeholder positions marked by B1/B2, given that in both camps there is support for A, C and D. And at least as important: Of 38 stakeholder representatives, 13 had stronger affinity with the arguments A, C, or D and the proposals these represent, than with arguments B1 or B2. This means that for them it is more important that action is taken on these issues, than that the expansion decision goes one way or the other.

The neither/nor term of the semiotic square is also a kind of metanarrative, albeit one that is not very amenable to further deliberation and analysis: it argues that there is really nothing to decide. This is the cynical view that some stakeholders ended up with after the arduous deliberative process. They saw the whole ordeal as a ritual. In reality, no political authority would ever stop airport expansion.

IN CONCLUSION

The emergence of narrative policy analysis has been a remarkable innovation within policy analysis. True enough, the identification of metanarratives have not put an end to controversy and polarization in the policy world. It seems unlikely that any product of policy analysis and advice could meet such a test. That said, the method has been able to generate surprising insights and valuable advice, if the recipients of the studies I was involved in are any measure. These insights and advice did not make their work much easier, but it did help them to identify areas where some progress was possible. Marginal progress, some would say. But as policy veterans Neustadt and May (1986, xvii) have said, "Marginal improvement is worth seeking. Indeed, we doubt that there is any other kind."

In this sense, narrative policy analysis has taken up Majone's advice on how to "improve the quality of public deliberation" for complex policy problems. "Good policy analysis," he argues, "[. . .] provides an intellectual structure for public discourse." This structuring is especially important "when factual or value premises are moot, when there are no generally accepted criteria of rightness, [because then] the procedure of decision making acquires special significance and cannot be treated as purely instrumental." The structure needs to "facilitate a wide-ranging dialogue" among the advocates of different views (Majone, 1989, 7, 17, 183).

Narrative policy analysis has not generated a sweeping professional movement, by any stretch of the imagination. However, it did manage to find appeal both within the postempiricist movement, as well as within mainstream policy analysis. Roe's work has been widely reviewed and cited. On a more personal note, my case study on the expansion of Amsterdam Schiphol Airport managed to receive the Vernon Prize of 2001 for best paper in the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*. Other authors using some form of narrative analysis have managed to get published in the major journals. All this is good news.

The attention given to narrative policy analysis from mainstream—"technocratic," if you will—policy analysis has raised some eyebrows and attracted suspicion in the postempiricist community. While some may frown on instrumentalism per se—a somewhat paradoxical view for a field that was founded to be exactly that: instrumental to decision making—one can also see this as a crosswalk to get across some of the important messages of the postempiricist agenda.

NOTES

1. For a brief overview of narratology, see: http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/hopkins_guide_to_liter-ary_theory/narratology.html.
2. In the appendix to *Narrative Policy Analysis*, Roe does offer a methodological elaboration on how "ideally" his approach should be implemented. While he presents an interesting and valid methodological approach that is more specific about the first two steps of the analysis, it does not address our concerns. First of all, the proposed "ideal" method seems unnecessarily restrictive. It is really just one way, and a rather unusual one at that, to operationalize the first two steps. Second, Roe himself applied this ideal procedure in only one of his case studies. Apparently the other were possible without it. This also points to the fact that there are other ways to achieve the same goal.
3. For an excellent general discussion of Q-methodology, see Brown (1980).
4. After calculating the correlations, a centroid factor analysis was performed, which was then rotated according to the varimax principle. The number of extracted factors was limited to four because additional factors did not contribute more than a handful of percentage points to the total explained variance and had negligible statistical significance.
5. The eight themes were: (1) the tension between individual needs and collective interests; (2) accessibility: destinations and connections; (3) using infrastructure: doing more with the same; (4) the environment as a crucial aspect of developing and implementing policy; (5) technology: mobility without drawbacks;

(6) the state and the market; (7) administrative relations: decentralization where possible, centralization where needed; (8) the international dimension of transportation policy.

6. For a full explanation of why these narratives are relatively independent, see Van Eeten (2001, p. 404).

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