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Explaining the currency of novel policy concepts: learning from green infrastructure planning

Mick Lennon
School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental Policy, University College Dublin, Planning Building, Richview, Clonskeagh, Dublin, Ireland. e-mail: michael.lennon@ucd.ie

Abstract. The 'interpretive turn' in policy analysis has greatly enhanced understanding of policy process dynamics. However, it has not afforded much attention to explaining the currency of novel concepts where open dispute appears absent in policy discussions. This paper seeks to address this lacuna by employing an innovative discourse analysis approach to examining the emergence of green infrastructure planning policy in the Republic of Ireland. Whereas the analysis accounts for the rhetorical force of language, it reveals that those advocating the green infrastructure concept were not passive actors in receiving a static discourse. Instead, it demonstrates that such agents actively sought to negate opposition and advance their policy objectives by exploiting the discourse's flexibility and consensus-building potential, as well as strategically identifying and employing a range of dissemination opportunities. Drawing lessons from this case, a new framework for understanding the interpretive analysis of seemingly unopposed novel policy concepts is presented.

Keywords: policy process theory, multiple streams framework, meaning making, green infrastructure planning

Introduction

Public administration systems are routinely bombarded with new concepts that promise to resolve complex policy issues, such as how to deliver sustainability through the land use planning system (Baker and Eckerberg, 2008; Owens and Cowell, 2011). Some of these concepts gain traction and are institutionalized, while others soon fade and are forgotten. Explaining why this occurs has proved difficult for policy theory (Moran et al., 2009). Nevertheless, there is increasing agreement among theorists that understanding public policy dynamics often involves a move beyond positivist conceptions of the policy process as 'applied problem-solving' (Howlett et al., 2009: 4), wherein problem identification sequentially precedes solution specification (Fischer et al., 2007). From this post-positivist perspective, the policy process is conceived to involve a 'perceptual interpretive element' (Kingdon, 1984: 115), wherein 'sense making is an historically and socially contextualized process' (Yanow, 2006: 10). A diversity of theoretical approaches has attempted to account for this re-evaluation of policy process dynamics. These include, but are not limited to, conceptual frameworks grounded in sociological institutionalism (Béland, 2005, 2009; Hay, 2006), network-focused approaches (Murdoch, 2000; Rhodes, 1997, 2006), science and technology studies (Burgess et al., 2000; Collins et al., 2009; Donaldson et al., 2013; Latour, 2005), Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2010), post-political constructs (Raco and Lin, 2012) and Derridean inspired post-structuralist analysis (Howarth, 2010). What these approaches share is a strong conviction regarding the important role played by 'meaning making' in the emergence and institutionalization of new policy concepts.

The 'interpretive turn' in policy analysis has greatly enhanced understanding of policy process dynamics with in-depth studies of contentious issues such as racism (Yanow, 2002) and the emergence of controversial new technologies (Gottweis, 2012) increasing

our appreciation of the role played by perception in the emergence and evolution of new policy concepts.However, less attention has been given to new policy concepts where disagreement is not immediately apparent (however, see, Myerson and Rydin, 1996). Consequently, this paper seeks to build upon, complement and enhance the contribution of interpretive approaches to policy analysis by exploring the role of meaning making in explaining the currency of novel concepts where open dispute appears absent in policy discussions. In doing so, an endeavour is made to examine, 'What are the various ways in which we make sense of public policies? How do policies convey their meanings? Who are the "readers" of policy meanings? To what audiences do policies "speak"?' (Yanow, 1996: ix).

This paper responds to these questions by drawing upon the work of rhetorical philosophers not normally associated with policy studies (Black, 1962; Boyd, 1993; Burke, 1966). In conjunction with more familiar interpretive policy theorists (Hajer, 1995; Yanow, 1996, 2000), this facilitates the formulation, presentation and substantiation of an innovative approach to policy analysis focused on the interactions between language, logic, identity and need. This approach is structured around a four-part framework of policy process dynamics comprising *interpretation*, *resonance*, *mobilization* and *realization.* The paper demonstrates the explanatory benefits of this framework by examining the remarkably swift emergence and institutionalization of green infrastructure (GI) planning policy in the Republic of Ireland, which despite much scope for dispute, was widely supported and formally adopted in the apparent absence of open opposition or critical analysis.

Ireland provides a particularly good arena in which to trace the emergence and evolution of a novel planning policy concept. This is due to the strictly prescribed timelines governing the review and production of development plans. These plans form the principal statutory land use guidance for city, town and county planning authorities. Such authorities are legislatively obliged to commence a review of their existing development plan every four years and to produce a new development plan every six years (Oireachtas, 2000). Consequently, the particularities of Irish planning legislation mean that it is possible to trace the emergence and evolution of a new planning policy concept throughout the recurring and relatively frequent plan review process. Furthermore, Ireland's relatively modest population of just 4.6 million (CSO, 2011), the limited number of planning authorities, and the comparatively small number of public, private and voluntary sector actors normally involved in planning policy formulation presents a restricted administrative and spatial context that renders it feasible to comprehensively chart the path of a new policy concept's development and confidently identify the roles played by different actors in its advancement.

In addition, and with particular reference to GI, the European Union has traditionally served as the principal driver of environmental policy in Ireland (Davies, 2008). In this context, local planning authorities have conventionally implemented nationally transposed EU Directives rather than pioneer novel environmental policy. This poorly developed culture of innovation with respect to environmental policy has been aggravated by the dominance of economic growth concerns in local politics and planning (Kitchin et al., 2012; Taylor, 2005). Consequently, those interested in environmental policy both within and outside the local government system have voiced concern regarding the perceived indifference to conservation activities by Irish local authorities (Leonard, 2008; McDonald and Nix, 2005). This relative paucity of initiative in local authority environmental policy formulation means that the swift emergence and institutionalization of the locally initiated GI planning approach is all the more remarkable (see below). Therefore, explaining the rapid rise of GI planning in Ireland may help illuminate the ways in which agents negotiate the opportunities and constraints of context to enhance the currency of novel policy concepts.

Following this introduction, the paper is structured in four more sections. The first of these outlines the theoretical perspectives informing the examination of empirical material. This focuses on the role of discourse analysis in facilitating a better understanding of the part played by meaning making in policy dynamics. The subsequent section details and interprets the emergence, evolution and institutionalization of GI in Ireland. It first indentifies and examines the initial reasons for the introduction of the GI concept into Irish planning policy discussions. It next traces the evolution of GI's meaning as different agents interpreted and promoted it as a policy solution to their specific problems. Following this, an explanation of why GI gained such widespread support is offered. A description of how it became institutionalized is then presented. This account is employed to substantiate and illustrate the theoretical innovations presented in the following section. Here, a new framework for understanding the interpretive analysis of seemingly unopposed novel policy concepts is presented. The conclusion then summarizes the argument and relates this investigative approach to broader debates concerning the study of policy process dynamics.

The empirical material discussed in this paper is sourced from the analysis of semi-structured interviews with 52 participants from the Irish public, private and voluntary sectors. Such work is complemented by the examination of information obtained from participant observation at two GI-related planning workshops and the detailed inspection of 1031 Irish land use policy documents. International academic and planning practice literature discussing GI is also scrutinized.

This begs the questions, 'what is GI?' Although there are many definitions of GI, by way of orientation, GI in an Irish context may be described as a,

> "...strategically planned and delivered network...designed and managed as a multifunctional resource capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities. (KCC, 2011: 288) [Emphasis added]"

Such a focus on purpose and implementation thus speaks to a series of debates concerning the presentation of environmental qualities in decision making (Beierle and Konisky, 2001; Cowell, 2010; Forsyth, 2003; Hajer, 2003; Jordan, 1999; Roe and Mell, 2013), though what the analysis below outlines is how GI's meaning is fluid in an Irish policy context and that this very fluidity has greatly aided the currency of the concept. Explaining such 'currency' involves the formulation of an innovative explanatory hypothesis. However, to achieve this, establishing a firm theoretical foundation is first required. Accordingly, the next section outlines the discourse-centered interpretive approach informing the hypothesis. This provides the basis upon which theoretical innovations are subsequently formulated, presented and substantiated.

Meaning making and the policy process

Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis refers to the process of scrutinizing the practices employed in the construction of discourses and the influences of discursively mediated interpretations. Discourse is here understood as a specific and cohesive ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorizations that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and against the background of a specific social, temporal and spatial context (Epstein, 2008; Hajer, 1995). In this sense, discourse theorists assert that the legitimacy of knowledge claims is seen as relative to the standards of authentication established by particular systems of knowledge which are related to specific places during certain periods (Foucault, 1972). Used parsimoniously as a backdrop to an analysis of specific discourses, rather than as the object of such an analysis, this comprehension of how standards of authentication are context dependent can provide a means for understanding how some concepts gain traction in debates among parties schooled

in specific modes of thought. Thus, employing discourse analysis facilitates an examination of how problems and policies may be coupled in a way that resonates with prevailing assumptions of knowledge legitimacy in a particular context.

Discourse coalitions

Understanding the currency of novel policy concepts may be achieved by attending to the ways discourse can furnish the 'collective centering' (Hajer and Laws, 2006: 260) that allows constellations of agents to coalesce. These coalitions comprise the well of support for a policy. Consequently, their composition may significantly influence the way a policy evolves and the pace with which it ascends the decision agenda. The theory of 'discourse coalitions' provides a useful means for exploring the formation, composition and operation of such coalitions. Hajer (1995: 65) theorizes that these as 'the ensemble of (1) a set of story-lines; (2) the actors who utter these story-lines; and (3) the practices in which this discursive activity is based'. Here, storylines are conceived as forming tropes or shortcuts into broader narrative schemes that configure events and actions into a unified order. Of specific benefit is Hajer's contention that the power of tropes to form such coalitions is derived from their capacity to facilitate 'discursive affinities'. These are envisaged as separate elements that have similar cognitive or discursive structures and so tacitly suggest a logical mutuality. Such affinities do not primarily refer to agents and their intentions, but instead allude to the influence of discursive formats on the perception of reality. Thus, for example, an agent may not comprehend the technical details of an argument but may be confident in asserting that it 'sounds right' (Hajer, 1995: 67). Consequently, discursive affinities may be thought to function in clustering interpretations of meaning that share a broadly aligned logic rather than an issue-specific assertion. In this way, the various agents comprising a discourse coalition can be conceived as capable of forming associations in their support for the reasoning upon which discursive affinities are able to successfully operate. This is achieved by permitting latitude in interpretation of the particular problems or policies perceived to be addressed by the expressions that prompt discursive affinities. Accordingly, discursive affinities may be seen as both reflecting and constituting the reality on which the rationalities of policies are based. In the case of land use planning wherein the perceived legitimacy of policies is generally reliant on reference to modernist rationalities (Richardson, 1996), the influence of discursive affinities in sustaining and expanding a discourse coalition among planners and allied professionals is likely to be predicated on their ability to resonate with the 'technical-rational model' (Owens et al., 2004: 1945) of knowledge production conceived as operative within planning practice (Adelle et al., 2012; Flyvbjerg, 1998; Rydin, 2003, 2007).

The power of words

By attending to the role of tropes as both constituting and carrying the meanings engendered in policy work 'language becomes part of data analysis for inquiry, rather than simply a tool for speaking about an extra linguistic reality' (Shapiro, 1981: 14). Appreciating this constitutive role thereby requires attention to 'what happens when people draw on the knowledge they have about language ... to do things in the world' (Johnstone, 2007: 3).Drawing on such knowledge entails mediating communication through the context contingent linguistic conventions that supply the pre-conditions for the process of discourse formation. Central to this is the part language plays in the categorization of experience, and as such, fostering 'mental constructs in a world that has only continua' (Stone, 1997: 378). Yanow (2002) suggests that these constructs are central to the policy process through their influence in structuring perceptions of the reality upon which policy is directed. Importantly, these category constructs are not 'fixed', 'innate' or 'given' phenomena. Rather, classification can be understood to entail an interpretive choice based on conclusions regarding the relative importance of some features over others. Hence, categories emphasize elements deemed commensurate within

their delineations and the possible associations between groupings (Bowker and Leigh-Star, 1999; Busch, 2011). Consequently, categories imply certain attributes about that which is classified (Yanow, 2000), such as for example, the ability of that contained within a category to be designed and delivered as 'infrastructure' via the land use planning system. Given their potential to configure the world in an apparently logical format, language-induced categories thus offer an important apparatus open to use by those seeking to promote novel concepts as a means to resolve complex policy issues.

However, engendering forms of reality by categories need not be done explicitly. Instead, 'The fundamental legitimating 'explanations' are ... built into vocabulary' (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 112). In this way, 'the mere act of naming an object or situation decrees that it is to be singled out as such-and-such rather than as something other' (Burke, 1973: 4). Therefore, the naming process may be conceived as a process of reality construction (Potter, 1996: 82). It is in this context that Burke advances a 'theory of entitlement' wherein he proposes a reversal of the intuitive understanding that 'words are the signs of things' by suggesting that 'things are the signs of words' (Burke, 1966: 360–361). As explained by Schiappa,

> "To 'entitle' something – 'X' – is not only to give X a title in the simple sense of assigning X a name or label, but it is also to give X a particular status. For example, to describe X as 'an object' is to assign X an ontological status somewhat different than labeling X 'an event' or 'a vague feeling'. (Schiappa, 2003: 114)"

Hence, Burke proposes that naming may 'entitle' reality. It is through this process of 'entitlement' that presuppositions of how something can be known may be stimulated. Schön (1993) has demonstrated how in a policy context this may be observed in the use of metaphors to orient attention towards novel ideas. Metaphors facilitate this as they are both fundamentally conceptual in nature but grounded in everyday experience (Knowles and Moon, 2006). Accordingly, 'the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another' (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 5).

As has been demonstrated by Myerson and Rydin (1996) with respect to environmental policy, although metaphors may initially appear as merely descriptive, they function by directing perception (Black, 1962). Thus, as with the categories they may help construct, metaphors emphasize certain aspects of things and obscure others, thereby organizing perceptions of reality and suggesting appropriate actions in response to such perceptions (Semino, 2008). It is their conventionality, tacit knowledge potential and the similarities in their broadly shared sense of meaning among a community of interpreters that masks the power of metaphors to shape action (Boyd, 1993; Yanow, 1996). In the context of policy analysis, this may occur as ontological and epistemological connotations are transferred from something familiar onto a new concept that appears to resolve a complex policy issue or series of issues. In time, and through frequent use, the connotations of such metaphorical reasoning may evolve into what are increasingly perceived as denoted 'facts' (Barthes, 2009). Thus, metaphors may evolve from models 'of' a situation to models 'for' it (Yanow, 2000: 43). Should the language of the metaphor(s) used facilitate discursive affinities, metaphor may provide a powerful means by which to create, sustain and expand a coalition of support for a policy or series of polices orientated to a reality entitled by language (Schiappa, 2003: 115). Consequently, it is conceivable to think that the strategic use of metaphor may assist the currency of novel policy concepts.

Policy myth

Such metaphor-stimulated discursive affinities may also serve an important role in the production of 'policy myths'. These forms of narrative are social constructions embedded in a particular time and place. They offer an account of reality which supply 'figures of

resolution' (Myerson and Rydin, 1996: 181) to problematic and complex policy issues. This is achieved by presenting clarity of meaning on the identity and nature of problems, as well as suggesting how such problems may be remedied. The term 'myth' is employed here to designate a 'narrative created and believed by a group of people which diverts attention from a puzzling part of their reality' (Yanow, 1996: 191). This understanding of myth is not an evaluation of a narrative's veracity, as myths are neither true nor false in the empiricist sense. Rather, discernment of their 'truthfulness' is dependent on subscription to their narrative. As such, myth in the context of policy analysis may facilitate subscription by a broad range of issue-specific interests through proffering apparent commensurability in situations where plausible discrepancies may coincide (Yanow, 2000). Consequently, a policy myth may be central to facilitating the emergence, maintenance and expansion of a discourse coalition. This potential may be enhanced by the capacity of myths to implicitly legitimate the actions which their narrative begets by resonating with the prevailing rationality of a policy community.

Discourse coalitions, categories, metaphors and policy myths are all useful theoretical devices that have been applied with varying degrees of combination in different contexts (Epstein, 2008; Myerson and Rydin, 1996; Rydin, 2003; Stone, 2012; Yanow, 1996, 2002). However, full and coherent integration of these concepts is not evident in academic literature concerning the dynamics of planning and environmental policy formulation. This paper seeks to demonstrate how the careful integration of these interpretive ideas may yield greater understanding of the policy process. Specifically, it endeavors to show how such conceptual integration can be employed to address the comparative dearth of attention afforded the explanation of how new policy concepts may quickly ascend the decision agenda in the apparent absence of open dispute or critical analysis. This is undertaken by exploring the case of GI's emergence, evolution and institutionalization as planning policy in Ireland between November 2008 and November 2011.

The Irish GI story provides insight into how an actor motivated by a desire to remedy a longstanding policy issue deliberately sought to foment cooperation and negate potential dispute by assembling a coalition of actors key to the concept's dissemination and institutionalization. This story outlines how both formal and informal networks were tactically exploited to disseminate the concept and propagate new champions for its integration in different policy contexts. Of particular importance is the role played by the strategic deployment of metaphor to shift interpretative categories and generate a policy myth that facilitated the formation of a broad-based discourse coalition centered on a flexible conception of GI.

Thus, by engaging an integrated interpretive approach to the analysis of the Irish GI story, it is shown how an agent who is attentive to the needs, identities and logics of other agents, can affect policy change by strategic action that suspends open disagreement and facilitates ease of concept institutionalization in the apparent absence of critical debate. Drawing lessons from the Irish GI story may thereby help advance our understanding of the policy process. Consequently, an effort is made to abstract from the Irish GI story a framework for integrated interpretive policy analysis. This is presented in the subsequent section.

The Irish GI story

The original impetus for introducing GI in an Irish planning context stemmed from a desire to address the perceived problem of ecosystem degradation resulting from habitat fragmentation. This issue had been identified as a matter requiring remedy in a number of network-focused policy approaches, including 'Green Networks' (GCC, 2005, 2008) and Green Chains' (DCC, 2005). However, these concepts failed to gain purchase beyond the local authority area in which they were introduced, with their lack of 'buy-in' attributed to an abiding governance tradition (Bevir and Rhodes, 2010) that showed scant regard for

biodiversity. As noted by Comhar, The Irish Sustainable Development Council (hereafter Comhar), 'Biodiversity continues to decline because its value is not reflected in decision making by business and Government' (Comhar, 2010a: 5). Accordingly, those seeking to promote the consideration of ecological issues in policy formulation sought a means to elevate the degree of consideration assigned to nature in land use governance.

It is against this backdrop that there emerged a perceived advantage in using the term GI. This was seen to be consequent of the connotations ascribed to the word 'infrastructure' as conveying the idea of 'something that is required for an area' (Interviewee B17), or as reasoned by one GI advocate, 'we need "green infrastructure" in this country sounds much better than saying we need 'green-ways' or we need [a] "biodiversity network" ... it sounds more essential' (Interviewee C3). In this sense, the word 'infrastructure' was used as a means to place ecological conservation within the category of those things deemed necessary. Furthermore, the term GI was used as it was thought to resonate with the disciplinary jargon and practice methods already prevalent within the planning policy community as, 'you've got the word "infrastructure" in there and it's a word that planners are familiar with, like road infrastructure' (Interviewee B3). Thus, the view that GI supplied a problem remedying 'proactive term' (Interviewee B10) may be understood as recognition that 'The struggle to define [a] situation, and thereby to determine the direction of public policy, is always both intellectual and political' (Schön, 1991: 348).

However, by virtue of the word 'green', the term GI quickly evolved from its initial reference to nature conservation and assumed associations with a multitude of broadly conceived green space formats (e.g. recreation and sustainable transport). This expanding scope for the application of the GI concept allowed other agents similarly troubled by the lack of attention afforded their concerns to employ the term in garnering greater consideration for their objectives in policy discussions. As commented by one local authority official, 'my bottom line is any gain from the ideas that I'm interested in is a gain, and if it's delivered through green infrastructure, great!' (Interviewee B20).

In contrast to the failure of previous efforts to disseminate networked-focused conservation approaches, key to disseminating the GI concept was the strategic efforts of an agent positioned within the local authority system to build a broad-based discourse coalition around GI narratives. This agent is most commonly identified as the Heritage Officer from Fingal County Council (FCC) in North County Dublin (Interviewees A2, A7, B16, B23, C2, C8, E4). This 'policy entrepreneur' (Kingdon, 1984) notes how his first contact with GI was serendipitous rather than strategic when recalling that in 2003,

> "I found this green infrastructure paper by Benedict and McMahon on the internet and I read it and I thought that's interesting, don't have time to think about it now but I'll file it away in my head and I'll think about it later. (Interview with FCC Heritage Officer, July 2011)"

However, as time progressed he became aware of what he considered the potential of the GI approach outlined by Benedict and McMahon (2002) as a means to address the low profile traditionally credited to biodiversity issues in Irish planning policy formulation. This view was intensified by his evaluation that, 'ecologists generally who all understand why biodiversity conservation is important ... have not been very good at communicating this to a wider audience' (FCC Heritage Officer, email correspondence, March, 2012). Such an assessment led him to conclude that effectively protecting biodiversity necessitated communicating its value to society in a way that achieves broad-based support for its conservation. Consequently, rather than remaining heedless to the land use aspirations of non-ecological-focused professions when formulating planning policy regarding biodiversity, he increasingly thought it necessary to foment support among a coalition of agents with a shared

interest in green space planning. GI was identified as the communicative means by which to bridge traditional disciplinary delineations and accomplish this objective. As he notes,

> "I like the idea of the synergies within it [GI], in the sense that in order to do this stuff, I can get on board landscape architects and parks people and maybe people who have a walking and cycling agenda and so it's not just about me on my own arguing my little corner, but it's about making that argument stronger by finding fellow travelers who think this kind of language. (Interview with FCC Heritage Officer, July 2011)"

In this sense, GI advocacy was viewed as a means from which a coalition of existing problem-solution narratives with discursive affinities centered on green space planning could achieve greater weight in policy debates by virtue of the number of issues assembled beneath the unifying rubric of 'GI'. It was against this backdrop that GI emerged as a planning discourse in Ireland at a GI conference in Malahide in November 2008, which was initiated and organized by this Heritage Officer.

Many of those who attended the conference later noted that prior to this event they possessed little if any knowledge regarding GI, with one interviewee indicating that the conference 'was almost like an awakening of the concept of green infrastructure for those attending' (Interviewee C7). Among those attending were members of Comhar, whose organizational mandate was to promote sustainable development in Ireland.[1] Operating on a three-year work program, Comhar specified a number of advocacy objectives in 2009 to pursue until the next program review in 2011. In reflecting upon the decision to include GI promotion in the 2009–2011 advocacy program, one Comhar interviewee identified the influential role of this conference when recalling that, '... one of the first times I heard of it was [when] Fingal County Council held a conference in 2008 ... the arguments they were making were things that just kind of made sense to follow it up with a research project' (Interviewee C2). Part of the production process for Comhar's GI research project involved the production and presentation of a draft Baseline Research Study document at a conference in November 2009 (Comhar, 2009a).Comhar used this conference as an opportunity for advancing the cartographic-focused interpretation of GI its staff deemed most appropriate for Ireland. A follow-up workshop of invited planning and allied professionals three months later (Comhar, 2010), further helped disseminate the GI concept among those engaged in planning policy formulation. As observed by one of the workshop's facilitators, 'it pulled together a whole lot of people from government departments and planning departments to talk about the concept and that was very useful' (Interviewee A2). The final report was subsequently published in August of that year (Comhar, 2010) and widely publicized in the national media (Buckley, 2010; Melia, 2010; O'Brien, 2010).

In addition, the Urban Forum[2] sought to maintain interest in GI planning following the 2008 GI Conference. Comprising a coalition of professional institutes focused on promoting shared concerns on built environment issues, the Urban Forum sought to achieve this by combining efforts with the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (IEEM) in disseminating awareness of the concept to both its professional members and those with an interest in the built environment more generally. Particularly, it aspired to build upon the

[1] Comhar was the Irish Sustainable Development Council. It was dissolved in the winter of 2011. In January 2012, the sustainable development role formerly performed by Comhar was integrated into the work of the National Economic and Social Council.

[2] "A joint initiative by the five Institutes representing the built environment professions in Ireland; Royal Institute of Architects in Ireland, Society of Chartered Surveyors, Engineers Ireland, Irish Planning Institute, and Irish Landscape Institute. The Urban Forum facilitates and promotes debate on issues pertaining to urban planning and urban design within Ireland." (UF and IEEM, 2010: 1).

GI advocacy work of FCC and Comhar by producing a 'pamphlet' outlining the potential application of the GI concept in an Irish context. As recalled by one of the Urban Forum's GI focus group members, the purpose of this pamphlet was 'Ultimately awareness raising or another way of thinking about that is "seeding"; seeding the term green infrastructure and the concept of green infrastructure through the body of people, of persons working in the built environment and beyond' (Interviewee A7). Resulting from this, cooperative effort was the publication of a GI advocacy document produced, disseminated and endorsed by the institutes of the Irish planning, engineering, landscape architecture, ecological and surveying professions (UF and IEEM, 2010).

Outside of the role played by these professional institutes, many of those interviewed identified heritage officers as key to the dissemination of the GI concept within the local authority system (Interviewees B1, B3, B4, B7, B10, B15, B19 and C3). Working on a broad definition of 'heritage', the function of these heritage officers is to promote local heritage conservation by helping coordinate and provide input to numerous council activities ranging from environmental and archaeology issues through to built and cultural heritage matters.[3] As such, their activities frequently interact with the local planning policy development process. The ability for heritage officers to disseminate and promote new heritage management concepts within the local authority in which they are situated is facilitated by knowledge exchange between heritage officers. This is assisted by the Heritage Officer Network.[4] Among those heritage officers interviewed, all identified this professional network as central to the dissemination of the GI concept within local authorities. Additionally, some of those interviewed noted the position of FCC's Heritage Officer as a member of the Heritage Officer Network as an important factor in aiding the dissemination of the GI concept throughout local authorities. This deduction is made following his use of the 2008 GI Conference as one of the Heritage Officer Network training days (Interviewee B7) and subsequently by the delivery of a presentation on GI planning at a later training day (Interviewee B20). Thus, by using an established professional network of heritage officers, in which he was embedded, this policy entrepreneur was able to disseminate the GI concept among a receptive audience of colleagues whose function is to advocate heritage management within local authorities. In this sense, an existing formal professional network was employed to precipitate the circulation of the GI approach throughout the planning system by enrolling in its advocacy those charged with assisting in the formulation of local authority planning policy relevant to a wide array of heritage issues.

Along with the Heritage Officer Network, the GI concept was also disseminated by means of the Parks Professional Network. This is a network of officials charged with the management of open spaces within local authorities. Similar to the Heritage Officer Network, the function of the Parks Professional Network is to facilitate knowledge exchange among professionals working in different councils. Colleagues of the FCC Heritage Officer were active in this network, and so following the 2008 GI Conference, FCC's Heritage Officer was invited to deliver a presentation on GI planning to its members (Interviewee B20). The conveners of this network subsequently decided to advocate the GI approach among

[3] There are 27 heritage officers in Ireland distributed throughout various local authorities. Although it is not mandatory for a local authority to employ a heritage officer, the majority of the larger county councils and all but two local authorities in the country's major urban centres chose to do so. These two urban authorities, Limerick City Council and Waterford City Council, are currently in a process of merging with Limerick County Council and Waterford County Council, respectively, both of which have heritage officers. Thus, these new amalgamated local authorities will have heritage officers.

[4] The Heritage Officer Network is coordinated by the Heritage Council, which is the state sponsored body responsible for the promotion of heritage related issues in Ireland.

its members. Furthermore, Comhar provided a presentation on GI at the Parks Professional Network Seminar Day in June 2010 (Comhar, 2010). Thus, in conjunction with the various professional institutes comprising the Urban Forum, and in addition to the Heritage Officer Network, the Parks Professional Network was employed to facilitate the dissemination of the GI concept. Consequently, the circulation of the GI concept within the local authority systems was effected through multiple entry points and from numerous disciplinary perspectives via established formal professional networks.

Concurrent with this was the use of informal professional networks of contacts and colleagues to advance the concept's dissemination throughout the planning system. Indeed, several interviewees noted the importance of informal relationships among professionals as key to the dissemination of the GI concept within the planning system (Interviewees B4, B14, C7). The significance of such relationships with a dispersed community of senior planning officials was manifested in the decision by those drafting the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area 2010–2022 (DRA and MERA, 2010) to promote GI. As recalled by the planner responsible for drafting these regional planning guidelines (RPGs),

> "I had come out of Fingal County Council and would have known [the FCC Heritage Officer] very well...he came to me when he was talking about organizing the green infrastructure conference [2008 Malahide GI Conference]...he explained the concept and I thought it was a great idea and I thought...how timely it was because it was just at the start of the review of the RPGs...so we backed the conference and then I suppose in backing the conference and seeing how the conference went, decided that that was definitely something that the RPGs could get involved in. (Interview with former Regional Planning Officer, July 2011)"

In this way, an informal relationship founded on a history of having worked together within the same organization facilitated the promotion of the GI concept within the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area. Importantly, since the advent of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 (Oireachtas, 2010), all land use policy provisions within the hierarchical structure of Irish planning policy must be consistent with the stipulations provided in higher tier guidance. Consequently, many of those interviewed felt that inclusion and advocacy of the GI concept within the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area (RPGGDA) was decisive to institutionalizing GI as a planning approach within the land use governance system. However, rather than introducing the approach afresh, the RPGGDA gave greater weight to GI's institutionalization by promoting the integration to planning policy of a by now familiar concept. This is evidenced from the fact that GI was already represented in the draft plans for public consultation of Dublin City, Fingal County, South Dublin County and Kildare County Councils prior to the formal adoption of the RPGGDA in June 2010.[5] All these plans were subsequently adopted in late 2010 or early 2011, and all make abundant reference to GI as a planning approach. Thus, by the winter of 2011, the GI planning approach had become institutionalized within regional and local authority planning policy formulation across the most densely populated region of the state. In addition, at a national level, the GI concept was advanced in the Issues Paper for a National Landscape Strategy for Ireland in September 2011 (DoAHG), the content of which was influenced by the GI advocacy work of The Heritage Council (HC, 2010). By November

[5] Wicklow County Council, which is located within the Greater Dublin Area, did not represent GI in its draft development plan for 2010 to 2016 issued for public consultation between October and December 2009. Rather, following a review of submissions on this draft public consultation document in March 2010, it was decided by the Council to include a section on GI. The Wicklow County Development Plan 2010-2016 was formally adopted in September 2010. It includes two objectives on GI (Section 17.7: GI1 and GI2).

2011, the GI concept was also promoted in the National Biodiversity Plan (DoAHG, 2011a) which was produced by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, senior members of which had attended the GI workshop organized by Comhar the year previously (Comhar, 2010).

The next section discusses some possible deductions that can be drawn from the Irish GI story. In particular, it advances an understanding of policy process dynamics that stresses the strategic deployment of discursive forms to garner widespread support, facilitate agenda-setting and promote concept institutionalization. Focused on the ontological, epistemological and coalition stimulating effects of naming, this approach is termed 'policy entitlement'.

Policy entitlement

Building on the work of Burke (1966), the understanding of 'policy entitlement' described below argues that appreciating the particularities of meaning making inherent to the naming process is key to understanding how the strategic use of language may be deployed in a way that appears to resolve longstanding problematic policy narratives by establishing broad-based support for a new policy concept. For purposes of clarity, this description is divided into a four-stage process comprising *interpretation*, *resonance*, *mobilization* and *realization.* However, these various processes may occur in parallel or overlap as the new policy concept is propagated in different organizational, professional and/or geographic quarters.

Interpretation

Entitlement involves the provision of a reference. It is from such a reference that assumptions regarding existence status and ensuing knowledge deductions can be constructed. However, such 'epistemic access' (Boyd, 1993: 483) does not imply uniformity of interpretation regarding the properties of that which is referenced. Rather, a reference may only supply a shared path for interpretation. The specifics of the interpretation produced are dependent on the subjective perspectives of the interpreter, albeit the scope for subjectivity is constrained by the conventions of language use. Given the desire for ready acceptance of the newly entitled concept, the entitlement process would likely need to be a familiar word or conjunction of familiar words applied in a new context. These both dissipate potential rejection of the newly entitled concept through the appearance of familiarity while concurrently directing interpretation of the concept's attributes. In this situation, appreciating the new concept involves transferring comprehensions of the familiar onto the new concept so as to reduce levels of abstraction (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003). Thus, although the new concept is itself given independent status, the entitlement process operates through a form of reasoning wherein 'we talk and, potentially, think about something in terms of something else' (Semino, 2008: 1).

Employing such 'connotative reasoning' facilitates a degree of latitude in the transfer of attributes from the familiar to the new concept. This leeway for interpretation forms an arrangement wherein the apparent simplicity in conceiving the new concept assists in its variable application. In this way, the new concept may subsume multiple issues normally considered discrete. Understood in the context of policy studies, this facilitates the linguistic constitution of a new concept which may couple numerous problematic issues to a unifying policy solution. In Ireland, for example, a multitude of issues were subsumed beneath the rubric of GI by means of connotative reasoning associated with the conjunction of the words 'green' (nature conservation, recreation provision, etc.) and 'infrastructure'. Such reasoning facilitated deductions that the issues to which GI was applicable were both necessary for society and could be planned in much the same way as conventionally conceived infrastructure. However, such meaning making activity was not impartial as it obliged the interpreter to subjectively invest that which was being interpreted with a meaning it did not already possess by way of existing formal denotation (Black, 1962). Thus, the latitude for interpretation permitted by

connotative reasoning facilitated appropriation of the new concept for the particular needs of the end user. As noted by one local authority planner, 'I think the key thing for anybody to realize is there's no definition of green infrastructure ... it's whatever the hell you need in your area' (Interviewee B24). This capacity for GI to be 'positioned' (Hajer, 2003) relative to the requirements of the user allowed multiple issue-specific interests to become aligned with a particular narrative emphasizing the ability to solve a range of policy problems through a single approach. Here, GI functioned as 'a brand' that addressed the problem of 'buy-in' for a variety of planning policy issues (Interviewee C10). This suggests a degree of reflective practice (Schön, 1991) wherein new modes of representation were seen as necessary to effect change by both attracting attention to issues and legitimating perspectives regarding them (Laws and Rein, 2003). Accordingly, those advancing GI discourses in Ireland recognized that 'policy making is mostly a matter of persuasion' (Goodin et al., 2006: 5). However, the persuasive effect of such activity was predicated on an aptitude for deploying discourses that resonated with the prevailing rationality of the policy community to whom they were introduced.

Resonance

For a new policy concept to gain traction, those promoting it are likely to experience greatest success if it is relayed in a way that resonates with prevailing modes of communication. Key to this is an ability to employ familiar language or disciplinary jargon in discussing the interpretation of both the new concept's meaning and applicability (Boyd, 1993). For example, this occurred with GI in Ireland, where antecedent policy concepts and methods were transferred onto new ideas for 'delivering' a range of planning objectives not previously envisaged using such ideas. Here, widespread familiarity of the word 'infrastructure' prompted a pervasive interpretation of GI as that which 'should be viewed as critical infrastructure for Ireland in the same way as our transport and energy networks are as vital to sustainable development' (Comhar, 2009: 39). Accordingly, those advocating GI envisaged it as a 'strategically planned and delivered network of high quality green spaces and other environmental features ... designed and managed as a multifunctional resource' (SDCC, 2010: 257). In this context, the activity of GI planning was perceived through the prism of conventionally conceived infrastructural planning whereby 'The Green Infrastructure concept involves the planning, management and engineering of green spaces and ecosystems in order to provide specific benefits to society' (UF and IEEM, 2010: 2). Hence, GI policy was perceived to reflect 'a typical rational planning methodology' (Comhar, 2010: 61) comprising 'the old processes of survey, analysis, plan' (Interviewee B17). By strongly resonating with this prevailing 'technical-rational model' (Owens et al., 2004: 1945) of planning practice, the GI concept was perceived as the normal view of things. In this way, the reconceptualization of broadly conceived green spaces as infrastructure was seen to simply 'make sense' (Interviewees A2, B13, B16, B20, C5).

Mobilization

Mobilizing a new policy concept involves entrepreneurial effort at enlisting a broad alliance of support for its advancement (Lovell, 2009). Through the process of entitlement, such mobilization is effected by forging narratives to which a broad spectrum of agents can subscribe. In the case of the Irish GI story, the initiative taken by FCC's Heritage Officer in organizing the 2008 GI Conference was decisive to concept mobilization. Comprising a large attendance of politicians and allied land use planning and design professionals from the public and private sectors, the conference represented a broadly sourced assemblage of agents pertinent to the dissemination of GI among those concerned with the formulation of nature conservation and green space planning policy. By assembling these agents,

mutual awareness of discursive affinities in their problem narratives was facilitated. Here, connotations with both the words 'green' and 'infrastructure' facilitated coalescence around GI narratives of numerous issues and interests heretofore considered discretely. This process was subsequently consolidated by a presentation delivered by FCC's Heritage Officer at continuing professional development events for heritage officers and parks professionals. It was further buttressed by a GI presentation delivered by Comhar at a subsequent conference and the organization by Comhar of a GI workshop attended by an invited audience of key planning and allied disciplinary professionals.

In addition, this entitlement process promoted sufficient accord between recreation planners, conservation ecologists and flood management engineers to facilitate broad-based consensus and support for the principles (although not yet the details) of GI planning. This enabled the formation of a discourse coalition consequent to fomenting the perception that through the rebranding of their various planning concerns as GI, a range of issues could be addressed by means of a single planning policy concept. Such a phenomenon was related by one interviewee in surmising,

> "it kind of showed how doing one thing can meet a range of different things all at once, so I think it just allowed the various professions, and I suppose stakeholders, to see that if they bought into the concept that it will deliver stuff that all of us need. (Interviewee B16)"

Achieving this required the suspension of plausibly perceived incompatibilities or logical inconsistencies in providing a unifying policy solution to an assortment of potentially disparate problems. This was accomplished through the 'mythic' qualities of those narratives stimulated by the entitlement of the GI policy concept. These allowed multiple parties with various interests to espouse the GI concept as it was seen as 'a sort of useful term ... it allows a lot of people who have overlapping interests to come together and sort of share the space' (Interviewee C3). In this way, entrepreneurial effort at mobilizing the 'GI myth' enabled those with longstanding and problematic policy issues to cooperate on matters in respect of which there was significant potential for disagreement.

Moreover, this attribute of GI was seen to help furnish the 'strength in numbers' (Interviewee A10) considered necessary for placing issues previously thought neglected on the decision agenda. Here, latitude for interpretation enabled those seeking remedy to unsolved problems to adopt GI as a resolving discourse. Also, those desiring to communicate the merits of their existing policy activities were able to rebrand their current problem–solution storylines in a manner that harmonized with GI discourses. Hence, as observed by one advocate of GI, 'sometimes it's trying to address water supply issues, sometimes it's trying to address energy issues, sometimes transport issues, so it depends on the context, it depends on the person, it depends on the function' (Interviewee E5).

Realization

Following the initial introduction of a new concept by a policy entrepreneur, several policy entrepreneurs may emerge and operate in different policy arenas. This propagation of entrepreneurial activity is facilitated by the strategic use of formal and informal networks, coupled with the interpretive latitude of what the new policy concept may signify, as it is applied to the assorted policy requirements of different agents. Such a phenomenon was witnessed in the case of GI in Ireland where following the GI Conference of November 2008 a number of planning and allied practitioners sought to pool their efforts by forging an advocacy network of allied institutions seeking to promote their member's varying interests by advancing the concept's dissemination. Resultant from this process was the publication of a GI advocacy document produced, disseminated and endorsed by the institutes of the Irish planning, engineering, landscape architecture, ecological and

surveying professions (UF and IEEM, 2010). Subsequently, several of these institutions sought to individually advocate GI as a policy solution among their members through presentations by invited GI experts. Similarly, Comhar emerged as a strong advocate of GI following the 2008 GI conference by organizing a GI workshop (Comhar, 2010) and producing a GI-specific planning guidance document (Comhar, 2010). Furthermore, through the initial entrepreneurial activities of FCC's Heritage Officer, the GI concept was disseminated among and subsequently advocated by members of the Heritage Officer and Parks Professionals Networks.

This dissemination among and embracing of a new concept by a broad array of agents involved in policy formulation activity, helped to prime the policy landscape for incorporation of the GI concept into statutory guidance when opportunities emerged. Accordingly, as local authority development plans were reviewed, redrafted and adopted over the following years, GI was integrated into land use policy in the seeming absence of open critical debate. As remarked by one planning authority officer,

> "each county has their own timing set out for their development plan so you can only decide on what's relevant at the time. So green infrastructure, if it's becoming the vogue or the thing to be doing, well then as each county introduces their new development plan it will probably become either a chapter or a section in their development plan. (Interviewee B23)"

Hence, this paper advances an explanation of how the institutionalization of a new policy concept may occur gradually but steadily from numerous quarters and with apparent broad-based support as opportunities materialize in different policy arenas at different times.

Conclusions

This paper endeavors to address the comparative lack of attention given to the study of novel policy concepts where open dispute and critical debate appears absent in policy discussions. It seeks to describe both *why* and *how* such concepts may gain traction and be institutionalized. In doing so, the paper builds upon, complements and enhances interpretive approaches to policy analysis. Specifically, an original interpretive case study analysis of the emergence of GI planning in Ireland is used to explore and explain the role of meaning making in the currency of novel concepts. Although now a concept commonly represented in national, regional and local planning policy documents, on the whole GI has not yet been applied in practice. Thus, future research should investigate if and how the general 'consensus in principle' regarding GI is transferred to a 'consensus in detail' as efforts are made to implement the concept.

The paper outlines how a new policy concept may gain currency by appearing to render longstanding complex issues amenable to resolution by existing modes of practice. It is demonstrated how this may be achieved by altering perceptions of the problems at hand so that they provide a 'better fit' with contemporary methods of solution formulation. It is also shown that such amended perceptions may then be conceived as the 'natural order of things' (Foucault, 1972), so that the new policy concept 'just makes sense' (Interviewee B16). The paper thus argues that focusing on the role of meaning making in the policy process may lead to a better understanding of how seemingly innovative concepts gain traction by promising new modes of operating while actually reinforcing 'confidence in prevailing institutions and their capacity to resolve problems' (Paehlke and Torgerson, 2005: 315). Key to this is an awareness that the persuasive potential of those discourses prompted by a new policy concept is dependent on its patterning according to a given logic of communication that resonates with the prevailing modes of thought in a given context (Schmidt, 2010). Therefore, such discourses may be imagined to thrive when speakers 'get it right' by addressing their comments to the

'right' audiences at the 'right' times in the 'right' ways (Schmidt, 2012). Importantly, the paper argues that such 'speakers' are not passive in parroting a received discourse. Instead, they actively seek to negate opposition and advance their policy objectives by exploiting the discourse's flexibility and consensus-building potential, as well as strategically identifying and employing dissemination opportunities, such as informal relationships and formal networks.

Much interpretive policy analysis concentrates on the emergence or evolution of new concepts. Here, investigation frequently centers on specific dimensions of meaning making. This most often devotes attention to actor's use of rhetoric, the role of epistemic traditions, discourse coalitions and the deployment of narratives. Within such work, focus may be given to the study of how meaning making devices such as categories and metaphors are deployed with varying degrees of combination in different contexts. However, less attention has been shown to how these different dimensions and devices interact with the identification and strategic exploitation of opportunities to disseminate new concepts. Moreover, interpretive analysis often fails to address the specific processes through which a new policy concept becomes both informally adopted and formally institutionalized. By not integrating these various aspects of policy dynamics, such work while laudable in its site-specific explanatory insight, loses a holistic perspective on the emergence, evolution and institutionalization of new ideas. This privileging of analytical facets ultimately impedes capacity to trace how different foci of interpretive investigation interrelate in giving new meaning and traction to novel concepts as they move between agents and discourses in different contexts.

This paper seeks to address such lacunae by supplying a full and coherent integration of these dimensions, devices and dissemination strategies. Hence, it offers an innovative means of interpretive analysis that promotes greater holism without compromising on attention to detail. Specifically, the paper proposes the notion of 'policy entitlement'. This functions by identifying and clarifying the 'interpretive schemata' (Hajer and Laws, 2006: 264) that give traction to new concepts within policy formulation activity in ways that appear to minimize disagreement by suspending debate on issues of potential dispute and highlighting 'win-win' possibilities for a broad coalition of actors. A four-fold interrelated and overlapping process is advanced. While investigation may begin at any point in this process, it cannot be detached from the process as a whole and so should lead the researcher to explore the interconnections between *interpretation*, *resonance*, *mobilization* and *realization*. At the heart of this account is an appreciation that the resolution of numerous policy issues in the seeming absence of open critical debate, 'is not a question of whether a given description is an objective picture of reality but whether a given description receives the intersubjective assent of relevant members of a discourse community' (Schiappa, 2003: 111). Accordingly, in cases where numerous, longstanding and normally conflicting issues appear resolved by seemingly widespread subscription to a new policy concept, what the analyst should attend to is *how* presumptions of issue commensurability are communicated by whom, to whom, when and where.

This paper adds credence to the view that 'public policy-making is rarely as simple a matter as either analysts or policy-makers might wish for' (Howlett et al., 2009: 9). Indeed, by proposing the notion of 'policy entitlement', it challenges conventional understandings of the policy process which erroneously partition the 'real' and the 'representational'. This entails recognition that 'Policies and political actions are not either symbolic or substantive. They can be both at once' (Yanow, 1996: 12). Such a perspective deepens our appreciation of policy process complexities by emphasizing that the meanings agents attach to new policy concepts 'are not just representations of people's beliefs and sentiments about political phenomena; they fashion these phenomena' (Wagenaar, 2011: 3).

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