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To cite this article: Arno Simons & Jan-Peter Voß (2018) The concept of instrument constituencies: accounting for dynamics and practices of knowing governance, Policy and Society, 37:1, 14-35, DOI: 10.1080/14494035.2017.1375248

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14494035.2017.1375248

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Published online: 26 Sep 2017.

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The concept of instrument constituencies: accounting for dynamics and practices of knowing governance

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ABSTRACT

As a new concept in policy analysis, instrument constituencies shed light on the ‘supply side’ of policy-making and thereby fill a gap in our understanding of national and transnational policy dynamics. Policy instruments are not only ‘active’ because they contain scripts for reordering society but also because they gather a constituency comprised of practices and actors oriented towards developing, maintaining and expanding a specific instrumental model of governing. Instrument constituencies account for a hitherto neglected form of agency and explain the often-observed paradox that policy solutions sometimes chase policy problems, although the former are meant to emerge as answers to the later. We give an outline of the concept as it has been developed so far, formulate propositions, and discuss linkages with established research traditions in policy studies.

Introduction

The concept of instrument constituencies accounts for the fact that any knowledge about specific modes of governing is made and actualized by specific actors in concrete practices. So-called ‘instruments’, ‘tools’ or ‘technologies’ of governance – broadly defined here as condensed and packaged knowledge about how to govern 1 – can thus be studied regarding their social life and the dynamics, sometimes indeed agency, that this life lends to specific ways of knowing and thus exerting governance. Knowledge about specific modes of governing, rather than being purely instrumental, also spur social interaction and the formation of practices and organizations that contribute to keeping that knowledge alive by communicating, practicing, developing and expanding it. The concept of instrument constituencies captures this ‘social life of instrumental knowledges of governing’. It offers new ways for studying policy change by allowing for an element of ‘supply push’ in policy change and the innovation of new forms of governance. The concept draws our attention

KEYWORDS

Instrument constituencies; policy instruments; governance; knowledge; agency; policy process; policy-making; practices

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1This definition includes policy instruments meant to achieve specific policy goals (e.g. market-based instruments for climate emissions reduction) but also instruments of the policy process, related to aspects such as orchestration and decision-making, impact assessment and evaluation, and to instruments of legitimation such as particular models of democracy, specific procedures of political representation, citizen participation or public relations.

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to the ways in which specific models of governance gain momentum as they link up academic research strategies, new business opportunities or political agendas, and how they are actively promoted by specialized actors who come to live through and for the development of a specific governance instrument.

The concept was first introduced in a study of the historical innovation journeys of instruments for trading environmental emissions permits and for liberalizing network-bound utility services (Voß, 2007a, 2007b). It was taken up and more explicitly articulated by Voß and Simons (2014) and studied for other cases of tradable permit systems (Mann & Simons, 2014; Simons & Voß, 2015; Voß & Simons, 2014), experimental sustainability management (Voß, 2014) or social policy (Béland & Howlett, 2016), but also for instruments of political representation and legitimation such as methods of public participation and deliberative democracy (Amelung & Grabner, 2017; Voß & Amelung, 2016). The concept has also been discussed in relation to existing concepts and frameworks, such as innovation networks, regulatory communities, epistemic communities, advocacy coalitions, policy subsystems or networks (Mukherjee & Howlett, 2015; Simons & Voß, 2017; Voß, 2007a, pp. 73–74, 177), models of the policy process, in particular Kingdon’s multiple stream model (Béland & Howlett, 2016; Mukherjee & Howlett, 2015; Simons & Voß, 2017; Voß, 2007a, pp. 81–85; Voß & Simons, 2014), or ideas and institutions (Béland, 2016).

The aim of this article is to give an outline of the concept as it has been developed so far, to discuss linkages with established research traditions in policy studies and to formulate a set of 10 propositions that may guide future research on instrument constituencies and their role in the policy process. First, we introduce main tenets of the concept and locate its development in a shift from instrument as tools to instruments as institutions to instruments as webs of practices. Second, we discuss relations between instrument constituencies and policy change.

**Main tenets**

*Instruments coming alive*

The concept of instrument constituencies fills a gap in our understanding of policy dynamics in pointing out social dynamics of instrumental knowledge making and instrument design. This includes trajectories of policy design spanning several policy processes and even extending transnationally and into different domains. The concept therefore makes an important contribution to the policy studies literature (Béland & Howlett, 2016; Jordan & Huitema, 2014a; Jordan & Turnpenny, 2015; Mukherjee & Howlett, 2015; Perl & Burke, 2015; Wolff, 2015). Most importantly, the concept of instrument constituencies has the potential to make visible and explain a hitherto neglected form of agency behind specific knowledges about governance and their linkages with the innovation of political practices. It enables us to recognize what we may call the ‘active availability’ of policy tools or of instrumental models of governance, more generally. By this we mean that the development of instrumental options and their consideration as viable solutions to certain problems does not necessarily, and indeed not very often, follow from the diagnosis of problems – neither chronologically, nor in terms of stages in a sequenced process of rational analysis and problem-solving. Instead, by tracing the emergence, development and expansion of
instruments over time with a view to the concrete practices which articulate and sustain them, we find that such tools or models have their own social histories and trajectories:

Proposition 1: Instruments of governance can develop a life of their own. Through their constituencies, they can become 'entrepreneurial' solutions that actively seek to nurture demand and give shape to policy problems.

In contrast to well-established notions of public policy-making as a sequenced process of rational problem-solving, authors like Kingdon (1984) have argued for an alternative understanding of policy-making, where problems and solutions lead an independent life, interacting with each other and with ongoing political struggles over offices and other institutionalized positions of power and influence. Policy-making, in this account, is a matter of creating linkages between the dynamics of these three streams by matching ambitions to seize institutional power with problem definitions and with policy models that can serve as solutions. Kingdon’s notion of streams refers to flows of social interaction and bundles of practices which develop according to their own logics and depending on their own historical pathways while at times interfering or linking up with each other (Zahariadis, 2007).

The rationalist default conception of policy-making as a process of problem-solving, where the development of solutions follows the identification of concrete problems, has also been scrutinized by other authors. While the rational problem-solving view appears to dominate public discourses of policy-making, many studies that focus on the actual practices of policy-making emphasize the apparent differences with such idealized conceptions and public accounts of the policy process (e.g. Colebatch, 1998; Hoppe & Colebatch, 2016; Peck & Theodore, 2010). Still, as Béland and Howlett (2016, 393f) point out, ‘the fact that solutions sometimes chase problems remains an anomalous observation upsetting the prevailing orthodoxy in the field’. What shall we make of observations such as sweeping fashions like network access regulation for the liberalization of utility services and tradable permits for environmental protection (Voß, 2007a), or methods of small group deliberation for citizen participation (Amelung 2012; Amelung & Grabner, 2017)? And what happens around abrupt U-turns in design orientations as part of such diffusion and convergence processes, like the European Union shifting from energy taxes to emissions trading around 2000 (Christiansen & Wettestad, 2003; Voß, 2007b; Voß & Simons, 2014)?

The social dynamics of instrument constituencies, we agree with Béland and Howlett (2016), ‘holds the answer to this puzzle’; it makes the concept a powerful addition to the repertoire of policy studies (Mukherjee & Howlett, 2015). Conceptualizing instrument constituencies as emerging entities with dynamics of their own leads us to question the notion of passive and neutral instruments, waiting in the toolbox of government to be picked up as ideas or cognitive solutions to policy problems. Exploring social practices and agency behind instrument design, testing, development and evaluation, helps to understand how instruments may come to shape the policy process according to their own logic. This perspective also provides an entry point for questioning instrumental discourses of policy-making for particular functionalist reductions and for reflexively engaging with innovation in governance also on the supply side, by entering the social dynamics of instrument design, mapping relations, diagnosing the inclusion and exclusion of particular concerns and thus opening-up seemingly technical processes of instrumental design for a wider public discussion of ontological assumptions, ethical orientations and political constellations that are built into them.
Practices of knowing governance

The crucial point of focusing on instrument constituencies is to shift perspective of analysis from instruments as mere cognitive constructions, bundles of ideas or tools, to instruments as constituted by social practices, collectively pursued activities that give rise to and are embedded in specific socio-material configurations. These configurations develop according to their own dynamics and, as they develop reflexive capacities, can generate a type of agency that is distinct from other kinds of actors that are well known in policy studies, such as advocacy coalitions or epistemic communities (Mukherjee & Howlett, 2015; Simons & Voß, 2017; Voß, 2007a, pp. 73–74; Voß & Simons, 2014) (Table 1).

Instrument constituencies comprise practices and actors that are oriented towards developing, maintaining and expanding a specific instrumental model of governing. The existence of instruments in practices becomes visible by zooming in from a perspective on policy instruments as ready-made concepts onto the ongoing practical work and social interactions that produce, maintain and promote that knowledge. The notion of instrument constituencies thus re-conceptualizes instruments, designs, options, models, solutions and other kinds of functional models of governing in terms of their social life, that is, regarding the actors and practices that ‘do’ these models and which only actualize the knowledge that describes them, so that the instrument becomes a part of political reality (For a conceptual shift from ready-made knowledge to knowledge in-the-making see Latour [1987]). For the turn to practices of making governance knowledge see, Voß and Freeman (2016b).

From tools to institutions to instrument constituencies

Policy instruments are often treated as neutral devices at the disposal of policy-makers. This ‘functionalist orientation’ (Lascoumes & Le Gales, 2007, p. 2) provides guidance to policy-makers as well as analysts. It provides a ‘productive illusion’ (Voß, 2007a, pp. 39–40). The apparent productivity of the functionalist view helps to explain why the metaphor of policy instruments as mechanical tools remains powerful in orienting policy-making despite fundamental criticism over several decades regarding the limits of control and the obscuration of politics through claims of functional necessity. The technical framing of policy solutions works to carve out apparently ‘apolitical spaces’ of policy design that provide room for manoeuver in political negotiations between antagonistic camps (Voß, 2007a, p. 181). As Lascoumes and Le Gales (2007, p. 17) note, this can be exploited strategically

Table 1. Based on Béland and Howlett (2016).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Composition</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Epistemic communities</td>
<td>Haas (1992)</td>
<td>Scientists and issue experts, NGO activists, public agencies</td>
<td>Developing conceptions of problems/ goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrument constituencies</td>
<td>Voß and Simons (2014)</td>
<td>Scientists and design experts, consultants, administrators and technicians</td>
<td>Developing suites of tools and techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy coalitions</td>
<td>Sabatier (1988)</td>
<td>Politicians, parties and legislators, interest groups</td>
<td>Developing identities, interests and ideologies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2For a general concept of social practices see e.g. Schatzki, Cetina, and Von Savigny (2005); Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012), Jonas and Littig (2017).
by political elites: ‘the debate on instruments may be a useful smokescreen to hide less respectable objectives, to depoliticize fundamentally political issues, to create a minimum consensus on reform by relying on the apparent neutrality of instruments presented as modern.’ Questioning the functionalist view on policy instruments, several authors have put forward the claim that policy instruments are constructed in (not always free and symmetrical) social interaction, consist in practices and have a ‘life of their own’ (e.g. Lascoumes & Le Gales, 2007; Peck & Theodore, 2012; Voß, 2007a; Voß & Simons, 2014).

Lascoumes and Le Gales (2007, p. 8) have argued that implemented policy instruments are ‘institutions in the sociological meaning of the term’, that is ‘a more or less coordinated set of rules and procedures that governs the interactions and behaviours of actors and organizations’. As institutions, policy instruments structure public policy ‘according to their own logic’ (p. 10). They have effects in virtue of providing a specific design for (re)organizing society, or specific parts of it. To give an example, environmental markets instruments envisage to reorganize activities that affect the environment by cutting it up into tradable goods, so that affecting activities can be calculated and regulated through the mechanisms of a market, e.g. the trading of pollution rights or biodiversity credits. Such designs are never neutral, as they carry specific worldviews, ontologies, values (e.g. decomposability of naturally emerging systems of life, human agency as utility maximizing calculation, market liberalism as a philosophy of collective life), and as they always provide a specific problematization of the concrete issue at hand, e.g. pollution as an effect of market failure to be solved by the creation of another market (Mann & Simons, 2014; Mann, Voß, Simons et al., 2014; Robertson, 2006; Simons, Lis, & Lippert, 2014; Stephan & Richard Lane, 2014).

What is important here is the observation that instruments do not only cognitively organize governing strategies, but that they shape practices, allocate roles and create social positions. The scripting of a performance which enacts a particular social reality rests with the specific ontology and theoretical assumptions about society and governing that are inscribed in any instrument (Voß, 2016a). With the implementation of the instrument, its underlying ontology becomes installed as a cultural infrastructure of political interaction (Voß & Freeman, 2016b). An instrumental design may then work as a ‘prospective structure’ (Van Lente & Rip, 1998) linking up with diverse expectations of various actors regarding the fulfilment of specific political goals, business opportunities or academic careers.

This perspective on instruments as prospective structures is only rudimentary included in Lascoumes and Le Gales’ framework, which focusses on explicit social roles that are created by the implementation of an instrument in a specific site. What is more, linked to instrumental models of governing are implicit expectations and promises that exist beyond specific sites of implementation. Emissions trading, for example, provides roles for permit traders as soon as a market for emission permits is created. In addition there are specialized think tanks, policy consultants, or builders of market infrastructure who get assigned a role as advisors, technical service providers, conference organizers, etc. They benefit from the emissions trading instrument, even without being explicitly foreseen in the functional model. Such actors may not only strive within in the context of a singular implementation processes but across several sites at which the emissions trading instrument is debated, adjusted with local conditions and taken up for implementation.

Taken together, these actors make up what we call the instrument constituency of emissions trading (Simons & Voß, 2015; Voß, 2007b; Voß & Simons, 2014). They develop stakes in linking up with the production and promotion of the instrument and are not necessarily
restricted to a particular emission market (some of them may even actively seek to set up more emission markets to expand the scope for their activities). To expand on Lascoumes and Le Gales’ notion of policy instruments having a ‘life of their own’, we like to shift the analytical perspective in a dual way: first, from specific sites of implementations to translocal spaces and historical dynamics of instrument making and, second, from instruments as sets of rules to instruments as webs of practices, which we call instrument constituencies, and which may develop agency in producing and promoting their instrument.

Proposition 2: Policy instruments assemble their constituencies by working as prospective structures, which interest actors into aligning their agency towards the development, retention, and expansion of the instrument.

The translocality of governance instruments is grounded in their ‘double life’ (Voß, 2007a, 55ff) as abstract functional models and implemented arrangements of governance. While this distinction is implicit in most conceptions of policy instruments its implications, especially for translocal dynamics of policy design, are only rarely explored (Simons et al., 2014; Voß & Simons, 2014). Instruments as models refer to abstract blueprints such as ‘flat tax’, ‘cap and trade’, ‘basic income’ or ‘citizens jury’, and they can be grounded in specific social theories, such as rational choice or deliberative democracy. One could thus call this the ‘paper appearance’ (Voß, 2007a, p. 55) of governance instruments, the theoretical models, claims and data produced in scholarly treatises, scientific simulations and evaluations of field trials. Instruments as implemented arrangements, on the other hand, refer to the actual doing of governance in a specific policy-making context, a specific configuration of material practices with wider effects. The European Emissions Trading System would be an example. It constitutes a market for greenhouse gas emission allowances and ‘works on the “cap and trade” principle’ (European Commission, 2014). The World Wide Views on Biodiversity would be another example, as an exercise of public participation comprised of 3000 citizens in 25 countries to produce an input to international negotiations based on models of deliberative democracy (Amelung, 2015).

Both appearances of governance instruments, models and implementations, deserve attention since their interaction unfolds what we call the ‘innovation journey’ of particular instruments (Voß, 2007a, 2007b). Models and implementations can reinforce each other. On the one hand, functional models of governing can guide the formulation and implementation of collective strategies. The existence of policy blueprints, backed up by analytical work and expertise, makes it possible for policy-makers to model their policies after such blueprints and to legitimate such choices as ‘state of the art’ policy-making (Simons 2016a, 2016b; Simons et al., 2014). On the other hand, the uptake and use of a blueprint in a specific context creates a framework for assembling actors into new constellations, training skills and building organizational capacities and it establishes the relevance of the model and of further work to develop it. Uptake for implementation increases the blueprint’s visibility and confirms it, by anchoring it in a wider set of practices and providing a stage for the model to shine. This again feeds into further work to develop the model and corroborate functional claims, e.g. with data from additional implementation cases. The sort of self-enforcing feedback loop that can emerge from this interaction between governance models and their implementation drives innovation journeys forward and can be understood as a form of ‘realizing’ new forms of governance ‘between lab and field’, as a co-production of science and politics (Voß, 2014, 2016a).
The double life of policy instruments affects the structure and dynamics of instrument constituencies. Whereas some constituency actors and activities may focus on specific implementations of the instrument and form something like a local, that is implementation-specific, instrument constituency, others may focus on developing or advocating the instrument as a general model for policy-making, e.g. on the UN or OECD level. Yet, as empirical research shows, the boundaries between local and translocal subconstituencies are fluent and many constituency actors and activities will do both at the same time (Simons & Voß, 2017).

Proposition 3: Instrument constituencies take shape and develop in the interplay between governance models and their implementation. At the same time, they become mediators of such linkages by seeking opportunities and mobilizing collective action for implementation and by using them for developing and corroborating the functional claims of the model.

Looking at the influence and agency of instrument constituencies both on the local and translocal level reveals a life of governance instruments that goes beyond the notion of instruments as institutions. In the following section, we discuss five aspects in the relation between instrument constituencies and established research interests in policy change which deserve closer examination.

Instrument constituencies and policy change

Theoretical and empirical research on instrument constituencies is growing (see Simons and Voß [2017] for a recent overview). We here discuss five questions:

(1) How do instrument constituencies form?
(2) How do instrument constituencies influence change in governance?
(3) What makes instrument constituencies strong?
(4) How do instrument constituencies relate to the policy process and to other policy actors?
(5) How can we engage with the politics of instrument constituencies?

How do instrument constituencies form and hold together?

Through its dual appearance as models and implementations, which creates a multi-faceted prospective structure, a policy instrument can attract and generate agency in its support and thereby grow a ‘social constituency’ around it (Voß, 2007a, p. 177). The latter is the social life of the former. An actor or a practice is part of an instrument constituency, because it relates to the instrument in a mutually constituting fashion. The instrument provides a purpose and frame of relevance for actors and practices which in turn only enact, give life to and materialize the instrument. The instrument constituency thus exists ‘for and by the instrument’ (Voß & Simons, 2014, p. 738). So how do such constituencies form and hold together?

As we also discussed elsewhere (Simons & Voß, 2015, 2017; Voß, 2007a, pp. 179–180; Voß & Simons, 2014), one can differentiate between two types of promises that work in different ways to recruit support for policy instruments. On the one hand, functional promises refer to the ability of policy instruments to achieve public goals. Such promises are debated at the centre of the mainstream literature on policy instruments and its functionalist orientation
(Lascoumes & Le Gales, 2007). Structural promises, on the other hand, are often less visible, but equally important. They are implied in specific structural features of a future world that an instrument is expected to bring about, especially regarding the roles and positions this world offers for different actors. To give an example, whereas a functional promise of emissions trading would be that it provides pollution control at least costs, a structural promise might be that the emissions trading instrument creates demand for new types of services and expertise or a reason for a new regulatory body to be installed or that it may prevent a strong role of the state in taxing environmental emissions. For the case of public deliberation methods, as another example, the functional promise is to produce legitimate representations of public opinion and thus serve to qualify collectively binding decisions as democratic (or criticize them as undemocratic), whereas structural promises may be related with expected positions in a growing academic research field and professional services market for the organization and moderation of such processes, or with expected opportunities to shield decision-making against uninvited, wild forms of public participation.

Establishing an instrument involves a great number of different tasks that can each attract the interest of various actors and connect various specific practices. Following instruments along their journeys by tracing events in which they have been articulated and shaped we become aware of a host of different activities like academic theorizing and testing, experimenting in laboratories, simulations and field trials, consulting, training, organizing conferences, publishing journals, mobilizing and negotiating alliances, doing public relations work, etc. In all these activities, the instrument is (re)produced and supported, that is, brought to life as an instrument.

Yet, it would be inadequate to understand such activities as being neatly integrated through shared frames and values, as one might be tempted to do when thinking of the ‘instrument as institution’ (Lascoumes & Le Gales, 2007). Rather than being connected through shared understanding constituency members and specific practices are embedded within different framings, orders of value, institutional logics, etc. as established for different fields of academia, consulting, marketing, party politics, campaigning, etc. They are also situated within different regional contexts, if instruments travel transnationally. For an economist, the instrument may look different than for a political scientist, a public administrations officer, an NGO activist or a business manager, even if they use some of the same terms, some basic articulation of a model, or cite some of the same authors. The practices that are involved here, comprise all the diverse kinds of work that are needed to maintain the instrument and establish momentum. Instrument constituencies thus comprise a wide field of university departments, policy-oriented research institutes, think tanks, law firms, consultancies, training schools, event agencies, publishers, public relations agencies, etc. In terms of institutional embedding, some are more deeply embedded in politics with linkages to parties or movements, some link up with institutions of academic research, others are more commercially oriented towards selling special ‘technical knowledge’ for whoever buys it. Most of these only become visible by looking through and behind the instrument, by attending to the actors and practices that produce the policy papers, manuals and checklists, legal expertise, projections, numbers, model simulations, etc. – all the material of ‘analysis’ that makes a governance instrument an instrument, or a policy option an option.

This fluently fades into activities that provide actual material technology. Any governance instrument also implies and requires specific material configurations to make it work. This may be special software programmes, conference technology, surveillance and measurement
devices, administrative infrastructures or scrubbers, social housing, highways, or weapons and border installations. Devising these things in a way they help to materialize the functional model is an activity that belongs to the instrument, even if there is little institutional connection. The instrument creates a rationale, a need and a market, and the provision of fitted technologies is constitutive for instruments to become more than theory, but there is not necessarily a shared framework of norms apart from general contract law, etc. The connection is rather by working on and with the same objects, very broadly framed only by an instrumental story for pegging out the societal purpose of those collaborations.

All this is to emphasize the fact that heterogeneous actors can become attracted by different structural promises related to the development and implementation of an instrument. Consultants and companies may seek new business opportunities arising from the spread and implementation of the instrument, academics may find their career path in developing the theoretical foundations of the instrument, regulatory bodies or think tanks may develop instrument-related positional profiles. As an object that connects heterogeneous actors and activities, the policy instrument around which the constituency forms can be understood as a ‘boundary object’ (Star & Griesemer, 1989; Voß & Simons, 2014).

Existing research suggests that structural promises are at least as important for the stability of an instrument constituency as functional promises. While the latter can attract actors in supporting a specific policy instrument only temporarily as long as the problem remains salient or until it is perceived to be solved or another instrument arises as a better solution (Perl & Burke, 2015), structural promises can promote an instrument and bind support even when particular problems lose attention or appear to be solved or when functional promises shift. Maintaining a position or demand for special skills and services can be a motivation for actively engaging even in the making of new problems and functionalities in order to keep up momentum and secure wider public and political support for continuing with instrument-related activities (Amelung & Grabner, 2017; Mann & Simons, 2014; Simons & Voß, 2015; Voß, 2007a).

Proposition 4: Constituencies form around instruments when expectations and promises attract and generate agency in support of the instrument. While both functional and structural promises are at play, the latter are important for the long-term stability of an instrument constituency.

**How do instrument constituencies influence policy change?**

While there is a tendency in the mainstream policy studies literature to treat policy instruments as ahistorical and passive devices at the disposal of policy-makers, more sociologically oriented research like our own has shown that policy instruments have a social life of their own through their constituencies. As Jordan and Huitema (2014b, p. 911) remark, ‘policy instruments are not “given” in the same way that a spanner sits in a toolbox; they have to be nurtured, pushed forward, and hence given meaning in particular contexts’. This is why, in order to understand how policy instruments develop and take shape as tools of governance, we need to study the work and influence of instrument constituencies, just as we study epistemic communities or advocacy coalitions in order to understand how policy problems arise or political programmes change. Instrument constituencies take on ‘independent social dynamics which become part of the overall process of governance change’ (Voß, 2007a, p. 177). So how exactly do instrument constituencies influence the innovation journeys of the policy instruments they form around?
Let us begin by emphasizing that constituency development is itself part of the innovation journey of a policy instrument. As we have discussed in the previous section, instrument constituencies emerge out of the entanglement of various practices involving and attracting heterogeneous actors. And the relationship between an instrument and its constituency is recursive in the sense that the instrument and the work related to bringing it alive give rise to the constituency while the constituency engages in the development, support and spread of the instrument. Through their constituencies, policy instruments gain socio-political momentum because they are advocated from within. Instrument constituencies are thus not only a key by-product but also a major driver of the innovation journeys of policy instruments.

An instrument constituency can influence the development of an instrument in a number of ways. Governance instruments, we explained, have a ‘double life’: as functional models and as implementated policies. The innovation journey of a policy instrument can be understood as the process in which these two appearances of policy instruments evolve with each other in close interaction (Simons et al., 2014; Voß, 2014, 2016a). The constituency can play a key role in the mediation between modelling activities – ‘in the lab’ so to speak – and implementation activities ‘in the wild’. Constituency actors may be involved with explicating and advancing the theory behind an instrumental design, also in relation to its implementations, e.g. by specializing in simulations of potential implementations or by conducting evaluation studies of existing implementations. Other constituency actors may find their niche in the actual implementation of an instrument in a specific policy-making context, e.g. by providing certain socio-technical infrastructures, such as trading platforms for emission credits, or by consulting the implementation process as instrument experts.

An instrument constituency thus influences the innovation journey of a policy instrument by creating a ‘supply push’ dynamic (Voß & Simons, 2014). Having studied the innovation journeys of several different policy instruments, we find a dynamic of ‘supply push’ similar to the one discussed for technological innovations (e.g. Dosi, 1982). By this we mean that policy instruments are not only selected based on demand by newly arising problems, shifting ideologies or power constellations, but also because demand becomes created by endogenous dynamics of instrument development. As the social life behind instruments, constituencies actively push for their solution. In many observed cases, constituencies actively market their instruments to relevant policy actors, especially when windows of opportunity arise (for a recent overview see Simons & Voß, 2017).

Connected to this is the observation that through such constituency-induced supply push dynamics, policy instruments may, metaphorically speaking, start chasing problems and making problems. This happens when constituency actors see structural promises in expanding their instrument’s scope to other policy fields. For example, in the case of emissions trading, several specialized consultancies and service providers, who had been active in early US emissions trading systems, participated during the 1980s and 1990s in making a case for marked-based solutions to the then upcoming problem of climate change (Simons & Voß, 2015; Voß, 2007b). Another related example is the expansion of pilot projects for the ‘joint implementation’ of climate protection commitments into the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) as a transnational market for emission credits (Schroth, 2016). How policy dynamics are triggered by emerging research fields is clearly visible in the case of sustainability innovations and transition management (Voß, 2014). Yet another example is the pushing of debate about the democratic deficit of liberal-representative institutions
by specialists involved in the development and provision of citizen participation methods (Amelung & Grabner, 2017; Voß & Amelung, 2016).

**What makes instrument constituencies strong?**

An important but tricky question in the study of policy instrument constituencies is how and when a constituency gains or loses power and influence. Existing research on the matter suggests several relevant aspects, but more research is needed to validate these and to identify potential other sources of power and influence. Here, we would like to discuss three related aspects: functional and structural promises, reflexive coordination leading to institutionalization, and socio-material infrastructure.

A first aspect is the above-mentioned ability to generate promises and linked expectations. Instruments hold explicit functional promises, such as goal fulfilment, cost-efficiency or justice and may thereby attract supporters. In the context of modern science-based cultures of governance (Ezrahi, 1990) and against the background of programmatic evidence-based policy-making (Straßheim & Kettunen, 2014), the ability to create functional promises is closely linked with the capacity to produce scientific evidence and thus with the mobilization of resources for carrying out experiments (*in silico, in vitro, in vivo*), establishing facts and bringing them into circulation (Simons, 2016a, 2016b; Voß, 2014; Voß & Schroth, 2018). Functional promises, while not as important as structural promises in keeping constituencies together (see above), provide a key mechanism for constituencies to gain wider public support and influence in the policy process:

**Proposition 5:** Creating and stabilizing functional promises and linked expectations, e.g. through the simulation and evaluation of effects in the framework of scientific models, is a first major source of public acceptance and strength for instrument constituencies.

Above, we also commented on the role of structural promises in the development and endurance of instrument constituencies. Since structural promises help to attract actors to partake in instrument constituencies they also affect a constituency’s potential to become influential, because the more actors come to ‘live off’ the instrument, that is find their ‘habitat’ in the development and diffusion of an instrument, the more effort they are likely to invest for pushing that instrument. Note, however, that this can set in motion self-enforcing dynamics. A constituency that grows because it provides structural promises may become more powerful and influential, may succeed in broadening the scope of its instrument and thereby offer even more structural promises. An unresolved question is how certain instruments differ in respect to the structural promises that they can offer, and how this influences their potential to become accepted and widely implemented designs. This could, for example, provide an (additional) explanation for the success of market instruments that create new commodities and opportunities for private profit.

A second, related, aspect is the extent to which a constituency self-organizes as a constituency. Authors like Howlett and colleagues (Béland & Howlett, 2016; Mukherjee & Howlett, 2015) conceive of instrument constituencies as collective actors. And our own work at times suggests this line of thinking. However, here we would like to emphasize again that a constituency is not per se a collective actor, but that it can become one. Our point is to stress that collective actor qualities cannot be taken for granted. While structural promises may provide opportunities to capitalize on and nurture certain practices and draw actors into shared activities related to the development and spread of a policy instrument, there
may or may not be episodes in which that constituency enacts its collectivity as a collective actor. Attachment through structural promises does not necessarily imply that constituency members also develop a self-reflexive awareness of their collectivity and articulate the shared interest in coordinating themselves as an instrument constituency.

We can see this when looking at the history of policy instruments like emissions trading (Simons & Voß, 2015; Voß, 2007b), conservation banking (Mann & Simons, 2014), the CDM (Schroth, 2016) or transition management (Voß, 2014), as well as instruments like methods of public participation (Amelung & Grabner, 2017; Voß & Amelung, 2016). At earlier stages of the journeys of these instruments, constituencies began to form but without much self-organization. Only at later stages, self-organization arose when constituency actors articulated a collective interest in developing and diffusing ‘their’ instruments – that is the social realm within which these instruments are regarded as a valid option of policy-making.

Self-organization can take many forms and is characterized by reflexivity. Over time constituency actors tend to become reflexive of the fact that they share an interest in the instrument’s retention and expansion and therefore start to reflexively pursue the management of interdependencies emerging from their joint engagement with an instrument. This form of reflexivity may then lead to two things. In an outward direction, it can lead to the coordination of activities geared towards the development and spread of an instrument, such as collective lobbying. Inwards looking, reflexivity may lead to constituency integration, e.g. by establishing communication channels such as conferences or online platforms.

Such coordination may lead to the establishment of constituency institutions and organizations, such as specialized conferences, fairs, mailing lists, internet platforms, boards and associations but also education and capacity building programmes, where constituency members come together on a regular basis to learn, exchange news and experiences, form collective positions, and coordinate their public outreach. In effect, instrument constituencies can, through coordination, become coherent and powerful collective actors ‘who strategically market their solutions, for example, by engaging with problem discourses, recruiting important supporters, or seeking to outcompete other instruments for a dominant position in the “toolbox of policymaking”’ (Voß & Simons, 2014, p. 740).

Proposition 6: A second source of strength for instrument constituencies is the process of taking on collective actor qualities. This requires the reflexive coordination of constitutive elements and actors for strategies of collective action and can lead to the development of constituency-internal institutions and organizations.

For instrument constituencies, a third source of power and influence is the socio-material infrastructures they build in the process of developing and expanding policy instruments (Simons, 2016a, 2016b; Voß, 2007a, pp. 170–176, 2014). Mobilizing again the distinction between policy instruments as policy models and as implemented policies, we can also make a difference between two types of infrastructures: those that help to sustain or expand an instrument as a generic policy model and those that help to sustain or expand an instrument as a policy arrangement in a concrete setting (Simons et al., 2014; Voß, 2007a, pp. 175–176). To sustain and expand a policy instrument as a generic model, constituencies may construct ‘socio-cognitive infrastructures’ that consist of academic associations, university degrees, conferences, laboratories and networked data and texts (Voß, 2007a, p. 176, 2014). Instrument constituencies can produce and use networks of documents and data to exert ‘policy control at a distance,’ by disseminating authoritative policy models throughout the world (Simons, 2016a, 2016b; Simons et al., 2014). This can lead to a situation where ‘the
data’ or ‘the literature’ in favour of a specific governance model becomes widely acknowledged as the ‘evidence base’ for that model. Supporters can then point to this evidence base, which resides in a transnational sphere, as a source of authority to support their claims, for example concerning the necessity to implement the model in a specific context.

When policy instruments become implemented in practice they lead to the construction of concrete policy arrangements. In line with Lascoumes and Le Gales (2007), we can think of such arrangements as social institutions because they enable and constrain the agency of actors. But just as sociologists explore the socio-material dimensions of social institutions (Latour, 1991; Pinch & Swedberg, 2008), we also need to explore the socio-material dimensions of implemented policy arrangements. Examples of how this could look can be found in studies on the materiality of liberalized utility sectors (Voß & Bauknecht, 2007), environmental markets (Callon, 2009; MacKenzie, 2009) and methods of citizen participation (Bogner, 2012; Lezaun & Soneryd, 2007). As these studies show, the implementation of a policy arrangement entails material tinkering of various sorts. In the case of environmental markets, environmental ‘goods and bads’ need to be made measurable and commensurable through a complex measurement and calculation apparatus. Trading of environmental permits requires a trading infrastructure linked to databases or stock exchanges (example are IT firms as members in IETA). Citizen deliberation is increasingly facilitated with wireless computer networks and special moderation software (see product description on IFOK webpage).

Any of these requirements is a potential field of activity for an instrument constituency. The construction of such infrastructures is not only a valuable business case but can also be used as a means to inscribe certain theories, values and interests into a socio-material set-up, which enables and constraints the agency of many. Such ‘politics of the material’, resulting from the actors’ capacity to inscribe values and interests into socio-material infrastructures, is in fact the key reason why policy scholars should attend to the socio-material dimension of policy instruments both as models and as implemented policy arrangements. It is here that linkages with the broader field of science and technology studies open up (Voß & Freeman, 2016a).

Proposition 7: A third source of strength for instrument constituencies is building socio-material infrastructures both for development and expansion of a generic functional model and for introducing and sustaining arrangements in concrete settings.

How do instrument constituencies relate to the policy process and to other policy actors?

The dynamics of instrument constituencies can be reflected in a Kingdon-like multiple-streams model of the policy process (Simons & Voß, 2017; Voß, 2007a, pp. 81–85; Voß & Simons, 2014). Recently, Mukherjee and Howlett (2015) argued that instrument constituencies are one of three concepts in the policy analysis literature that help to explain the agency behind the type of streams Kindgon had in mind. Asking ‘who is a stream?’, Mukherjee and Howlett (2015) identify epistemic communities, instrument constituencies and advocacy coalitions as the principal agents of Kingdon’s problem, policy and politics streams, respectively. Since instrument constituencies ‘are united by their adherence to the design and promotion of specific policy instruments as the solutions to general sets
of policy problems', the authors write, they should ‘[n]ot to be conflated with Sabatier’s or Haas’ notions of advocacy coalitions or epistemic communities’ (p. 70).

Béland and Howlett (2016) also emphasize that instrument constituencies must be differentiated from other key collective policy actors, because in developing and advocating policy solutions they play a unique role in the policy process. Building on our own attempts to distinguish instrument constituencies from other collective policy actors (Voß & Simons, 2014), Béland and Howlett propose a tri-fold conceptualization of independent policy actors and activities in juxtaposing instrument constituencies, epistemic communities and advocacy coalitions. Whereas instrument constituencies engage in the development of policy tools and techniques, epistemic communities engage in the development of problems and advocacy coalitions engage in the development of ideologies and in matching goals and tools. Although we also see other differences between these three concepts, we think that for a pragmatic orientation in theory advancement it makes sense to adhere to the tri-fold conceptualization by Howlett and colleagues (see Simons & Voß, 2017).4

Proposition 8: By advocating governance designs and policy solutions independently of problems or issues, instrument constituencies play a unique role in the policy process. They constitute the agency behind the policy stream postulated by Kingdon and must therefore be differentiated from other policy actors such as epistemic communities and advocacy coalitions.

Mukherjee and Howlett (2015) also map the interaction of epistemic communities, instrument constituencies, and advocacy coalitions related to the interaction of the problem, policy and politics streams in five prototypical stages of the policy process: agenda setting, policy formulation, decision-making, policy implementation and policy evaluation. This clarifies the role of instrument constituencies in the policy process. It should be noted, however, that instrument constituencies, at least at a later stage of their expansion, persist beyond particular policy processes and engage with several processes, even across issue domains and different political systems. They thus span different policy processes and establish translocal linkages between policy-making practices within specific contexts. Figure 1, just like Kingdon’s account, does ‘catch a glimpse of instrument constituencies’ only in their relationship with a particular policy process (Voß & Simons, 2014, p. 740).

During the stage of agenda setting, instrument constituencies act as ‘policy entrepreneurs’ (Kingdon, 1984; Minstrom, 1997), who combine solutions with problems and politics (moods, constellations of power), that is help to join Kindgon’s three otherwise independent streams. This involves the mobilization of political support through lobbying and making promises linked to the implementation and use of the instrument. But it also involves the discursive construction of policy problems in a way that fits them to the solution at hand (Simons, 2016a; Simons & Voß, 2015; Voß, 2007a, 2007b).

During policy formulation, instrument constituencies partake in the negotiation of the many technical details of policies. It is here, where constituency actors shine as technical experts and policy advisors. As such they are not neutral, however. In many cases, the quasi-technocratic act of fine-tuning a policy is but a way of depoliticizing highly political decisions. Instrument constituencies will therefore try to sell their solution in terms of

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3Note that while the three types of policy actors can be differentiated regarding their role in the policy process, they can overlap in terms of the actors they are made of. A think tank, for instance, could be part of an instrument consistency, an advocacy coalition and an epistemic community at the same time.

4Through their focus on policy solutions, instrument constituencies can also be distinguished from other conceptualizations of collective subsystem actors, such as issue networks, iron triangles, policy communities or policy networks (Heclo, 1978; Jordan, 1981; Kingdon, 1984; Rhodes, 1997).
efficiency and effectiveness rather than normative core beliefs. In other words, they will try to render policy choice a merely technical, apolitical undertaking.

During decision-making, instrument constituencies may not be very active, except when they are part of the decision-making elite, as was the case with the EU Commission in the decision-making process that led to the implementation of the European Emissions Trading System (EU ETS) in the early 2000s. Apart from such exceptions, instrument constituencies become important again during the implementation stage when the task is to create the real socio-material infrastructure that lies behind an instrument as configuration in practice. As we explained above, the real-world implementation of governance instruments holds significant structural promises for constituency actors.

During the evaluation phase, instrument constituencies are active as well. As experts, instrument actors are often seen as key authorities in assessing the functioning of an instrument in practice. However, the evaluation of implementations by constituency actors can also be problematic, especially if those who perform the evaluation themselves strongly benefit from the existence and expansion of the instrument in question. Paradoxically, the experts who evaluate the performance of policy instruments are often the same who advocate and help to implement these instruments. There is a danger here that this may lead to biased results.

We can thus see that instrument constituencies are active during most phases of the policy process, not only during agenda setting and policy formulation. As we have noted above, it is important to see, however, that instrument constituencies have their own ‘biographies’ independent of particular policy processes as conceived in a model of problem-solving stages. For the kind of engagement and the effect of instrument constituencies in specific
(stages of) policy processes the state of ‘maturity’ of the instrument constituency is decisive. That given, it is important to stress that instrument constituencies are more than just inventors of policy solutions; they are also implementers and evaluators. In fact, they work on their governance innovation in all registers, from invention to adoption and evaluation (Jordan & Huitema, 2014b; Voß, 2007a; Voß & Simons, 2014). And while instrument constituencies indeed are the dominant actor in the policy stream, as Mukherjee and Howlett (2015) propose (or competing actors, if there are other instrument constituencies active in relation to specific problem and within a particular political system), they also help to re-define problems and mobilize political support as a means to advocate their solutions. The same could be true, in reverse, for epistemic communities and advocacy coalitions, whose role we have not elaborated on here. Further research is needed to understand the interaction of these three policy actors and to consider their interrelation in various political environments (May 1991).

Proposition 9: Instrument constituencies are active throughout the policy process. In support of their instrument becoming positioned and accepted as a solution to a specific problem in the context of a specific political constellation, they help to formulate, implement and evaluate policies that match these solutions and to set the agendas for them. Being active in relation with several policy processes in different issue domains and political systems they establish trans-local and trans-temporal linkages between them.

How to engage with the politics of instrument constituencies?

In terms of the impulses that the concept of instrument constituencies may give to policy studies, a last point is the identification of new sites and forms of reflexive engagement with ongoing processes of governance change that it allows. Part of this is to raise public awareness of the politics involved in the design, experimental testing and expansion of specific instrumental models (Voß, 2016b; Voß & Schroth, 2018). As much as a view of models and instruments in terms of the practices and actors who make and sustain them reveals that the instrument emerges from and is shaped in specific social dynamics, we are led to ask what the selectivities are and the exclusions that occur in these processes. If we drop the assumption that knowledge about governance emerges in a purely evolutionary process where it is selected by objective conditions of political reality alone, and if we thus come to acknowledge that the dominance of specific instrumental designs has a lot to do with social interactions in which models of governing are articulated and made forceful, then we have to ask, if the instrumental options that are offered for policy choice have indeed been rightly articulated considering all relevant concerns, and if the worlds that are produced by putting them in practice are desirable also to those who are not involved in the process of making them and who are not persuaded by their structural promises. To put it short, the concept of instrument constituencies leads us to de-technicize and to re-politicize the making of governance knowledge and the design of instruments.

An understanding of governance instruments in terms of functional models, whose strength does not rest in their capacity to mirror a given reality, but in their capacity to cater support and align practices to create a reality as described by the instrument, may be called a ‘performative’ understanding (Voß, 2016a). It concedes that questions of instrument design and choice are not really epistemological questions of matching models with a given reality. Of course, knowledge making is also not only a matter of social construction and
beliefs, the strengths of which depend merely on consensus or cultural dominance. It’s rather that we come to see instruments as programmes for reality-making, as blueprints, so to say, for the reconfiguration of human practices in a way that the theoretically described models and their functional effects become real (Voß, 2014, 2016a). Instruments are about technologically configuring and controlling social interactions. This may first only be the case in theoretical imaginations, computer simulations or laboratory experiments, but as instruments develop, the world in which they are practiced to exist may expand, both within research and academia, but also in public administration, consulting services, IT infrastructures, implementation industries, educational programmes, etc. (Voß & Schroth, 2018).

What does that mean for the way in which we engage with the development of governance instruments as policy scholars? If we cannot take instruments to enter the political process from the outside, but see their making as part of the political process, we should turn to the making of instruments (not only their formal choice and installation) as a site of the politics of policy-making and institutional design. Policy scholars should thus empirically dig up the processes in which decisions are made in the process of producing knowledge and garnering support for certain instrumental designs, for example by focusing on seemingly technical controversies among specialists or between specialists and critics, and reconstructing the ways in which such controversies are closed, i.e. who wins and how.

A second step, however, would then be to diagnose the ways in which the politics of instrument development is carried on and to engage with it from a normative point of view. This is basically about evaluating this politics in democratic terms and articulating strategies for reducing imbalances in how diverse societal perspectives, along with their concerns for desired functionalities and feared side effects, are reflected in the design process. Extending the involvement of policy studies scholars from the process of policy choice to the process of instrument development is important, because later, when instruments are pitched against each other during policy formulation phases within the context of specific policy processes, many decisions and the work undertaken to create the worlds in which instruments can function, are already ‘black-boxed’. It is then often only for their predicted effectiveness and efficiency to reach one specific policy objective that instruments are evaluated, while wider and deeper transformations which come along with materially installing the ‘ceteris paribus’ conditions that only allow to replicate the functional effect of the model are ignored (Voß, 2016a). We here have a similar constellation as with other more conventional types of technology development in fields like medical, transport, agricultural or energy technology. It is for this black boxing and the increasing entrenchment of technologies as they mature (Collingridge, 1980) and for the ‘collateral realities’ that they produce (Law, 2012) that technology assessment methods have increasingly moved ‘upstream’. They do not anymore seek to ask questions about the allowability of ready-made technologies, but to open up the design and development process for a greater diversity of actors to articulate their needs and concerns (Guston, 2014; Rip, Misa, & Schot, 1995).

The concept of instrument constituencies invites creative ideas by policy scholars about how such concepts of constructive technology assessment may be translated for democratizing the politics that are inherent in the design and development of instruments as programmes for creating certain types of collective order. Steps in to this direction have been explored by the Innovation in Governance Research Group, which provided the intellectual habitat for our study and conceptualization of instrument constituencies. We developed and tested a methodology of constructive innovation assessment in two workshops: ‘challenging
futures of biodiversity offsets and banking’ (Mann, Voß, Simons et al., 2014) and ‘challenging futures of citizen panels’ (Mann & Amelung, Forthcoming; Mann, Voß, Amelung et al. 2014, Voß, 2016b). The workshops took inspiration from Constructive Technology Assessment (see also the percursor Voß et al., 2006). About 25 actors with different positions within the instrument constituency and outside of it were invited to identify and discuss ‘critical issues’. Discussions were supported by alternative scenarios if future pathways of instrument development which exposed some of the in-built selectivities and tensions that we found in our studies of the historical and current development of those instruments. The product is an ‘extended innovation agenda’ which exposes ‘critical issues’ for future design and development of those instruments that concern worldviews, values and interest rather than epistemological or technical questions. Bringing this extended innovation agenda in circulation enables citizens to engage with instruments in other capacities than as technical experts and it may stimulate wider and more diverse publics to engage with the construction of model designs for governance (cf. Marres, 2007; see also Mann & Amelung, Forthcoming; Mann & Voß, 2018, Voß, 2016b).

The ‘challenging futures workshops’ provide an example of how policy analysts may extend approaches of participatory or deliberative policy analysis from problem-oriented engagements with the policy process (Fischer & Gottweis, 2012; Fischer & John Forester, 1993; Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003) to also include instrumental design-oriented engagements with ongoing processes of innovation in governance. Many other concrete ways may be imagined by which the concept of instrument constituencies may not only enable analytical descriptions of the social dynamics and politics of instrument development, but also the diagnosis of problematic aspects of how this politics is carried on, and the development of strategies for engaging and intervening with the dynamics of instrument constituencies and how they give shape to instruments.

Proposition 10: Much of the political work of instrument constituencies tends to be disguised as technical or scientific. As a result, important design decisions with implications for people affected by development and implementation of the instrument become black-boxed. Policy scholars should not only study the effects of policy instrument constituencies but also opt for a reflexive and, if required, critical engagement with them.

Conclusion

As a new concept in policy analysis, instrument constituencies shed light on the ‘supply side’ of policy-making and thereby close a crucial research gap. Policy instruments, it turns out, are not only ‘active’ or ‘alive’ because they contain scripts for reordering society – a fact that is captured in the notion of policy instruments as institutions – but also because they gather a constituency comprised of practices and actors oriented towards developing, maintaining and expanding a specific instrumental model of governing. Through such constituencies, policy instruments can develop a life of their own, partly determining preferences and actively enrolling allies. The concept thereby helps to explain the often-observed paradox that solutions sometimes chase – or even make – problems, although the former are meant to emerge as answers to the later. As Béland and Howlett (2016, p. 13) content, this phenomenon may ‘not at all [be] extraordinary and exceptional but in fact commonly may be the norm’.
In this article, we formulated 10 propositions about the structure and dynamics of instrument constituencies and further developed our original argument that instrument constituencies are a long-neglected driving force in national and transnational policy-making processes. It is due time that instrument constituencies receive critical attention from policy scholars. More research is needed to fully understand how instrument constituencies emerge and what their role is in the policy process.

Acknowledgement

We thank our colleagues in the Innovation in Governance Research Group for stimulating discussions of broader issues related to this article.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

The research for this article was funded by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) under its program of socialecological research [grant number 01UU0906].

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