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The genesis and evolution of urban policy: a confrontation of regulationist and governmentality approaches

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Abstract

This paper develops an analytical framework that can serve to analyse the genesis and evolution of institutions that instantiate urban policy. To this end, two theoretical approaches are integrated: the state theoretical regulation approach and the governmentality approach. Although these approaches depart from different ontological and epistemological starting points, the research tools that they have developed are largely complementary. Therefore, in concrete research, a framework that combines elements from both approaches could yield important empirical insights. Urban policy in the Netherlands is analysed to illustrate some of the theoretical and methodological propositions that have been developed.

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In the past decades, Jessop and some of his colleagues and students have developed the so-called state theoretical regulation approach (henceforth referred to as STRA) and have used this approach to explain the dynamics of urban and regional policies in Britain (cf. Jessop, 1990; Jones & MacLeod, 1999; MacLeod,

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1997). More recently, a number of authors who want to make sense of these types of policy have been inspired by the work that has evolved in response to Foucault's lecture on 'Governmentality' (Foucault, 1991; MacKinnon, 2000; Raco, 2003; Raco & Imrie, 2000). Both approaches have so far been developed in relative isolation from each other. 'Relative' because representatives of both approaches have incidentally referred to each other's work.

For example, the authors who have adopted the governmentality perspective have indicated on several occasions that not all state theories fall victim to the economism or formalism they identify with political-economic state theory (MacKinnon, 2000, p. 5; Raco & Imrie, 2000, p. 2089, note 1). However, these remarks have been made in footnotes or in introductory paragraphs and so far these authors have not directly confronted the STRA or, indeed, any other type of political-economic state theory. In a similar vein, one representative of the STRA has conceded in passing that the regulationist approach falls short in analysing the "microphysics of governmentality" (MacLeod, 2001, p. 822, note 22), whilst another author has stressed that STRA scholars "should also attend to more ethnographic aspects of state strategy and capacity" (Jeffrey, 2000, p. 1033). These observations are in line with a more general conclusion that "...political economy...has an impoverished notion of how subjects and subjectivities are formed and how different modes of calculation emerge and become institutionalised", which calls for the development of an approach that "...articulates the micro-foundations of political economy with its macro-structuring principles in an overall material-discursive analysis..." (Jessop & Sum, 2001, p. 97). These statements indicate that a central problem in the literature on governance – the relation between developments on different spatial scales – has not been properly dealt with. Jones (1998) raised the issue in a provocative paper in this journal and several papers have touched upon it since. However, the papers by MacKinnon (2000) and MacLeod and Goodwin (1999) are firmly rooted in the two respective approaches. A third paper by Jeffrey (2000) has with some success tried to broaden the scope of the STRA without, however, directly commenting on the origins of (urban) policies.

The casual references of representatives of both approaches in recent papers indicate that there potentially is a lot to gain from a further confrontation and integration. This paper covers a small part of this agenda. It tries to build an analytical framework for studying the genesis and development of urban policies. More specifically, this paper deals with the *multi-scalar origins* of (urban) policy, as it will try to provide a schematic account of the interactions between actors and processes operating on diverse spatial scales and the ways in which these interactions ultimately crystallize into specific types of policy. It is argued that both approaches have a rather limited conceptual tool kit when it comes to analysing the multi-scalar origins of (urban) policy. This omission occurs in a different guise in each case and both approaches have tried to resolve it within their own paradigm. If these fruitful yet partial attempts to deal with the problem of scale are combined, it becomes possible to make some steps forward.

The paper is organised as follows. The first section highlights some of the steps that have been taken in recent decades to conceptualise the state from a

political-economic perspective. It is argued that the British variant of the regulation approach, as formulated and promoted in particular by Bob Jessop, offers some important insights. However, this approach leaves some questions open. The second section argues that these issues can be (partly) resolved by taking aboard insights from neo-Foucauldian approaches, in particular the emerging ‘governmentality’ literature. The third section then tries to select elements from both approaches that can function as building blocks of an analytical framework that can facilitate a study of the emergence of state policy. The fourth section offers a broad and tentative analysis of urban policy in the Netherlands in order to illustrate the usefulness of the framework.

The political economy of policy

Drawing inspiration from a variety of sources, Bob Jessop has during recent decades endeavoured to take state theory to a higher theoretical level. During the last decade, his theories have become extremely influential amongst British geographers and they have been key in various analyses of state restructuring (cf. Hay, 1996; MacLeod & Jones, 1999). In this section I subsequently pay attention to the intellectual roots of Jessop’s work and discuss a few of its most important themes. In passing, I provide some preliminary comments on discrepancies between political-economic approaches and Foucauldian approaches. After that, I identify some weaknesses in Jessop’s approach and indicate how and to what extent other STRA researchers have overcome these weaknesses.

In Jessop’s view, the state is not a homogeneous entity that operates according to a single logic. A key assumption that underlies his approach to the state is derived from Poulantzas: the state is considered “as a system of *strategic selectivity* and the nature of political struggle as a field of *competing strategies* for hegemony” (Jessop, 1990, p. 221, original emphasis). The tasks for the state theorist are then to determine how past processes and strategies have shaped the selectivity of the state and how the state, as a strategic terrain, privileges some strategies over others. Oversimplifying for space considerations, we can suggest that, on the one hand, regulation theory has helped Jessop understand the different ways in which the state can come to serve different purposes in the process of capital accumulation and, as such, can take on different kinds of selectivity. On the other hand, Gramsci (1971) has been a key influence with respect to the ways in which political agents formulate strategies, acquire power and may ultimately achieve hegemony.

To investigate the dialectical relationship between strategies and structures, Jessop (1990, 2001, 2002) has opted for a strategic-relational approach (SRA). SRA proceeds from the assumption that strategies and structures are co-constitutive of each other, implying that it is impossible to draw an ontological line between them. Yet in concrete analysis, the exclusive concern of this paper, structures and strategies must be distinguished analytically in order to establish the changing nature of the relationship between, on the one hand, structures that are strategic in their forms and privilege some actors, identities, strategies, temporal/spatial horizons and actions

and, on the other hand, the ways in which actors interpret, respond to and try to manipulate these strategic selectivities (Jessop, 2001, pp. 1223–1226). Jessop (2001, p. 1230) argues that “institutional analysis occurs prior to action – even if the action subsequently transforms institutions and institutional context”. Thus SRA implies that the analysis of social change should shift continuously between the identification of the structural selectivities that confront actors and the ways in which actors act within and upon those selectivities. Yet in concrete analyses, Jessop has primarily paid attention to the shift from one type of state (the Keynesian Welfare National State) to another (Schumpeterian Competition State), focussing more on the provisional end-result of strategies, in the shape of institutional structures, than on the activities of individual actors (e.g. Jessop, 1994, 2002).

I suspect that most readers are already acquainted with Jessop’s work, so I will here refrain from a general discussion (see Jessop, 2002). However, I do believe it is important to focus here specifically on the relation between Foucault’s accounts and those of Jessop and Poulantzas because identifying discrepancies and commonalities between both strands of theorising can help establish what opportunities and problems arise if we combine elements from both approaches into a single analytical framework (see Jessop, 1985). Much in contrast to other Marxist writers, including Gramsci, Poulantzas’s latter analyses seem to be relatively consistent with those of Foucault. In *State, Power, Socialism*, Poulantzas considered the state structure as a condensation of social struggles. As he supposed that the state’s functions, policies and goals are contingent upon the outcome of social struggles, he has a dynamic and non-essentialist view of the state. In this respect he is on the same par as Foucault and contemporary Foucauldians who, even though they shy away from terms like social struggle, see the state-civil society division as the outcome of a variety of open-ended processes. However, whereas Foucauldians see the state only as a result of processes of (discursive) *codification* (see below), Poulantzas stressed the importance of *materialised* institutional structures. As I will explain below, this means that Foucauldians have a somewhat impoverished understanding of the institutions that link local settings to each other and to centres for decision making.

Another important difference concerns the way both theorists conceptualise power. While Poulantzas recognised how capillary power as exercised within particular local settings is not simply the result of political and economic processes operating on higher scales, his view of power is not impersonal or, perhaps more accurately, actorless. Thus, power may be located in, amongst other things, local settings but the dynamics of the forms through which it is exercised are related to the actions of knowledgeable actors. In contrast, Foucault subscribed to a more impersonal notion of power and strategy. He located strategy not in actors but in dispositifs, which, in turn, are the outcome of, rather than condition or determine, dynamics in local settings where a microphysics of power continuously creates new relationships between knowledge and the exercise of power. The difference between these two notions of power is of an ontological nature and can thus not easily be resolved. Yet in more mundane analysis and theorising, it is possible to opt (provisionally) for a hybrid notion of strategy. Below I suggest that strategies that generate and discipline subjects flow from institutional constellations that are not

under intentional control of any particular agent. Yet once strategies have developed from the microphysics of power in such constellations, they can be appropriated and promoted by identifiable actors and subsequently become the stake in political struggles.

This admittedly brief and sketchy excursion through the work of Jessop and his sources of inspiration is hopefully sufficient to flesh out four problems as a step towards the synthesis to be developed below. First, even though Jessop, especially in his recent work, clearly recognises the need to specify the scalarity of the processes he analyses, he has not fully explored the nature of the relationship between different actors operating on different scales. This is related to the fact that it is difficult to pinpoint chains of causation when one assumes, as Jessop does, that all institutions and behaviours have mutually determining relationships. The challenge is to combine such an ontological claim with an approach that does not provide tautological explanations.

Second, Jessop is notoriously hesitant when it comes to using his theoretical propositions in empirical research. The closest he has come in recent years to empirical investigations are his attempts to fuse theoretical deduction and empirical generalisations into typologies of states under different ideal-typical regimes. Contrasting two or more ideal-types may be useful for heuristic purposes but it does not help to study the ways in which modes of government are actually the object of continuous struggles, which gives regulation the character of a fluctuating and contested process rather than an achieved end-state¹ (see also Painter, 1997; Peck & Tickell, 2002). In fact, there is a large discrepancy between the formal methods of SRA and Jessop's actual analysis. In analysing social change and state transformations, he focuses on contradictions inherent to capitalism and how these can be resolved through the implementation of mediating institutions. While he does indicate that such institutions are not automatically created but are the result of trial-and-error processes (cf. Collinge, 1999; Jessop, 1995), in his actual analyses these processes escape his attention. The strategies of individual actors, too, play no role in Jessop's empirical analysis. This may be justifiable to some extent since Jessop can be said to focus on the *result* of strategies in order to grasp fundamental changes. Yet it is important to recognise that most of the time policy shifts will occur *within* a particular regime. Urban policy is a typical example of a collective endeavour of an (often internally antagonistic) inter-organisational ensemble that functions relatively autonomous from a larger institutional complex and hence has particular dynamics that deserve attention of their own.

Third, even if it is accepted that the state can be considered a terrain, stake and result of the actions of actors who act strategically, it remains unclear where strategies come from. What happens *before* actors try to attain and employ state

¹ Of course, Jessop recognises this on a theoretical level as he, for example, talks about the ways in which the actors that operate through the state are continually changing the strategic selectivity of the state (Jessop, 1990). However, when he formulates empirical generalisations or constructs ideal-types, which are his favoured modes of empirical analysis, he at the very least de-prioritises the internal dynamism of modes and mechanisms of regulation.

power has remained unclear. This is so because, in Jessop's view, actors operate on one another and the historical aggregate of their actions in the form of a malleable yet inert set of institutions confronts them with a set of strategic selectivities. Actors are, in turn, understood to act upon, and within, these selectivities. However, actors operate not only upon other identifiable actors and selectivities. State actors in particular also act on such entities as neighbourhood populations that can be considered neither as actors nor as selectivities *per se*. Indeed, because of his emphasis on the relationship of actors to their institutional and organisational context, Jessop ignores the ways in which categories and entities of government are constructed and the relationship of state actors to the entities they are supposed to govern. Below I will develop the argument that the actions of state actors should be explained as the result of the creative and generative response of actors to the institutional context in which they operate *and* their inherently troublesome relation to the entities they govern.

Fourth, this body of work tends to ignore the places where power makes itself actually felt – the body and the institutional setting that surrounds it. Even though more recent work has applied Jessop's abstract theoretical pointers in concrete research on, for example, the interaction between policy makers and their institutional environment, it remains the case, as MacLeod (2001, p. 822, note 22) suggests that the microphysics of power has remained well out the orbit of not only Jessop's work but the body of regulationist writings as a whole.

These problems do not imply that the STRA is altogether useless – on the contrary, the theorising of Jessop is extremely valuable but it needs to be reformulated or at least complemented before it can be used to explain the genesis and evolution of urban policies. To some extent, students and colleagues of Jessop have taken up these challenges as they have translated his theoretical insights into workable research programmes (Jones, 1997, 1998; Peck & Jones, 1995; Uitermark, 2002a). One of the most promising areas of research, from the point of view of this paper, is the relationship between political struggles taking place on different scales. They show, for example, how territorialized social blocs try to manipulate the distributions of power among different administrative levels and spatial scales (MacLeod, 1999). Another example is MacLeod's study on 'revanchist urbanism' (see Smith, 1996) in Glasgow as he associates state restructuring with the intensification of repressive state actions and has provided some valid reasons why these processes may occur simultaneously (MacLeod, 2002). In all cases, STRA researchers emphasise the national (and occasionally supranational) level over the local level, as they suggest that the procedures of subjectification on which they are based, have been *imported* from elsewhere – indeed, it is often suggested that policies are somewhat 'synthetic', lacking an organic relationship to the territories where they are implemented (cf. Jones, 2002; Jones & MacLeod, 1999). In other words, local developments are explained by taking into account supra-local processes and seeing the former as the (mediated) result of the latter. It is important to note that such a conclusion is not intrinsic to STRA. MacLeod (1997, p. 534), for example, has suggested that

...in certain fields of public policy ... emergent institutional forms and representational artefacts can mutually constitute with (as yet) fledgling discourses, before competing to form hegemonic public narratives and 'institutional centres of gravity'...

He then goes on to suggest that particular discourses acquire hegemonic status during particular periods. Drawing on the work of Jane Jenson, he states it is important to ask *how* or *why* this happened. Jenson's work (e.g. Jenson, 1993) is helpful in this respect because she connects the regulation approach to the notion of political opportunity structure (see, e.g., Tarrow, 1994) in order to better understand the strategic behaviour of actors.

These brief remarks indicate that the STRA allows, in principle, an understanding of national policies as mediated outcomes of *local* struggles and processes of subject building. However, little use has been made of these opportunities. When the STRA considers statist actors or actors closely allied to the state, the focus is on activities of actors *within* an actually existing (national) institutional framework. Local and regional actors can act inside that framework or move beyond it by shifting their activities to higher spatial scales (MacLeod, 1999) but cannot change it. Whitehall officials are responsible for those policies and the STRA treats these officials and the policies they conceive as autonomous from local actors.

Indeed, despite initial probes in the direction of a more complete understanding of the dynamic of central–local relationships, these authors are quite clear with respect to urban policy and, to a lesser extent, regional policy. For example, MacLeod and Goodwin (1999), after a sophisticated discussion on state restructuring and scale, argue that successive national governments have tried to shape urban governance in London according to their own ideas and interests. And even though they indicate that the central state cannot 'fix' local governance, they firmly situate change at the *national* level. Rather than seeing the changing forms of urban governance as the result of the interaction between strategies of local and national actors, they give the impression that the central state has, by itself, the power to shape local governance to the extent that it is unnecessary to pay attention to the intentions, ideas, interests and strategies of local actors. Jones's statement that "[p]erhaps the *last* place to start with TECs and local economic governance is at the local level" (Jones, 1998, p. 971, original emphasis) is equally typical; in the end, strategies of regional and local actors are understood to distort or complement national strategies but the latter are always *imposed* from the outside upon the former. Jones's contribution to this journal offers a welcome addition to this literature in that it clearly articulates the position of the regulation approach *vis-à-vis* other strands of literature and in that it is in fact meant for debate.² Let me cite at some length from one passage that neatly

² As I indicated in the beginning of this paper, that debate did not really take place, even though Jones gave some valid and strong criticisms of the existing literature. With this paper I have a similar objective, namely to restate the problem and to press others to deal with the complex yet crucial issue of central–local relationships.

summarises the position of STRA researchers on urban policy and, in fact, any policy:

Under the surface, local governance has a brutal logic. Because institutional change is driven as much by national crisis management practices aimed at achieving local social control, as it is by the needs of the economy – giving rise to a primacy of political factors involved in the architecture of contemporary local governance – there is *more* to governance than the complexities of inter-institutional and intra-spatial coordination. This is not to deny the role of local geographies of governance within capitalist transformation but to restate the role of the nation state – political geography (with politics) – when analysing local state transformation (Jones, 1998, p. 960, original emphasis).

While I agree overall with the argument Jones is making here, I do want to highlight some aspects that are problematic. First, in contradistinction to Foucauldian accounts, Jones has spotted *a* logic, implying that there is one mechanism that affects all governance arrangements to the extent that they come to share identical characteristics. Moreover, this logic operates *under the surface* and has its origin in the *central state*, which leads Jones (and others who adhere to STRA) to redirect attention away from the nitty-gritty that goes on at the local level. It is important to recognise that these two aspects of his account do *not* necessarily flow from his important argument that the central state performs a pivotal role. The question, however, is what this role consists of and whether or not there might be reasons to (also) make a claim that contrasts with that of Jones's, i.e. that central state policies follow a specific logic that is the cumulative result of, or develop in dialectical relation to (rather than determines), local developments.

I do not want to discuss the case of the GLC or TECs, with which these authors are of course far more familiar than I am. I do want to make the point that, especially in advanced liberal societies (see below), the strategies of national actors can only have significant effects if they productively intersect with strategies of local actors. Thus, whereas MacLeod and Goodwin (1999, p. 508) approvingly quote Harding's (1997, p. 308) conclusion that "little can happen sub-nationally without [the nation state's] cooperation, acquiescence or benign ignorance", I think it is important to stress that the reverse is also true: only if central actors strategically act through local strongholds, capitalise on local knowledge and, more generally, build strategies that complement those of (already) powerful local actors, can it hope to do reach its stated goals. In other words, it is more productive to discuss the actions and strategies of local and national actors in a relational manner as co-constitutive of each other. Such a remark is of course easy to make (who would dare to defend an approach that views the local or central level in strict isolation!) but it is more difficult to substantiate it by providing some analytical instruments to actually fill in the gaps.

Without attempting to fully solve these problems here, I suggest that viewing the activity of local governance actors not only as an execution of or a resistance to national policies but also as *constitutive* of such policies may help identify forces of change that have hitherto been neglected. Investigating the microphysics of power at

the local level would not merely fill a small gap in empirical research but may also further understanding of the macro-processes that form the core interest of the STRA writings. This task I take on in the third section, where I will emphasise that, somewhat contrary to Jones's claim, understanding local governance regimes depends on understanding the transfer of powers and knowledge from the national to the local *and vice versa*. Formulated in a somewhat more polemical fashion my claim is that we indeed *should* start at the local level but that we simply should not keep stuck there.

The problematisation of policy

Like my remarks on Jessop, my account of the Foucauldian literature will be very selective and far from comprehensive. I highlight only those elements of the literature that have played a role in the formulation of the analytical framework presented below. Thus, I first discuss some aspects of Foucault's work on institutions and focus specifically on 'local centres' for power–knowledge. Then I turn to the governmentality approach and suggest that, despite its shortcomings, this approach may help understand the connections between the exercise of power in local settings and programmes of government.

Foucault sought to redirect attention away from the actions of representatives of capital and the state who are commonly held to exercise power towards the local settings in which power actually makes itself visible and sensible. His empirical studies sought to demonstrate that power does not flow from centres to eventually impact on the minutiae of daily life but instead is produced through the play of forces in decidedly local settings. He explained how at a certain conjuncture in time a combination of conditions paved the way for the evolution of new institutions, such as the prison, the mad house or the clinic. Foucault argues that there are important parallels between different types of institutions, enabling him, for example, to use the panopticon as an archetypical example of a disciplinary institution. Thus he emphasised that the insertion of the prison into society was possible because its logic was compatible with other systems of social order: he argued that the emergence of the prison was (almost) inevitable in a situation where there was an explosion of mechanisms for identification and registration that drew individuated subjects into networks of discipline (Foucault, 1977). But while institutions can thus be analysed against the backdrop of societal changes, Foucault (1990, p. 98) stressed that they can become 'local centres' of power–knowledge and, as such, have an autonomous role to play in the production of discourse. In *History of Sexuality*, for example, Foucault explains how systems for observing sexuality generate norms of normality. While initially an advanced division of labour, characterized by the existence of medical and hygienic experts, was necessary to create a web of institutions around the cradle, after its formation this web created its own dynamic and started to function as an autonomous producer of discourses. In line with these comments, Foucault (1990, p. 94) saw 'major dominations' as the effect of confrontations in an endless variety of local settings.

For the present paper, Foucault's work is especially interesting because he *locates* processes of discourse formation. Although Foucault is not entirely consistent about this, he generally saw power as coming from below (Foucault, 1990, p. 94); the modalities of power have their origin in local confrontations and settings, subsequently fuse or combine with other modalities and finally constitute one overall heterogeneous pattern – *dispositif* – of domination.

Precisely because it considers extensively the modes of government that function at a distance from the places where power makes itself felt and visible, the governmentality literature that has emerged in recent years can provide some useful instruments for analysing the connections between 'local centres' for power–knowledge and programmes of government (Dean, 1999; Miller & Rose, 1990; Rose, 1999; Rose & Miller, 1992). This approach has extensively analysed contemporary forms of government from a Foucauldian perspective. The analytical distinction between rationalities and technologies of government has been key to this enterprise. Political rationalities refer to:

practices for the formulation and justification of idealized schemata for representing reality, analysing it and rectifying it – as a kind of intellectual machinery or apparatus for rendering reality thinkable in such a way that it is amenable to political programming (Rose, 1996a, p. 42).

Technologies of government refer to

strategies, techniques and procedures through which different authorities seek to enact programmes of government in relation to the materials and forces to hand and the resistances and oppositions anticipated or encountered (Rose, 1996a, p. 43).

Expertise comes to play a crucial role as experts mediate between the actions of political authorities and the objects – jurisdictions, persons, groups, etc. – that fall under their responsibility (Rose, 1993, 1996a, p. 40, 50). Hence the stress in the definition of technologies of government on the 'materials and forces to hand' and the 'resistances and oppositions anticipated or encountered': liberal government capitalises on the self-governing capacities of processes, persons and organisations. It steers rather than dictates; and even when it steers, it necessarily has to respect the local or sectoral – in a word, expert – knowledges and practices it relies upon for the effective enactment of government.

The analysis of the link between authorities and (local) experts has been inspired by Latour's treatise on 'government from a distance'. Latour explains how authorities in centres of government can enact programmes of government over objects to which they have no direct access. He argues that authorities have to perform three operations on objects in order to be able to govern them from a distance: they have to (1) render them mobile so that they can be brought back; (2) keep them stable so that they can be moved back and forth without additional distortion, corruption or decay; and (3) make them combinable so that they can be assembled and processed in aggregates (Latour, 1987, p. 233). These three requirements imply that processes of abstraction and simplification are a necessary

precondition for any type of government. As Rose (1993, 1996a) has persistently argued, under liberal governance a fourth requirement is that such processes of abstraction and simplification do not negatively affect the self-regulative qualities of the objects and processes that are governed.

The relevance of the governmentality approach for this paper derives from its ability to reconsider the relationship between centres and the places where power is in the first and final instances exercised. To some extent, it has complemented Foucault's accounts of individual regimes of truth and power by showing how these regimes can be inserted into more general programmes of government. Nevertheless, its usefulness is limited if we want to study the evolution of specific types of policies. This is so because the governmentality approach analyses social change only from the viewpoint of authorities. Thus, authorities are considered to act *only* on the basis of the ideas and plans that they themselves creatively generate by drawing on – but, in the process, modifying – already existing systems of thought. Even though lip service is paid to resistances that may be anticipated by authorities or actually occur, the approach has not incorporated struggles into its analysis (Isin, 1998). The governmentality approach has a rather voluntaristic view of the decision-making process because it fails to take full account of the importance of the properties of the institutional context in which authorities operate and which facilitate as well as constrain their actions.

Below I develop seven hypotheses that together can serve as an analytical framework for the analysis of (urban) policy. These hypotheses are derived either from the STRA, the governmentality approach or the traditions in which these two respective approaches are embedded. While I do not want to consider ontological differences between both approaches, I do want to provide some initial considerations with respect to the possibilities for integrating insights from both perspectives into a single analytical framework. First, with respect to the compatibility of both approaches on a superficial level, it is important to note that their working hypotheses largely overlap. This already becomes clear from Jessop's (1990, ch. 8) comparison of Poulantzas's and Foucault's approach to power. For example, just like Foucault abstained from an analysis of 'the state', Jessop (1982, pp. 211–212) argues against a general theory of 'the' state. A more recent example: Jessop's discussion of metagovernance as a mode of coordination that is becoming more important corresponds closely to Rose's stress on the way in which self-organising capacities acquire increasing importance (see Jessop, 1998, 2002, ch. 7; Rose, 1999). Both authors locate these changes within a more general transition from a 'Fordist' (Jessop) or 'social' (Rose) type of government to a Schumpeterian post-national state (Jessop) or an advanced liberal mode of governance concerned primarily with sub-national 'communities' (Jessop, 1999, 2002; Rose, 1996b). These examples are instructive when we want to integrate both approaches on a methodological level. However, because these two authors attempt to provide a comprehensive account of social change in all Western societies, it is also important to note that they tend to underplay not only the extent but also the importance of geographical diversity (Stenson & Watt, 1999). In addition, there is a real danger that changes are 'read of' from general accounts of social change,

which would limit the understanding of causalities and micro-processes underlying large-scale trends. In particular, despite warnings on the contrary by both Jessop and Rose, the strategies of individual actors easily disappear from analysis and seem therefore fully determined by rather than constitutive of social change.

Second, I want to make use of two major possibilities for integrating both perspectives on the methodological level. First, both approaches stress the problematic nature of social change – problematic in the sense that transitions are always partial, provisional and characterized by countertrends rather than fully established. A transition between two periods, in the STRA account at least, is characterized by a continuous trial-and-error process; experimentation in modes of government is evident on a variety of levels and the process whereby some rather than other results of these experimentations condense into more stable institutional configurations should take central stage in the analysis of transitions and shifts (Collinge, 1999; Jessop, 1995). However, in actual analysis, such experimentation and the strategies of actors that underpin them receive little attention. One way to resolve this problem, at least partially, is to see the play of forces in ‘local centres’ for power–knowledge – the ‘microphysics of power’ – as constantly driving innovation in modes of government. These centres have their own dynamic and thus serve to produce the discourses that can subsequently be adopted, as a result of the strategies of actors within a strategically and spatially selective institutional context, by authorities as part of their programmes of government. Second, I want to ‘stretch’ the concept of ‘conditions of possibility’ to include not only material settings where the microphysics of power is located and systems of thought but also the institutional settings that are of primary concern for STRA researchers and that in many ways connect the material settings and systems of thought analysed by Foucauldians. Even though the STRA does not explicitly refer to ‘conditions of possibility’, it stresses that modes of government do not evolve in a vacuum but in relation to extant institutional configurations. These institutional configurations can be considered as reservoirs of resources for actors in these configurations (compare Giddens, 1984). Such a conception departs from the governmentality approach in at least two respects: first, conditions do not only refer to systems of thought but also, following Poulantzas and Jessop, to *materialised* institutional structures; second, actors play a more crucial role as they are considered as knowledgeable, creative and, therefore, capable of effecting institutional reconfigurations. In sum, I define conditions of possibility as arising from the microphysics of power and distributed through institutional configurations as a consequence of the strategic manoeuvres of actors.

Third, especially because I frequently use the words ‘central’ and ‘local’ in this paper, it is important to indicate that it is difficult or impossible to draw a line between them. As Archer (1995) explains, actors in micro-settings draw on symbolic and material resources that are not restricted to those settings but circulate within society. Their use of these resources is not without effect – it has impacts on a macro-level and changes, in turn, the availability of systemic resources in micro-settings. Below I try to do justice to this dialectic by showing how ‘local’ and ‘central’ actors continually interact with each other and condition each other’s behaviour. The actors I label ‘local’ have as their point of reference one or more cities or

neighbourhoods. Central actors, in contrast, have as their point of reference the nation-state as a whole. These definitions already imply that the local or central character of an actor is not fixed over time but in practice it is usually not difficult to distinguish between both categories.

Local–central interplay and the genesis of policy

Since policies directed at disadvantaged neighbourhoods are supposed to effectuate changes at the level of social interaction between individuals and institutional interaction between organisations in order to safeguard the integral management of demarcated territories, there is an analogy between disadvantaged neighbourhoods and the prison or the cradle, in the sense that in all cases institutional settings are created that function as relatively autonomous producers of truth regimes. Thus, my *first* hypothesis is that

disadvantaged neighbourhoods, or rather the set of intertwined institutions that identify and observe them, generate knowledge with respect to poverty, social exclusion, the management of public space, etc. and, crucially, about the role of the state in relation to these domains.

We can assume, following Foucault, that it takes a certain set of local institutions for any discourse to develop. It is reasonable to assume that the institutions in some neighbourhoods will be more likely to identify and conceptualise problems than institutions in other neighbourhoods. This means, for example, that discourse on (a particular aspect of) ‘social exclusion’ is more likely to emerge in a neighbourhood with a large number of ‘policy experts’ and a high level of poverty than in a neighbourhood where these conditions are less prevalent or absent.

However, here I arrive at a *second* hypothesis

large parts of the discourse that is developed are not useful and functional only in those neighbourhoods where conditions are conducive. Institutions in other neighbourhoods might find that the conceptualisations developed elsewhere are also useful for them. Therefore the technologies and rationalities of government generated by the plethora of institutional actors who have in common that their point of reference is one particular (set of) neighbourhoods can be *distributed* from one neighbourhood to the other.

Like the prison or other governmental regimes analysed by Foucault, narratives such as those of ‘social exclusion’ and ‘balanced neighbourhoods’ can serve different purposes and hence be applied in a variety of settings. Horizontal distribution can be facilitated, for example, by visits from institutional actors of one territory to another. This process of horizontal distribution, which is marked by the steady emergence and geographical diffusion of certain key concepts and discourses, can make it *seem* as if all neighbourhoods are subject to a general strategy that has been conceived and implemented at a central (national or European) level of government (compare Foucault, 1990, p. 97).

However, I argue that it may be wrong to assume that national (urban) policies *determine* local outcomes but that it is equally simplistic to assume that they merely *flow from* local struggles. Instead, I insist, the central state *draws from* distinctly local processes of knowledge production for the formulation of its policies and it tries to *manipulate* the outcomes of those struggles through strategic intervention. The question that then arises is: under what circumstances and with what kind of selection mechanisms does it do so? However, neither Foucault nor his followers ever talk about the evolution of state structures. Everything between, on the one hand, material practices and the production of truths and knowledges in local settings and, on the other hand, the apparently free floating ideas of philosophers or party gurus with respect to the state, escapes the attention of the governmentality literature. It so happens that the STRA never descends to the local settings where power actually makes itself felt and talks about philosophies of the state only as a background to concrete analysis and theorising – so, in fact, this literature chooses a particular meta-theoretical perspective which enables it to cover issues that have been ignored by Foucauldians. Now the question naturally arises whether, and if so how, the insights of the STRA and other political-economic state theorising might be used to glue together the apparently remote terrains of study covered by Foucault and his followers.

In response to this question, I want to develop the argument that the state is central to processes of distribution and that the birth of a particular policy initiative can be considered as a moment in a process where discourses are circulated, selected and reshaped. For now I will focus exclusively on those modes of distribution where the central state is strongly involved.

A first thing to note in this respect is that municipalities (or other administrative units) that fall within the same national jurisdiction share some characteristics that may not be found either alone or in combination in other countries. For example, they share comparable fiscal and judicial systems. And some municipalities may experience a similar fate because of nation-wide (but spatially differentiated) developments, such as immigration trends or industrial restructuring. Of course, this does not mean that cities will converge but it does mean that similar conditions will occur in different places, albeit at different times. In this case, the central state, as the core of a more encompassing national institutional structure, performs a crucial structuring role. Thus, a *third* hypothesis holds that

the central state facilitates the distribution of discourses between different localities because it *harmonises* (not *homogenises*) some conditions that affect the emergence of discourses and the transferability of those discourses.

Besides its role in shaping local conditions, the state may play a role as a *distributor* of discourses. Mann (1993, p. 59) importantly argued that Weber was only half right when he said that the power of a central state increases as it gradually penetrates its territories with an increasingly dense institutional infrastructure that makes it possible to implement decisions in remote territories. The reverse, Mann notes, is also true: actors (including those in remote areas) can use institutional infrastructures to manipulate the decisions of the central state. The institutional

infrastructure of the state is exactly that: a set of connections that serve to distribute resources amongst places, administrative levels and spatial scales. The discourses on disadvantaged neighbourhoods can be considered as one particular type of resource since they provide actors with useful conceptualisations that can help them perform their tasks. So here we arrive at a *fourth* hypothesis:

discourses on disadvantaged neighbourhoods, like other discourses that are potentially useful for (urban) policy, can be distributed through the institutional infrastructure of the state.

Even though he does not explicitly conceptualise the institutional infrastructure of the state as a vehicle for the transportation of diverse resources, Poulantzas (1978, pp. 132–136) indicated that the state serves to connect different element of the social totality. Moreover, he also recognised that power relations amongst social forces were shaped by what he termed the institutional materiality of the state (Poulantzas, 1978). Building on these insights, largely via Jessop, Jones (1997) shows how certain strategies and regimes are *spatially* selective. This account, too, has a strong state-centrism in the sense that Jones zooms in on national policies and not on the social forces that have acted through the state and given rise to those policies. Nevertheless, his concept is extremely useful, especially because it provides a way to understand the asymmetrical institutional *interdependencies* that underlie interactions between local and national actors (see also De Swaan, 1987).

At any point in time, we may be able to draw on the basis of the interdependencies between central and local actors a *topology of power* (Théret, 1994), indicating how the institutional structure of the state affects the relative power position of different actors. Thus, a *fifth* hypothesis is that

actors operating on a local level will be able to get the ear and cooperation of central actors when they are in some sense important for these actors. They can help their local discourses to ‘jump scales’ (Smith, 1993) and let them be institutionalised and supported as national policy.

There are several ways in which they might have, or gain, such importance. In the case of disadvantaged neighbourhoods, for example, it can be:

- (1) Electoral – politicians and civil servants are more likely to attend to the problems of disadvantaged neighbourhoods when they constitute a relatively large part of the electorate and especially when their voting behaviour is considered a dependent variable of national policies. In Belgium, for example, when votes for the extreme-right Vlaams Blok were considered as an expression of discontent with national policies, a large-scale urban policy was for the first time implemented (De Decker, 1999; Loopmans, Uitermark, & de Maesschalck, 2002);
- (2) Fiscal – when the central rather than the local state is directly responsible for local service provision, it is more likely that it will try to maintain vital thresholds for the maintenance of those services (see the example of the Dutch case below);

- (3) Economic – when cities and disadvantaged neighbourhoods are relatively important for the economy of a nation-state or when many investments are fixed within the urban structure, it is likely that the nation-state will reinvest in those areas to guarantee remuneration of (public and/or private) investments;
- (4) Political – when local actors have relatively close ties to national decision makers, it is more likely that they are able to draw (positive) attention to disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

These interdependencies typically develop in a path-dependent fashion. Every country has its own particular set of interdependencies that are relatively inert. This is not to say that they are unchangeable. In fact, actors continuously try to alter their relationship of interdependency with others. They can, for example, try to gain access to central resources through committees that advise the central state on such issues as unemployment or urban decay. And actors continuously try to mobilise each other and themselves around issues that transcend their own specific interests – certain discourses presuppose *or produce* interdependencies (see the example of ‘liveability’ below). So these interdependencies are not given. Like any structure, they have “no meaning outside the context of specific agents pursuing specific strategies” (Jessop, 2001, p. 1228). Interdependencies can, in fact, be considered simultaneously as the stake of struggles between actors and as the arena where the confrontation between different strategies takes place and produces effects. As a *sixth* hypothesis, I want to suggest that

strategies of local and central actors thus interact within and upon, and thereby reproduce and produce, interdependencies. Strong interdependencies are likely to foster local–central interactions and cooperation.

I will discuss this process of interaction first from the perspective of local actors and then from the perspective of central actors. As I indicated in hypotheses 1 and 2, local actors have the capacity to develop both rationalities and technologies in relation to the environment in which they operate and which they may seek to manipulate. So far, we have not yet considered the fact that different actors may develop different discourses in response to similar problems. In the case of urban governance, for example, voluntary associations may have different views of social problems than, say, business actors. In each case such differences are related to a combination of the interests of the respective actors and their historically evolved ideology. We may therefore expect to find at any moment in time a number of competing discourses relating to specific problems.

As said, strategies of central actors are likely to be affected by the pressure that is put on them ‘from below’, either through the comprehensive efforts of local actors (e.g. lobbying) or through less formal and organised events and activities (e.g. riots). In addition, national actors are driven by the pressure they feel ‘from aside’. The typical example of such pressure is the (perceived) necessity to compete with other nation-states for economic growth. Other, and perhaps more important, examples include the struggles between different departments or political parties, where each

actor competes with others for influence or legitimacy. Thus, as a *seventh* and final hypothesis, we can say that

Institutional actors can be considered as power constellations with certain interests that produce different, and sometimes competing, discourses of the same problem. We may therefore expect to find at any moment in time a number of competing discourses relating to specific problems. Central actors strategically select both discourses and partners when they choose to instantiate a certain urban policy. Their selectivity is determined by the pressure that is put on them, the gains they can expect and the resources that are available to them, all of which relate to the configuration of interdependencies within a national context.

Of course, the instantiation of an urban policy is not simply an automatic response to these pressures – here, too, there is a ‘creative moment’. However, it is not for nothing that I started this series of hypotheses at the local level, where instruments of power – rationalities and technologies of government – are actually implemented. I did so because I want to discard the idea, central to much theorising on (urban) policy and to the STRA, that policies are first conceived on a supra-local level and subsequently implemented. This may happen from time to time but it is important to emphasise the importance of the local level for at least three reasons.

First, even if notions or conceptualisations are first devised at a national level, this process is often, if not always, dependent upon information that has been collected on a local level. Apart from basic figures with respect to, for example, death rates or educational achievements, present day policy making depends on information that is gathered and communicated by local actors. Think, for example, about the routine visits politicians and civil servants pay to consult local actors. Arguably, with the move towards more ‘advanced liberal’ modes of governance, such involvement of local actors will increase.

Second, far more important than these organised trips, consultancies or surveys, is the function of the local level as a site of *experimentation*. Problems that are at some point considered worthy of attention by national policy makers are almost per definition making themselves felt in local settings in an earlier point in time. As I argued in hypothesis 2, the institutional actors active within those ‘local centres’ are the first to identify problems and to develop discourses in relation to them. When problems that first had a decidedly local character gradually come to be considered as a universal problem that should be met by a national policy – note that I elaborate the ways in which this process can occur in hypotheses 3–7 – the central state can draw upon these local discourses.

So, in the example I discuss below, the central state strongly relied on, or even copied, the discourse that housing corporations had developed with respect to disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Discourses, once they have been exported to the central level, can then themselves be distributed among localities. This can happen through white papers that suggest certain problematisations or by guidelines for subsidy requests that demand the submitters pay attention to, for example, ‘social exclusion’. Thus, the central state can facilitate the distribution of locally produced

rationalities and technologies of government by importing from some, and then exporting to more, localities certain discourses.

Third, even more important than this second reason, is the fact that the central state is crucially dependent upon local actors for the actual execution of a national policy. Urban policy, like many other types of policy, is *always* the business of a coalition between local and national actors. Central actors have long ago let go of the idea, if they ever had it, that they can simply tell others what to do. Recent rounds of re-scaling have further undermined the nation as the primary scale of decision making. Instead of imposing plans, central actors are more likely to strategically shift resources and to help (or force) lower-tier governments to develop as autonomous governance units (Brenner, 1997; Uitermark, 2002a). In my view, urban policy thus takes on a certain division of labour where local and central actors respect the strategic interests of their partners. The prime tasks of the central state are to select and redistribute resources (funds, discourses, information) and to facilitate the strategies of those local actors that are expected to act in line with the self-identified interests of central actors. So central actors, too, seek to build, manipulate and capitalise on central–local interdependencies. However, it is my contention that, in general, they cannot impose their plans upon local actors. When it comes to the nitty-gritty of intervention on the neighbourhood or city level, local actors have a quasi-monopoly of knowledge. Local actors initially identify problems, develop knowledge with respect to their environment, undertake concrete interventions and seek to expand their influence through coalition building (both horizontally and vertically). Central actors opt for concepts that are sufficiently universal to describe each and every single territory yet sufficiently flexible to be incorporated into the idiosyncratic discourses of local actors (think of, for example, social exclusion, competition, flexibility, joined-up government, integral plans, etc.). Thus, urban policy is a sort of meeting ground between the local and the central.

The genesis and evolution of Dutch urban policies

How can the working hypotheses that have been formulated in the previous section be used to analyse a concrete case? I try to answer this question by considering recent developments in Dutch urban policy. This case makes clear that seven hypotheses do not add up to a simple recipe for case studies where each hypothesis can be dealt with and then ticked. But in my opinion it also shows the general usefulness of the approach, especially where central–local interactions are concerned.

A first observation with respect to the Dutch case is that the central state has generally been rather committed to urban policy, regardless of fluctuations in the economy or the political profile of the government. Terhorst and van de Ven (1995, 1997, 1998) have provided a rough yet satisfying explanation for this situation as they show how the institutional materiality of the Dutch state evolved. They indicate that, from the 1850s onwards, no religious subgroup was able to take complete control of state power. After decades of political disputes and under pressure from

a radicalising working class (Stuurman, 1983), representatives of the major political parties reached a compromise on several major issues, such as voting rights and the right of each religious group to manage its own educational system with full state support. The indirect result of these decisions was a strong fiscal centralisation that made the state responsible for local service provision and therefore led to a strengthening of the interdependencies between cities and the central state (hypothesis 5). When suburbanisation weakened the socio-economic position of cities from the late 1960s onwards, the central state was confronted sooner rather than later with problems to uphold service provision because of the spatially selective nature of the Dutch state. In addition, the central state had to deal with an immense housing shortage that lasted until well into the 1980s. Together, these developments led to the implementation of ambitious urban renewal plans and to the formation of a building coalition of housing corporations and local state officials. These renewal plans, in turn, caused some major social upheavals. In response to these upheavals a dense institutional infrastructure was created in disadvantaged neighbourhoods to manage the process of urban renewal, drawing increasing numbers of civil servants and citizens into decision-making bodies (hypothesis 3). What we see here are the embryonic steps towards neighbourhood governance regimes that would, and in fact were meant to, smooth government policy by providing knowledge and feedback about local circumstances (hypothesis 1).

From the 1980s onwards, after it became clear that both guest workers and structural poverty would stay, the institutions that were developed in cities and neighbourhoods became increasingly concerned with the neighbourhood residents rather than their houses. Arguably, Rotterdam here functions as a kind of social laboratory since this city was confronted with economic restructuring and poverty (especially amongst ethnic groups) earlier and more severely than other cities (Uitermark & Duyvendak, 2004). Documents produced by the city council during this period show that Rotterdam officials felt they had a very clear understanding of the problems in disadvantaged neighbourhoods but were obstructed by the bureaucratic demands and guidelines of the central government. In 1989, a Rotterdam commission, after extensive consultations with local actors, wrote down a plan in which it advocated a policy of ‘social renewal’ that called for extra national subsidies to be directed to cities and the decentralisation of decision making to diverse local coalitions consisting of state officials, community groups, local businesses and the voluntary sector. The policy philosophy and strategy as formulated by commission in Rotterdam quickly became hegemonic. In my interpretation, to make a long story (Uitermark, 2003a, 2003c) short, this was because the set of institutions dealing with disadvantaged neighbourhoods that had emerged in many Dutch cities operated under similar circumstances as their colleagues in Rotterdam (hypothesis 3).

Thus, the discourse that had been developed on a local level, primarily in the city of Rotterdam that functioned as a local centre *par excellence*, was adopted in revised form by the central state and then redistributed to the local level (hypothesis 4). Although it is not difficult to identify some general features of the social renewal policy, it is important to point out that part of the discourse on social renewal was

that local actors should be allowed to act on the basis of their own judgement and to tailor their intervention to meet local circumstances. Instead of providing blueprints, the central state was supposed to provide rough guidelines and funding. Although I do not address the question whether the developments in Dutch urban policy are emblematic of more general trends in government – that is, I am here primarily interested in developing a theoretically informed method for the study of policy, not so much empirical trends *per se* (see Uitermark, 2003b) – it is useful to note that the social renewal took on an explicitly ‘advanced liberal’ form (see Rose, 1999). The creation of neighbourhood communities and local policy networks that were supposed to regulate themselves and each other was an important instrument (compare Cruikshank, 1999). It was an instrument *both* for central and local actors but arguably it was of more importance for the latter, since they themselves had persistently argued that an integral approach to social problems was necessary, meaning that local state officials and other actors should unleash themselves from departmental cleavages and act together to solve local problems.

These local interdepartmental coalitions that first took shape during the urban renewal policy and were expanded and consolidated under the social renewal policy functioned as ‘discourse machines’ in the sense that they continually produced new conceptualisations of the situation in their working environment (hypothesis 1). Many concepts were invented or reinvented to describe problems and suggest solutions. I would argue that we would need to investigate the microphysics of power in disadvantaged neighbourhoods to fully appreciate the interaction between policy representatives (formal institutions) and policy objects (neighbourhood residents) and the kinds of power–knowledge that arise from these interactions. Extensive research in this area is not available but here are many researches and evaluations that give a proximate indication of the processes taking place in these neighbourhoods. Evaluations typically focussed on the difficulties experienced by local actors – as a consequence, the impressions and strategies of the latter were built into officials’ recommendations (SCP, 1994). Two developments were constantly stressed. First, the organisational transformations that had started with the formation of urban renewal coalitions and had continued under the social renewal policy were considered by all parties to be very positive developments. Thus, there was a strong continued commitment to the promotion of more ‘integral’ – or, in British jargon, ‘joined-up’ – policy making. Second, there were growing concerns about the social distance between formal institutions in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and citizens (Beaumont, 1999). This second development is all the more important since the involvement and participation of citizens in both the formulation and execution of policies was supposed to be strengthened. The result of these two processes was that institutions became more and more detached from the citizens in neighbourhoods whilst inter-institutional linkages were strengthened. This schism in governance coalitions was considered a major problem since, in the new philosophy that was first formulated in the social renewal policy, some of the main problems that had been identified could not be tackled by institutions alone. There were calls for a concerted effort on the part of the state, citizens and third sector organisations (Denters, van Heffen, & de Jong, 1999; Priemus, Boelhouwer, & Kruythoff, 1997; Torrance, 2003)

but, as I mentioned above, such joined-up neighbourhood management, especially in the context of the management of public space, did not work as envisaged. A number of citizen groups, political parties and statist institutions dealt with these issues and constantly conceived new plans, all of which were firmly rooted in the empowerment discourse of the social renewal policy, i.e. the built environment was seen as the object of policy, while the state, together with third sector organisations and especially neighbourhood residents, was seen as the subject orchestrating the policy. Such discourse, however, simply did not ‘work’ any more in many neighbourhoods due to the lack of ties between the prospective participants in governance coalitions.

Eventually, a new discourse revolving around the notion of ‘liveability’ came into being, with the housing corporations playing a crucial role (hypothesis 7). Previously, citizen groups had used the concept of liveability; they contrasted a ‘liveable’ city with a city that had been designed according to high-modern principles of efficiency. For the housing corporations, liveability referred to all aspects of the neighbourhood that potentially related to the rentability of housing. This difference of emphasis is important; whereas first residents were central to liveability – they indicated when their liveability was at stake and what to do about it – the concept now entered the calculations of state officials and housing corporations as a flexible and general description of all problems of social order in a neighbourhood. As a consequence, and this is crucial, the manipulation of the composition of neighbourhood population could become a means to an end. Within this discourse, relocating undesirable elements and attracting desirable elements could be legitimated since it was no longer the situation of the residents but the situation of the neighbourhood that had to be improved. Thus, it became common to sell and demolish social housing in order to increase the share of affluent and white residents.

This shift cannot be understood without taking into account the real problems experienced by the institutional apparatuses in neighbourhoods: their failure to solve problems of social order by themselves and their failure to mobilise the residents. Existing discourses did not provide a way out of these problems. This tension created a situation wherein the institutional apparatuses in disadvantaged neighbourhoods looked for new discourses. The discourse on liveability that finally prevailed is not simply or only the result of strategic behaviour of housing corporations in relation to the institutional materiality and spatial selectivity of the state. The problems they identified and the solutions they conceived were also, or even primarily, to do with the situation in those neighbourhoods – more specifically, their discourse was the result of ongoing, creative and open-ended discourse production by institutional apparatuses built around, and dealing with, disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The discourse on liveability was a response on the part of a complex of institutional actors, with the housing corporations at its core, to problems that may not have local origins but do manifest themselves locally.

The housing corporations played a pivotal role in the ascendancy of the restructuring policy because they connected the neighbourhood as a site of discipline and social regulation and the wider institutional context. As quasi-private organisations with strong (relatively fixed) interests in neighbourhoods and a strong relationship with the central state, they embody the strong links between cities and

the central state in the Dutch context. However, the institutional materiality of the Dutch state from which this sensitivity for urban problems stems does not exist outside the actions of actors who use it and, thereby, reproduce it (hypothesis 6). In this respect, the governmental technologies employed by housing corporations are crucial. They were able to codify the situation in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in such a way that their discourse was flexible enough to apply in individual cases and general enough to serve as a guideline for (state) action. The concept of liveability, moreover, is attractive to all those actors with a stake in the neighbourhood since it can roughly be equated with 'governability'. In a way, the social mixing policy is emblematic of a more general dual process: notwithstanding rhetoric of citizen participation, residents are marginalized and become more and more the object of policy whilst the institutions that instantiate policy function more and more as a coherent apparatus, creatively producing discourses on the neighbourhoods they govern.

At present, the techniques developed by housing corporations to monitor the liveability in disadvantaged neighbourhoods have been completely adopted by the state and are now used to continuously monitor the whole national territory (Rous, 2003). The discourse that connects the generic concept of liveability to the social and ethnic composition of the neighbourhood populations can be summarised along the three dimensions that Rose (1996a) and Rose and Miller (1992) identify with political rationalities. It has a *moral* dimension, in the sense that it offers a normative framework through which behaviours and groups of residents can be evaluated in terms of their capability or likeliness to meet certain norms and in the sense that it denotes a certain ideal state of affairs. It has an *epistemological* dimension in so far as it embodies a certain conception of reality and of the connections between different elements in a neighbourhood. And the discourse leans strongly on a certain *style of reasoning*, as is amply illustrated by the concept of liveability that enables a diverse set of actors to operate within a flexible normative framework, a "...mobile interface of the game between government and governed" (Gordon, 1991, p. 34). In sum, the terms in which neighbourhoods are measured and conceptualised, together with the kind of causal analyses that are made with respect to the neighbourhood's condition and the composition of its population constitute a set of rationalities that provide suggestions as to how authorities might interfere. The measurements that are used as well as the interventions that are undertaken are the technologies that promise a development in the desired direction.

The dominant presence of housing corporations in disadvantaged neighbourhoods is not the result of urban policy – they were there well before urban policy as we now know it existed. But urban policy, in fact, is partly but significantly determined by the actions of housing corporations. That is, in line with the hypotheses developed above, it is more accurate to say that local power relations have shaped national urban policy rather than vice versa. In turn, the state might, and does, manipulate power relations at a local level through urban policies. But the causal arrow has been reversed; urban policy affects local power relations but it cannot simply mould them – instead, in order to be effective, it has to be designed in such a way that it becomes compatible with the strategic behaviours of local actors, including housing corporations. This, of course, does not mean that local power relations are unaffected by urban policy; it

simply means that we need to be sensitive to sequences of events and the conditions that made these events possible. In the Dutch case, we see that discourses are developed on a local level and then scaled up to the national level and distributed amongst different localities: they ‘jump scales’ (Smith, 1993). The discourses and instruments of a certain policy that have been consolidated on a national level tend to become under pressure because of local developments. A complex of local institutions responds to these problems and hence generates a new discourse. This is, of course, not an automatic and immediate response – discourses and discursive changes are typically the result of trial-and-error processes. Moreover, the central state does not automatically adopt such discourses. It is strategically selective, in the sense that it will only pay attention to local interests if there are strong central–local interdependencies and if there are (elements in) local discourses that fit with the more general political strategies of the political parties, civil servants and other organised interests. In sum, rather than privileging the local over the central level or vice versa, we need to study at least three aspects of central–local reciprocities in order to appreciate the multi-scalar origins of urban policies: the strategic interests of local actors, which are discursively formulated in relation to the institutional environment in which they are embedded and the entity over which they are supposed to exercise control (a neighbourhood, a housing block, etc.); the strategic interests of central actors and specifically the central state, which are determined by, for example, election results, party politics and ideologies, the functioning of the economy, etc., and are always strategically and spatially selective; and the ways in which local and central actors communicate with each other, select each other and realign their interests in such a way that they become complementary.

These three issues are closely related, as can be illustrated with reference to the concept of ‘liveability’. In the case study, we saw how the concept of liveability enabled local actors to communicate to central actors because it provided a convenient mode of codification. Moreover, the concept is strategically selective, in the sense that it privileges the power of some (for example: housing corporations on a local level; the department of housing on a central level) over others who are simply not recognised as legitimate actors (for example: residents who have to relocate or lose their social networks on local level; the ministry of social affairs on a central level). Finally, the concept enables local and central actors to forge a coalition and to direct funds in a specific direction (‘urban renewal’). Such processes of communication, selection and cooperation should be seen as more or less conscious efforts of finding new institutional fixes, i.e. they represent searches for, and experimentations in, modes of government that are relatively stable and successful at regulating potentially antagonistic relationships (cf. Uitermark, 2002a, 2002b).

Conclusion

Rather than providing a comprehensive theory of the process of policy formation, this paper has tried to provide some outlines for the formulation of an analytical framework by selectively drawing from two major strands of literature. It could be

argued that the resulting synthesis that stresses the importance of local institutional ensembles in providing the central state with both rationalities and technologies of government is inspired as much by the theoretical literature as by my empirical reference point. That is, it may be that, in the UK, local governance institutions do not fulfil such a function and that the central state indeed (a) plays a dominant role in shaping local institutional structures and the form of their interventions (b) autonomously, i.e. in isolation from local actors, generates or imports from abroad rationalities and technologies of government. However, the hypotheses formulated above (mainly the idea that the central state has to tailor its policies to meet local actors' interests since it is per definition dependent upon local actors because they have detailed and sophisticated knowledge of the object of policy and have to instantiate actual interventions) and the empirical observations suggest that an alternative view of the policy formation process is worthy of further research. Such a view is not necessarily at odds with the STRA accounts of urban and regional policy – obviously, the central state plays a pivotal role and we would downplay its importance at the peril of our theoretical understanding of the actions of both the local and the central state. The present paper has rather sought to highlight elements that may have been underplayed by the STRA and the governmentality approach. In the sense that it highlights features that may be more prolific in some policy areas than others, the model may be more appropriate for the study of certain policy fields and programmes than others. As a general rule, the hypotheses formulated above will correspond more closely with actual developments when the local government has to perform relatively autonomous from the central state. To take two extreme examples: while the model applies rather well to the social renewal policy, it will probably be rejected when national monetary policies are analysed. Generally speaking, I expect that this way of looking at policy will become increasingly relevant as scales other than that of the nation-state become more salient (see [Brenner, 1999](#); [Jessop, 1999](#)). The nation-state will not wither away but instead develop itself more and more as a strategic partner for local actors. Rather than claiming full responsibility or imposing plans, it will increasingly select those actors and ideas that are most compatible with its perceived interests. Especially states that are typified by high levels of central–local interdependencies will tend to support the efforts of a select group of local actors.

To really appreciate the merits of the hypotheses developed above they have would have to be applied in more case studies. A fuller understanding of their range and depth could also be furthered through a more systematic test against alternative hypotheses than has been attempted here. Thus, the hypotheses formulated in this paper are just that: hypotheses that should be tested, expanded, complemented and/or reformulated on the basis of future empirical and theoretical research. To speak in biological metaphors: if the state is considered as an organic whole that evolves in an open-ended and complex yet intelligible fashion, state theory should address us to as much as possible genetic modulations that constitute this development. The approach here then possibly helps to identify some of the genetic codes of contemporary policies that have hitherto not been fully recognised.

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