Chapter 5
Seeing, Making and Distributing Things

Abstract In this chapter we investigate the construction of subjects and objects in governance paths, the inclusion of those in policies and plans, and their impact via implementation. Implementation is understood as a process, and policies are considered temporary constructs coordinating power/knowledge, but continuously affected by other power/knowledge configurations.

5.1 Object Formation and Subject Formation

The actor/institution configurations in governance paths produce many things. First of all they produce actors and institutions (Van Assche et al. 2011; Foucault 1994). Some actors are formed in governance and others enter it. Some exist as organizations or individuals with a specific interest before any involvement in collective decision-making; others did not. Even those groups and individuals interested in certain goals and topics, cannot be considered 'actors' before inclusion in governance. Once these organizations or individuals are included as actors, they are also transformed in and through the interactions with other actors and the institutional configurations. New actors that are formed within governance can emerge in various ways: existing elements in society can be assembled around a common goal at the instigation of other actors, or in response to the actions of others. The outcomes of governance can be observed in a positive or negative way in the social environment and cause some to engage themselves in governance. The lack of certain outcomes can have the same effect. Internal discussions within actors in governance can lead to segments feeling alienated and either withdrawing from participation within the actor (thus further changing it) or to segments becoming involved separately, therewith creating a new actor (Van Assche 2007; Van Assche et al. 2012).

The productivity of governance is more substantial than the creation of actors. Governance creates both subjects and objects (Van Assche et al. 2011; Duineveld and Van Assche 2011; Duineveld et al. 2013). The production and transformation

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of actors in governance are processes of subject formation that along with the production of new identities, produces new subjectivities and new visions of the world. The perspective on object and subject creation allows us to see more of the discursive mechanics at play within governance evolutions and it allows us to map more of the routes in which discursive worlds seep into the continuously transforming game. This perspective is inspired by both the early and the late works of Michel Foucault (Foucault 1966, 1972, 1980, 1998, 2006).

If we see actors as subjects that are transformed in governance, then it is easier to grasp the many potential links with visions of the world, of desirable and less desirable futures. In most cases actors are groups, or individuals or organizations representing groups. These actors define themselves by reference to goals, but usually these actors have implied ideas about the existing, feared and desired worlds, of the past, present and future (Van Assche et al. 2012). If these actors are clearly defined, and equipped with fully developed narratives before entering governance, this might give these narratives more impact on governance, without however avoiding an influence of governance on these narratives themselves. If they are weakly or partially developed, there is a bigger chance that the governance experience itself will lead to further development of the discursive equipment of the actor. In governance, a green party cannot remain green, it has to develop ideas on other aspects of the world, and the new positions of the green party are likely to represent identity politics within the governance process (the green party might highlight their difference from party X and their similarity to party Y).

Exposure to governance can also lead, maybe more concretely, to the embracing of objects as important by certain subjectivities. Subjectivities, as constructed identities, can associate themselves with certain objects, in such a way that the involvement and/or the object becomes part of the identity, of the subjectivity (Delanty 2003). One can think of European green parties in the seventies and trees or American neo- conservatives and guns. Objects can be (concepts of) physical objects, such as trees and guns, but also places, groups, issues and topics, or abstract concepts and the embedding ideologies. Some of these objects are the product of governance itself, other enter it and are transformed within governance.

Both objects and subjects are the product of discursive evolutions and governance is a realm of high discursive productivity: new actors are formed in the process; others are entering it and are being redefined. The objects they are dealing with might come in and be altered, or they are the product of the process itself. Governance can create new associations between objects and subjects, in some cases redefining subjectivity.

In keeping with the terminology presented in previous chapters, we distinguish between paths, sites, and mechanisms of object and subject formation (Duineveld and Van Assche 2011; Duineveld et al. 2013). Not every path of object and subject formation is on the terrain of governance, but governance sites are certainly sites of object and subject formation. With their continuous confrontation between versions of the world and the pressure exerted on discursively by the need to take decisions, governance paths are highly productive series of sites. Mechanisms (or techniques) are sometimes applied consciously, strategically (as part of

stratagems) by actors, but in many cases they occur unintentionally and invisibly, as a result of interactions between actors and evolving actor/institution configurations. After two weeks of negotiations about a new cabinet, each party is a little different, and for each of them, several objects will be new or newly important.

In the techniques of object formation, we distinguish between reification, solidification and codification (Duineveld et al. 2013). Reification entails the recognition of the object as a unity, separated from its environment, more than a loose assemblage of parts. A tree becomes visible, rather than branches and leafs; a forest becomes visible, rather than a collection of trees. Solidification refers to the tightening of internal connections in the concept, an increasingly sharp delineation of the emerging discursive object. Branches and leafs are recognized as elements of a tree, as linked and necessary parts, and probably requiring a root. Codification is the simplification of the object boundaries. It comes with the simple applicability of codes to decide on conceptual inclusion/exclusion. The bird on the branch and the worm on the leaf are not considered part of the tree, the wanderer in the forest becomes a matter of discussion.

As a second, sometimes separate, sometimes less discernible stage of object formation, we can speak of object stabilization. As techniques of object stabilization, we distinguish objectification, naturalization, and institutionalization. Naturalization is the strengthening of the public perception that the object is part of the order of things, part of nature. It is the process that veils contingency, blinds the awareness that things could have been different, that objects could have been constructed differently (Latour and Woolgar 1986). 'Of course this is the forest? What else could it be?' -sacred grove, dark place, tree plantation, place of chaos and wildness, hunting ground. Naturalization is creation of the aura of the obvious, the incorporation of the object into the warehouse of unquestioned commonplaces. With that, the policy implications of the new object tend to sneak in public awareness, tend to become more easily acceptable. If forests are ecosystems and ecosystems are fragile, important and useful, then protection might seem appropriate; if forests are plantations, then management is a matter of cutting and planting.

Objectification completes the process of reification. Objectification, then, is the acknowledgment of the object as part of the objective truth, established by scientific means (Latour and Woolgar 1986). Especially in administrations or other governance arena's where scientific expertise is expected to reduce the burden of political decision- making, this step can increase the impact of the object on governance. If some birds are seen in the bulb fields, they can become assembled into the new object of 'bulb birds', and once scientists study and count the bulb birds, this assemblage becomes an objective unity that can fare well or not so well (Duineveld and Van Assche 2011). Institutionalization is the codification of discourse, including its objects, in organizations, policies and plans. If the bulb birds are recognized and doing not so well, they can be protected, the planning of bulb areas can be altered, and maybe no residential development should take place in these fragile ecosystems. One can notice here a metaphoric slide: the new object can shift the meaning of its environment, which in turn can have new policy implications.

In governance, no construct is entirely stable (Duineveld et al. 2013; cf. Mol 2002). The techniques of object stabilization are never perfect and always likely to encounter strategies pushing for moulding or deconstruction of the object. In other words, the construction of irreversibility is never perfect. The radically constructed nature of subject and object does not deny the agency or the constraining role of the material environment in the process of object formation (Duineveld and Van Assche 2011). Neither does it contradict the role of human agency. What does transpire in our perspective is that in evolving governance both objects and subjects are transformed, that this is partly a matter of strategy, and partly a matter of discursive evolution outside the control and/or the view of the participants. Actor/institution configurations produce effects anticipated by no one, and these effects include object formation. The reproduction of the actor/institution configuration is driven by actions, and these actions are structured by discursive worlds partly produced in governance.

5.2 Boundaries

If governance evolution is discursively productive, this can be analysed as the production of objects and subjects, whereby mechanisms of formation can be distinguished. At a more elementary level, we can study the construction of boundaries underlying object and subject construction. Analysing boundary formation, maintenance and change can shed a different light on the relations between objects and subjects, and on other relations in governance.

Since our epistemology is constructivist, a constructivism that accounts for materiality, agency and the agency of materiality, we start with the discursive construction of reality, and then we reincorporate the non-discursive. That means that we preliminarily consider all boundaries *conceptual boundaries*. *Spatial boundaries and social boundaries*, delineating respectively places and social identities, are considered special categories of conceptual boundaries (Van Assche et al. 2008). Conceptual boundaries delineate objects and subjects (social identities), and they delineate places. The process of delineation can start from the interior and from the exterior, i.e. it can start with the demarcation of a difference, and it can start with the crystallization of relations, which then become considered as interior, and delineated. One can define one tree as first of all different from the next one, or from a different species, and one can come to the concept of tree by means of gradual observation of the relations between roots, branches and leafs. Possibly the root becomes part of the tree later, as an externally delineated addition of something that emerged as a set of internal relations.

Not all conceptual boundaries are spatial or social, as not all discursive objects are places or subjects, so we call the rest, for simplicity's sake, conceptual boundary. Conceptual, social and spatial boundaries entangle, and, as with metaphors, their similarity as boundaries enables the carry- over of other meanings. Since all are in essence discursive constructions, they are more related than it seems, than

one tends to think after the processes of codification, naturalization, et cetera we discussed earlier. This means that they can entangle more easily than people usually think. Meanings can be carried over more easily from one object to another, and redrawing one boundary, or creating new associations between objects, tends to spark off effects in boundary construction, hence object construction.

Spatial boundaries can be the result of existing social boundaries and they can trigger new social boundaries. They can also trigger the formation of new conceptual boundaries, or objects, with which social groups can identify. Whereas social boundaries can emerge from spatial boundaries, from contrast with other social identities, from association with material objects or practices, they can also produce new associations with objects, subjects and spaces (Van Assche et al. 2008; Elias and Scotson 1994). An ethnic group can recognize itself as group only when confronted with others behaving differently; the teapot that was just a teapot can become distinctive, and other groups can start producing teapots that are purposefully different. The people from an area in Western Europe can be Celts, and when the area becomes France, and France becomes more unified and recognized, these people might become the French. They can morph into French as a result of policies fostering identification, as a result of slow identification by many small communities, or because all foreigners and some local groups (becoming 'minorities') call them French. The identification might be fostered by a political centre, or it might be actively promoted (and reconstructed) at the edge, in a border zone where spatial and social boundaries are disputed.

A special category of conceptual objects that shape boundaries in governance evolution, we call *images of history*, or historical narratives. History can give depth to objects and subjects, can harden their boundaries, intensify the process of object stabilization, and render them more a part of the natural order. 'It was always like this'. In terms of subjects, if these subjects are or become actors in governance, then the use of history and the reconstruction of history in governance can intensify or smoothen oppositions between actors. History can focus the strategizing of the actors, by clarifying identity, but it can also reduce governance to identity politics and block attempts at mutual understanding or reflexivity. All these efforts can look useless if the actors start from the assumption that they know perfectly well what they are and what they want, and that historical depth and continuity is the proof of their conviction. 'This is what we stand for because this is what we are and we are what we are because we have been like this forever'. Images of history thus permit tautologies that render reflexivity harder, that make it harder to redraw object and subject boundaries in governance, a redrawing that is part and parcel of the negotiations of democratic governance. Images of history can thus be said to *harden the boundaries of the actors*, which makes governance less flexible and adaptive.

Similarly, history, i.e. images of history as conceptual objects, can *harden spatial boundaries*. In the case of spatial boundaries, institutionalization in administrative and political structures (municipalities, watershed commissions, regional governments) often combines with images of history to produce hard spatial boundaries that are not reflected upon anymore. Many issues of course do not respect these

spatial boundaries, and many of these boundaries could also be constructed and considered differently, even if only in the context of deliberation.

Also in devising appropriate policies and in assessing the impact of policies, the hardening of spatial boundaries as a result of images of history and institutionalization, the associated forgetting of the contingent character, and permeability of these spatial boundaries can become problematic. We can speak, with Bruno Latour, of *blackboxing* of objects after hardening of boundaries (Latour 1999). Policies, embedded goals, or (spatial) impacts of policies are often considered, their results measured against the background of a landscape that is presumed neutral, where the contingent character of spatial boundaries, and the entanglement with the other boundaries, is black boxed. Both material flows and discursive flows do not respect these boundaries, but if hard enough, this is forgotten. And such forgetting means that potentially superior policies become invisible. If an urban area is, for historical reasons, perceived and organized as a collection of 17 villages, then traffic flows, commercial development and green infrastructure will probably not be managed and planned well, and investment in heritage, preservation and redevelopment will not be directed in the most efficient and most beneficial manner.

All this being said, the material world does assert itself in boundary construction. It is just that we are never sure how and when (cf. Eco 2000; Bryant 2011). Watersheds, ecosystems, certain landscape types (think marshes, mountains, and deserts) have boundaries that have effects on discursive construction and human actions, on discursive and material flows. Man-made landscapes (think cities, mining landscapes, industrial wastelands, and polluted areas, but also parks, high quality neighbourhoods) can have similar effects; they can affect the formation of spatial, social, and other conceptual boundaries. Poor people can end up in marshes, or in polluted areas, but marshes can also attract affluent birdwatchers, who over time can built their own colony next to the Heron's colony.

For people however (and for social systems), it is not possible to distinguish between the physical environment and discursive environment. All meaning, whether psychic or social, depends on an internal construction of the outside world, the environment. We cannot operative beyond our discursive worlds, and even if we can certainly hit a wall in that landscape, and can see that many birds hit that wall, the birds, the wall, the landscape, and the series of relations and inferences associated with the designation of the wall as boundary, are all discursively delineated. One of the consequences is that one *cannot distinguish between the physical environment as obstacle (therefore boundary) and the effects of previous discursive activity that hardened into obstacles*. It cannot tell the difference between physical boundaries and the results of the activities of social systems (and psychic systems).

For that reason, we speak of *empirical boundaries*, as boundaries that function as boundaries but do not originate in the internal semantics of the observing subject or system. Some of these boundaries are associated with natural physical obstacles and ecosystem boundaries; others are forgotten effects of human activity or effects of forgotten human activity. The activities, sometimes the effects,

were once present in and structured by discursive worlds, but they are forgotten, disappeared from discourse, or *externalized*. These externalizations can come back to haunt us, and appear as natural obstacles, as physical boundaries later. Environmental pollution e.g. can be unobserved for a long time, while forming an obstacle for many human activities; it can create spatial boundaries of which the origin is not always reflected upon. Forests can be cleared a long time ago, and the ecological consequences account for a landscape that imposes its boundaries on many human activities (and understandings). In other words, a community experiences an obstacle, that obstacle is perceived as a physical, natural boundary, but one can never tell for sure what the origin of the obstacle is, and, related, what the precise influence of the material difference was on the construction of differences (hence objects and boundaries) in discourse (cf. Eco 2000).

These resonances between various sorts of boundaries are relevant to governance, because actors are discursively bounded subjects, in the sense of individuals (a product of narration) and in the sense of social identities, operating on the basis of social boundaries. Because governance in most cases is governance of a place or territory, delineated by spatial boundaries, collective decision-making involves other spatial and social objects too. Decision-making is about something, places, topics, issues, and all these receive their discursive identity because of conceptual boundaries that are likely to be transformed in the process of governance. Spatial, social and chronological boundaries (places, subjects and images of history) can harden a path of governance when they are not disputed. They can also make the path more unpredictable and the process more volatile when they are disputed, reducing governance to identity politics.

5.3 Policy, Knowledge/Power, and Implementation

In evolving governance, many things happen. Objects and subjects are under constant pressure of redefinition, formal and informal institutions co-evolve, while actors and institutions do the same. At this point in the reasoning, it is necessary to address two more essential concepts: knowledge and power. *Power* we define, in line with Foucault, as a set of immanent force relations that is present and working everywhere and in every direction (Foucault 1998). Power is neither good nor bad, it is not necessarily tied to individual or group action, desire, and intentionality. Rather, it is the web of forces at micro- level that make things at the same time possible and understandable and that allows for aggregations of power at higher levels of understanding and authority. Power and knowledge are thus entwined (Flyvbjerg 1998). In governance, where collectively binding decisions are strived for, and decisions with an impact on the lives of many are institutionalised (e.g. in the form of policies, plans, and laws), this is all the more true.

In the governance process, power and knowledge are always entwined. Knowledge independent of the web of power relations that produced it, does not exist, and vice versa, power independent of a version of the world that is

promoted, does not exist. *Knowledge*, then, is the insight made possible by others insights and the way they interweave with power. It is not restricted to scientific knowledge, while conversely, no special epistemological status is assigned to 'local knowledge' (Fischer 2000). Local knowledge, scientific knowledge, and the more clearly politicized forms of knowledge present in reports for and by administrations, are all entwined with power. None of them can claim to a direct access to the truth, and none of them can be decoupled from power relations. This can be understood at several levels: no form of knowledge can be fully dis-embedded from organizations, from communities, groups, or from a set of topics, methods and questions that structures the production of each form of knowledge. These observations lead to the double assertion already made: direct access to reality, to truth, does not exist, and embedding in communities, thus power relations, cannot be avoided.

Governance, as we know, both serves and creates actors and objects. It also leads to decisions which can be codified in policies, plans, and laws. Policies we consider the standard codification here, with plans representing a second codification, and laws a reinterpretation into the function system of law (Luhmann 2004). We can discern another angle to look at governance now. Governance is continuously shifting networks of governmental and non- governmental agents, it is strategizing with power/knowledge, and it is the production of policies. Actors can utilize knowledge to reinforce their own position of power, while delegitimizing the knowledge of competing actors. Directly or indirectly, this can dis-enfranchises knowledge held dear by citizens, and the citizens themselves. Representation of citizens is representation of understandings of the world, and also in this sense, power/knowledge configurations cannot be extricated.

If we understand, with Foucault, knowledge as discursively produced in discourses that evolve, compete, and transform, and that both open and close reality for us because of the necessity of simplifications, then we can present governance also as a continuous battle over the simplifications, reductions of complexity, or models of the world that will exert more influence over the future community. Each discourse, each perspective on a part of reality creates that reality for us. Yet, the choices implied for one or another construction simultaneously veil alternative constructions, alternative delineations of objects and subjects, backgrounds and relations. Governance deploys and produces discourse and can therefore create and uphold social realities, while making alternatives less visible and less likely to happen. Governance is a process in which discourses compete and transform, partly as a result of stratagems by actors, partly because of the process itself, the unique reproductive logic of the reigning actor/institution configuration. Governance paths are therefore paved with sites of conflict, open and latent, in which power/knowledge are transformed more intensely in and by the conflict. Power conflicts give rise to conflicting versions of reality and different versions of reality, past, present or future can trigger power conflicts. Policies, as results of governance, can solve conflicts, freeze them, and produce new ones.

Policies appear now as a tool of coordination of governmental and non- governmental actors, not only as a supposed final result of coordination. Governance

never stops, and governance as an on-going competition between discourses never leads to a unifying discourse that fully represents the community and is capable of addressing its key issues in manners acceptable to all. Policies appear as temporary conceptual structures coordinating knowledge and power, in constant transmutation, because of the confrontations with other power/knowledge configurations.

This view is useful to study the vagaries of policies, from emergence to application: how do various arenas of power/knowledge, at several scales, crystallize policies that consequently impact those arenas? Policies entering one arena are reinterpreted and used differently, even by the same actor, in different arena's, and at different stages. Policies are always and everywhere opposed, ignored, reinterpreted, repackaged, forgotten, and selectively enforced or implemented, because each arena, and each moment in an arena, represents a different power/knowledge environment, a different set of oppositions and transformation options. '*Implementation*' of policies is therefore a process of continuous reinterpretation, of divergence and convergence, of adaptation to new power/knowledge configurations in new discursive environments, to new objects and subjects, and to new coordinative rules (institutions) (Beunen and Duineveld 2010).

These insights add to the understanding of uncertainty and unpredictability in governance. They also expose rhetoric of stability, consensus, uniformity, and shared values and goals as not only difficult to achieve, but also to what it is: rhetoric, which can be used and abused in the on-going confrontations in governance. The same applies to notions of transparency and truth. Science, as knowledge promising more direct access to reality, and more direct answers to objective issues existing in society and supposedly asking for answers, is therefore exceedingly prone to use and abuse in governance. It's used to solve problems that cannot be solved, to answer questions that do not have an answer, or to reduce and replace thorny social issues with manageable yet different issues.

To get a better grasp on the issue of expertise and its promises in governance, the next chapter takes a closer look at the power of stories.

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