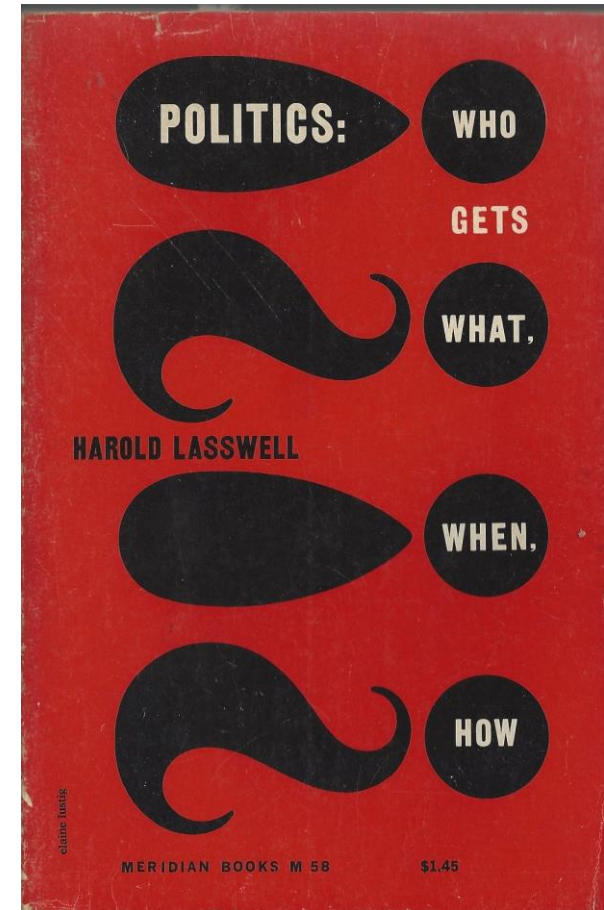# Policy process theories

Petr Ocelík

Outline

- Public policy and policy process

- Overview of the policy process theories

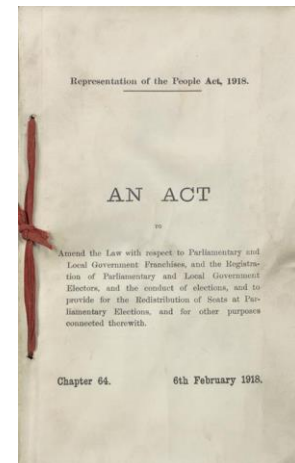- A network perspective on policy process

Public policy and policy process

The "political"

- Activities through which people **make, preserve, and change the general rules** under which they live (Heywood 2012: 2)

- → produce **collectively biding** outcomes (policies) that bring **unequal distribution** of costs and benefits

- This involves both collaborative (seeking for resources and allies) and conflictual (interfering with opponents) **interactions**

Polity, politics, policy

- **Polity:** institutional framework of the political system

- **Politics:** focus on **interactions of the actors**, e.g.: voting patterns within the polity

- **Policy:** focus on formation of **particular domains**, e.g.: social or energy, within the polity through collectively biding decisions
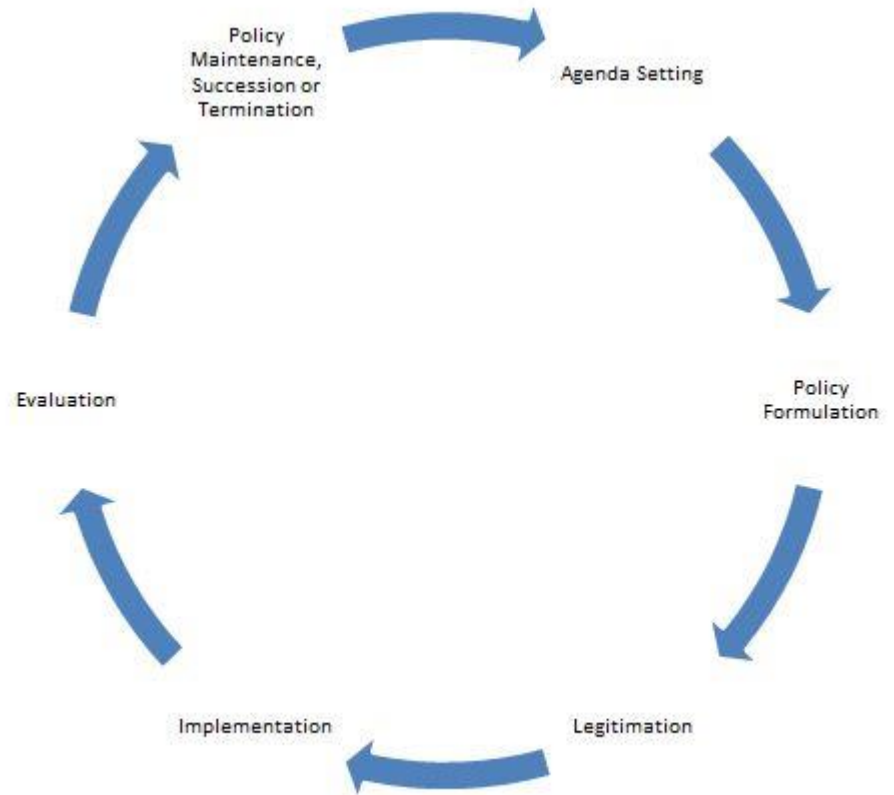
What is public policy?

- **Public policy:** a government policy that (1) **guides and regulates** actions in a specific (2) **issue area** and within a (3) particular **jurisdiction**

- More inclusive definition: the sum of direct and indirect **topically bounded government activities** with social impacts (see Cairney 2012)

- In democratic regimes, public policies are **enacted** through complex **legislative processes**

How is policy made?

- The policy-making process can be captured by **policy cycle** model (Lasswell 1956)

Policy Maintenance, Succession or Termination → Agenda Setting → Policy Formulation → Legitimation → Implementation → Evaluation

Cairney 2019

How is policy made?

- But, what about?

1. **Actors** not directly participating in the legislative process?

2. More generally, **context** of the legislative process?

- Thus, policy process is much more **complex** than policy cycle suggests...

Policy process theories

Policy process

- **Policy process**: a process through which the public policy (or its components) is produced, terminated, or revised

- Policy process is **shaped by**:

  1. interactions of **diverse actors** influenced by **institutional** structures (Ostrom 2014; Sabatier 1988)
  2. policy **discourses** and **frames** (Shanahan et al. 2011)
  - (number of more general structures and events)

- Different policy process theories tend to emphasize different dimensions of the policy process

Advocacy Coalition Framework

- Policy process involves (1) **diversity of actors** and their **groups** and occurs (2) mostly at the level of a **policy subsystem –** subset of political system defined by issue area

- Actors perceive policy problems through a **system of policy beliefs** and struggle to translate their beliefs into policies

- **Advocacy coalitions** (1) share policy beliefs and (2) coordinate their efforts

→ Patterns of actors' (coalitions') interactions and subsystem configurations facilitate or constrain **policy change**

ACF: Coal policy in Czechia

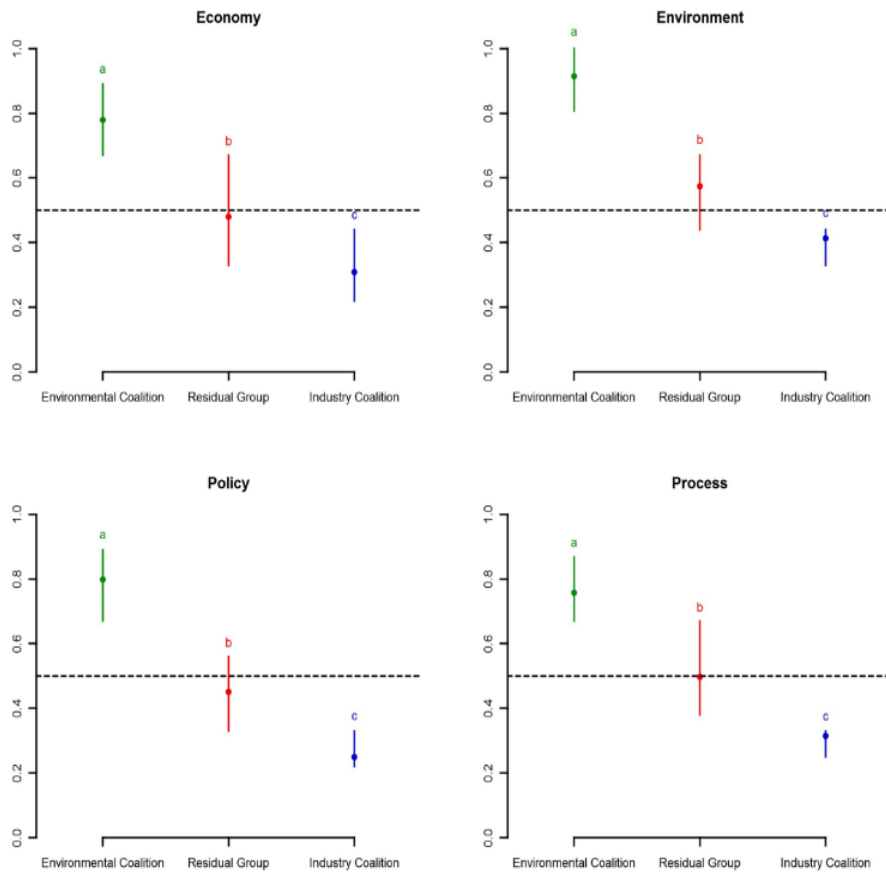Two competing coalitions in a fragmented political system (Ocelík et al. 2019)

Fig. 1. PCB comparison based on coalition membership.[1,2]

[1]All variables range between 0 (strong pro-coal position) and 1 (strong anti-coal position). For details on PCB dimensions, see the *Data and Methods* section and Appendix B.

[2]Multiple comparisons test was used to determine pairwise differences between the three groups for each dimension. The groups marked with a different superscript letter and different color are significantly different at p < 0.05. For more information, see Appendix B.
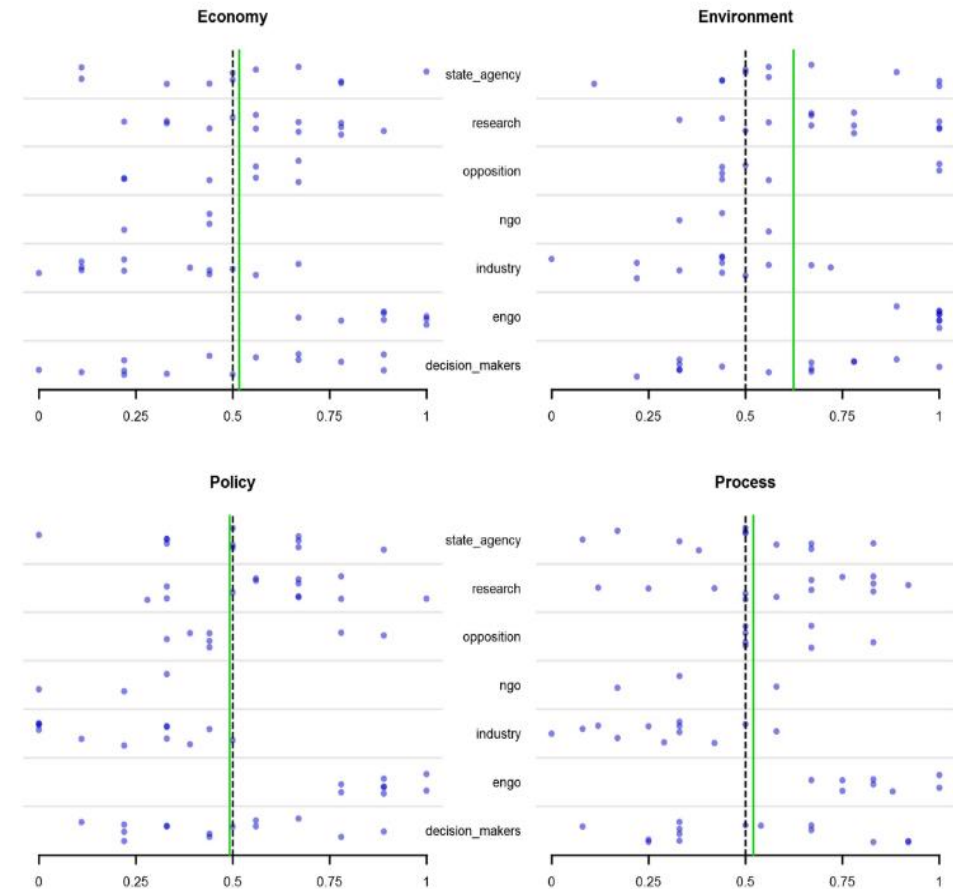
Fig. 2. PCB scores based on actor type.[1,2]

[1]All variables range between 0 (strong pro-coal position) and 1 (strong anti-coal position). For details on PCB dimensions, see the *Data and Methods* section and Appendix B.

[2]The blue dots represent the scores of individual organizations. The dotted line represents a neutral position (0.5); the green line represents the mean value.

Narrative Policy Framework

- Diverse actors and their coalitions use **narratives** to influence policy process (Jones et al. 2014)

- A narrative includes:
    1. Setting: contextual factors (e.g., socioeconomic)
    2. Characters: heroes, villains, victims, and beneficiaries
    3. Plot: situates the characters, e.g., "decline plot"
    4. Moral: a take-home lessons containing the solution to the policy problem

→ Specific **narrative strategies** aim at particular audience(s) to facilitate or constrain **policy change**

NPF: Nuclear energy debate in India

- Two coalitions with competing narratives (Gupta et al. 2014)

Table 5.2 Strategies used by the pro-nuclear and anti-nuclear coalitions

Strategy	Winning Coalition (Pro-Nuclear Coalition) [N = 12]	Losing Coalition (Anti-Nuclear Coalition) [N = 43]
Identification of Winners	33% [n = 4]	47% [n = 20]
Identification of Losers	0% [n = 12]	91% [n = 39]
Distribution of Benefits	100% (Diffused) [n = 4]	100% (Concentrated) [n = 20]
Distribution of Costs	—	100% (Diffused) [n = 39]
Use of Symbols	50% [n = 6]	81% [n = 35]
Use of Policy Surrogates	42% [n = 6]	84% [n = 36]
Use of Science	67% (100% Certainty) [n = 8]	91% (100% Disputing) [n = 40]

Source: Public consumption documents produced by the pro-nuclear and anti-nuclear coalitions in the JNPP subsystem.

→ The pro-nuclear coalition succeeded in establishing a "winning tale" emphasizing diffusion of benefits and scientific certainty

A network perspective on policy process

Policy process as a network

- **Policy process** can be captured **as a network:**

1. of **diverse**, both state and non-state, **actors** who are

2. centered around a **specific issue** and who interact at

3. the **subsystem level** and

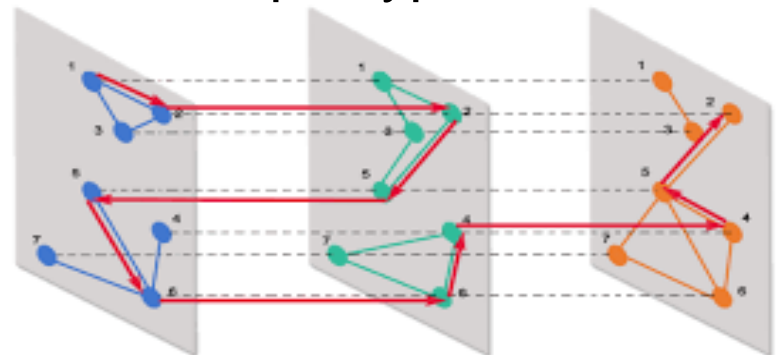4. within **geographically** and **juridically** defined boundaries

Policy process as a network

- **Policy process** can be captured **as a network:**

1. of **diverse**, both state and non-state, **actors** who are
   → companies, NGOs, social movements, interest groups, academia, etc.

2. centered around a **specific issue** and who interact at
   → taxation, healthcare, migration, energy, security, etc.

3. the **subsystem level** and
   → a subset of political system: government, parliament, courts, advisory bodies, etc.

4. within **geographically** and **juridically** defined boundaries
   → typically, state boundaries and exclusive national competence
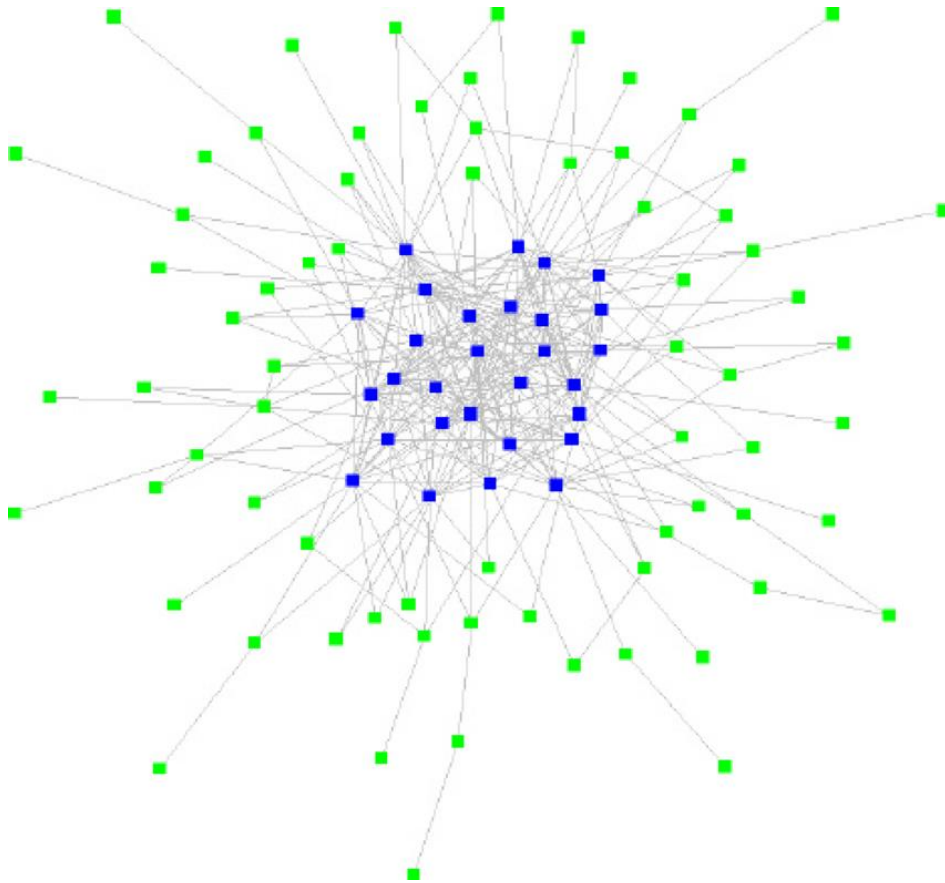
Policy process as a network

- The **characteristics** of the actors (typically organizations) and their interactions can be defined by:

1. **Nodal** (individual) **attributes:** organization type, budget, policy preferences, etc.

1. **Ties:** cooperation, exchange of resources, information flows, membership in umbrella organizations, etc.

- In practice, actors are embedded within multiple types of relationships (**multiplexity**)
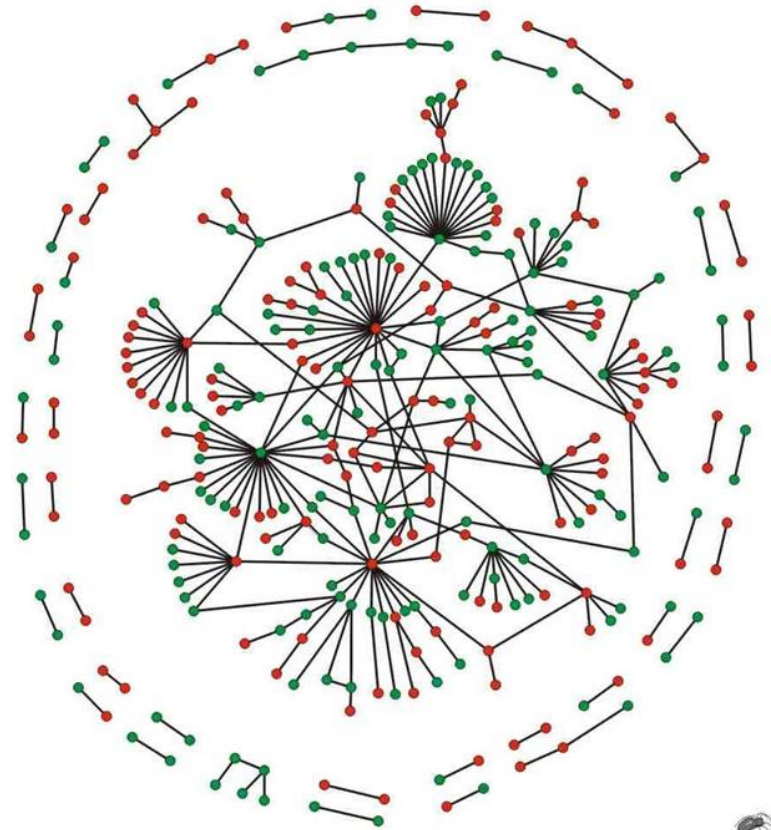

De Domenico et al. 2014

Policy process as a network

- The current governance systems are **complex** and often **non-hierarchical**

- **Structure matters:** different forms of organization (poly-centric vs. core-periphery) might influence policy outcomes

- Importantly, policy processes are **different for different policy issues** (e.g., taxation vs. climate change)

- **Government** is **not the only player** in the game → we need to take into account more actors

Policy process as a network

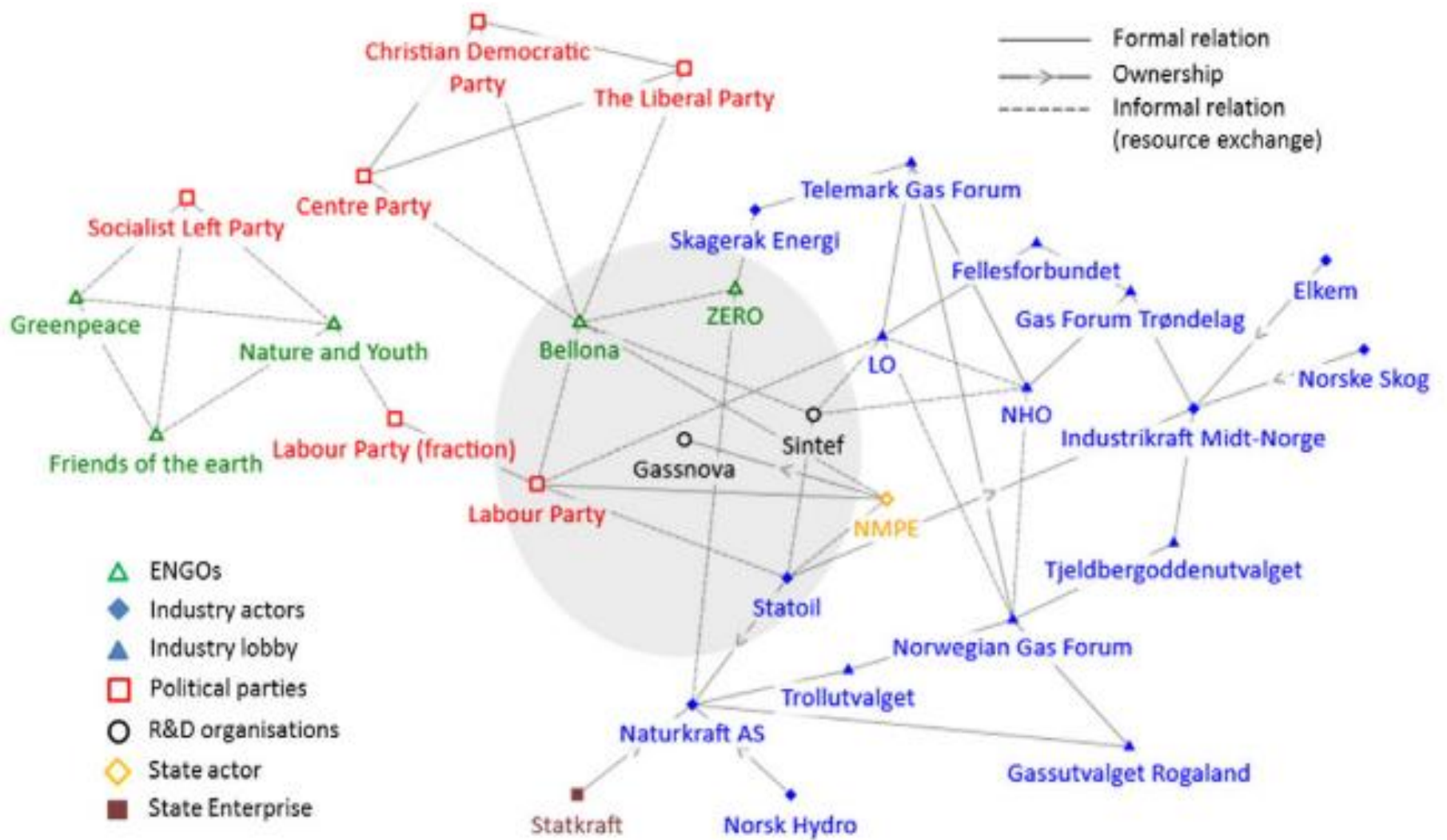Crebs and Holley 2004

Maslov and Sneppen 2002

Fig. 4. Mapping of relations between CCS and natural gas proponents and opponents (1998–2004). Shaded area indicates CCS network.

Normann 2017

Influence in climate policy networks

- Wagner et al. 2021. [Network ties, institutional roles and advocacy tactics: Exploring explanations for perceptions of influence in climate change policy networks](). *Social networks*, online first.

- **What drives (perceived) influence in climate policy network?**
→ Influential actors shape policies more than others.

- Hypotheses:
    1. Institutional roles (e.g. decision-making authority)
    2. Network position (e.g. brokers)
    3. Advocacy tactics: insider (lobbying) and outsider (media campaigns) tactics

- Data collected for 6 EU countries: CZ, FIN, GER, IRE, PG, SW

Influence in climate policy networks: results

- **Advocacy tactics:** limited evidence that insider tactics are associated with influence, outsider tactics not weapons of the weak

- **Institutional roles:** gov departments recognized as influential in all 6 countries

- **Network position:** collaboration partners and brokers recognized as influential in all 6 countries

→ Actors ought to reflect on their network position

→ Influence primarily linked with structural factors – institutional roles & network position – **incumbents likely in advantage against the new entrants** → less ambitious climate policies

Conclusions

- **Public polices** are topically bounded sets of governmental (in)actions with societal impacts

- They result from **policy processes** that involve **diverse actors** and their **coalitions**

- Policy actors interact in **complex environments** including institutional and discursive structures as well as more general trends and events

- Policy process **theories** emphasize various dimensions of the policy process → room for theoretical elaboration and integration