

A review of evaluation findings on Dutch policy successes and failures points to the influence of political culture on policy effectiveness.

The Anatomy of Collective Failure in the Netherlands

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After the constitutional state and the welfare state, the failing state now seems to have become one of the central themes in European scientific publications on governmental policies. Here are some characteristic titles: *Why Government Programs Fail* (Larson, 1980), "On the Anatomy of Collective Failure" (Peacock, 1980), "A Theory of Nonmarket Failure" (Wolf, 1979), and "Zur Theorie des Staatsversagens" (Rectenwald, 1980). Titles of relevant Dutch publications — *The Stagnating Welfare State* (van Doorn and Schuyt, 1978) and *The Welfare State: An Administrative Chaos?* (Kooiman, 1980)—are not much more optimistic.

With the notion of a failing state, demand for well-considered evaluation of public policies has been growing. A Dutch state committee for the reorganization of the public service remarked: "Without evaluation afterwards of existing tasks and evaluation beforehand of new tasks, a democratic, balanced, and efficient use of governmental capacities can never be attained. For this reason, the strengthening of the evaluation of effects of policies deserves the highest political and administrative priority" (*Elk kent*, 1980, p. 220).

The notion of government failure and the demand for evaluation of public policies are both stimulated by a widespread conviction that drastic cuts are necessary in public expenditures. Boorsma (1980) speaks of the transition from the welfare state to the austerity state. The government can do new **tasks** only when it stops doing old tasks. This fact strengthens the need for a systematic evaluation of the success and failure of public policies.

However, it would be premature to believe that governmental policies fail generally. The political judgment of conservatives and others that the state is ineffective, inefficient, and rife with needless coercion is as old as the political judgment of progressives and others that the state is an effective, efficient, and indispensable instrument on the way to a better society. Contemporary discussion on the failure of the welfare state can hardly be more than ideological, because empirical scientific knowledge of the success and failure of public policies is still very limited.

The purpose of this chapter is to give an insight into the results of empirical research concerning the success and failure of public policies in the Netherlands. Methods and techniques of this research are not extensively dealt with here in this connection (Hoogerwerf, 1982; Blommestein and others, 1984).

Evaluation of Public Policies in the Netherlands

This section surveys the results of research on the success and failure, sometimes called goal attainment, of public policies in the Netherlands. The explanations for success or failure will be dealt with in another section. The results of the research projects are grouped as far as possible according to the policy sectors that they concern.

Water Quality Policy. In 1980, Dutch surface waters were in many respects much less polluted than they had been in 1969. According to Bressers (1982), the government's goals concerning the purification of sewage appear largely though not completely to have been attained. The goals concerning the sanitation of organic pollution of industrial wastewater have more or less been attained. The pollution of industrial wastewater with heavy metals also decreased considerably between 1975 and 1980. All these forms of goal-attainment can to a large extent be ascribed to pursuit of the water quality policy (Bressers, 1982). This policy is one of the very few successful public policies dealt with here.

Public Employment Policy. In the 1970s, public employment policy was one of the major elements of Dutch labor market policy. It aimed primarily at reducing an intolerably high regional level of unemployment, particularly in the building industry. In order to achieve this objective, the Department of Social Affairs tried to stimulate public investments by subsidizing public works, for example, the building of schools and swimming pools. The effectiveness of the policy seemed to be limited. On the one hand, unemployment in the building industry would have increased substantially if it had not been for public work programs. On the other hand, a large majority of the unemployed benefited little from capital-intensive public works. Furthermore, when public works were carried out, the employment effect was not necessarily one of additional employment. Programs of moderate size were fairly effective, but counterproductive forces reduced the policy effectiveness of large-scale

projects. One of these forces was fiscal substitution: Local governments spent the subsidies from the central government, not their own funds, so the volume of local investments in public works did not increase (Maarse, 1983).

Regional Policy. The goal of regional policy was to abolish inequalities between regions in levels of income and employment. Regional policy was especially directed toward the industrial sector. To date, however, the government has not succeeded in creating large-scale employment in industry. In economically backward areas, employment has dropped even more than it has in other parts of the country. So, the goals of the regional policy were generally not attained (van Laar, 1979; Folmer and Oosterhaven, 1980).

Physical Planning Policy. In a second memorandum on physical planning, the Dutch central government sketched in 1966 a prospective vision of desirable spatial developments through the year 2000. The memorandum was principally concerned with the problem of controlling the urbanization process. The core of the policy was the principle of bundled deconcentration, which was based on grouping future urban developments within city zones. Ten years later, it was evident that the central government had overestimated the possibility of implementing a national policy in a decentralized state. The growth of the suburbs in the west of the country had exceeded the norm of an average growth of the population by 1 percent each year. The central open space between the city zones was strongly affected (Glasbergen and Simonis, 1979; Bierman and others, 1982).

Individual Rent Subsidies. The central government's arrangement concerning individual rent subsidies for tenants of houses was more or less a success. The intended redistribution of financial burdens for tenants was realized, with the lower-income groups especially benefiting from the reduction of the rent quota. As far as redistribution of living accommodations was concerned, that goal, too, was attained. Only about half of the present recipients of rent subsidies would stay at their present addresses if they no longer received rent subsidies. The other half would have to look for cheaper housing (Lucassen and Priemus, 1977).

Distribution of Public Expenditures. Researchers who have compared government goals for distribution of public funds with the reality of that distribution have found that the higher-income brackets received more than they should have, according to the government's goals. In particular, the richest 20 percent of the households received too much from housing subsidies, education subsidies, public transport subsidies, social and cultural subsidies, and health subsidies (van 't Eind and Ruitenbergh, 1983).

Appreciation for Art. One government regulation provided a subsidy to make it possible for private citizens to purchase works of art by living Dutch artists. One of the goals of this measure was to increase appreciation for art in broad strata of society. Ten years after the regulation went into effect, researchers concluded: "Although 12,000 persons a year now buy art with a subsidy from the government, the regulation makes no sense for the social

spreading of art. . . . The regulation favors the most privileged socioeconomic group in the Netherlands" (Welters and Eykman, 1976, pp. 3, 12).

Drunk Driving. In November 1974, a law went into effect to counteract drunk driving by diminishing problems of measuring alcohol level in blood samples and by easing rules of evidence for the police. Drivers who had more than 0.5 of alcohol in their blood were punishable under law. Suspects were obliged to cooperate in the breath test and the blood test. An evaluation of the effect of the law showed that the use of alcohol by all types of motorists had decreased, but changes were only temporary. The general attitude toward mainly passive as far as active publicity was at stake (*Oppenbaarheid tussen*, 1982).

Control of Collective Expenditures. Notwithstanding several cuts in expenditures, the share of public expenditures in the national income continued to grow during the 1970s. In fact, it even accelerated: During the 1970s, the average growth of public expenditures was 1.2 percent a year; in the 1970s, it was 1.8 percent a year; and in the first two years of the 1980s, it was 2.2 percent a year (*Interimrapport*, 1983).

Income Tax Returns. One of the purposes of the Ministry of Finance is, of course, to ensure that taxpayers complete income tax returns correctly. Research in one district made clear that 34 percent of a sample of tax payers had in 1974 completed the tax papers incorrectly; that is, they had understated their income in one or more respects (Drost and others, 1980). According to other data, the goal attainment of the Ministry of Finance is even lower (Bijsterveld, 1980; Grotenhuis, 1980; Kerver and Roemers, 1982).

Reform of University Administration. The law on the reform of university administration of 1970 was one of the first Dutch laws to stipulate that the functioning of the law itself should be evaluated. Nine years after the law went into effect, a committee reached the conclusion that the law had not been implemented completely, especially at the basic level of the universities. The committee identified a number of problems with regard to the four values that lay at the foundation of the law, namely, democratization, efficiency, autonomy, and the quality of education and research (*Gewubd en gewogen*, 1979).

Publicity on Public Administration. The law on the publicity of public administration, which went into effect on May 1, 1980, was evaluated by another committee. After one and a half years, this committee expressed a feeling of disappointment. It reported that citizens were not very active and that public administration reacted mainly defensively. Public administration has been reasonably active as far as passive publicity was concerned, but it was mainly passive as far as active publicity was at stake (*Openbaarheid tussen*, 1981). Grounds for exceptions to the rule of publicity are interpreted freely by governmental agencies. They also use a ground for exception that the lawmakers did not intend, namely political opportunism (*Oppenbaarheid onder druk*, 1982).

Organized Participation and Municipal Democratization. An evaluation of an information campaign concerning a governmental memorandum on organization led to the conclusion that organized participation was, to a large

extent, a means used only by persons who already participated and that it did little to stimulate nonparticipants into participating (*Eerst u*, 1976). Research at the provincial level led to the conclusion that organized participation functioned mainly to mobilize support. Participation did not lead to changes in the points of view of provincial administrators (Korsten and Kropman, 1977).

Rearrangement of Municipalities. The central government of the Netherlands rearranges municipal boundaries and unites small municipalities in order to improve the quality of local government, increase financial possibilities, and promote local democracy. What are the results? According to surveys, the administrative power of the local governments has increased slightly, but the convenience of arrangements has diminished. The new municipalities have more financial possibilities. The budgetary space has increased, but reserves and capital investments are declining. As far as the level of democracy is concerned, about 43 percent of the seats in municipal councils were eliminated, so the number of citizens represented by each council member has increased. Combining municipalities led to a decrease of interest among citizens in local issues (Derksen and others, 1983; Ruiter and Thomassen, 1981).

Relative Successes and Failures

The overall picture that emerges from these results of research on the success and failure of public policies in the Netherlands is mainly negative, perhaps even depressing, but still differentiated. Only in two of the fourteen cases, namely the cases of water quality policy and individual rent subsidies, did the research conclude that the policy goals had been attained. This does not mean, however, that the goals of the policies were not all realized in the other cases. On the contrary, the researchers used such formulations as "smaller than intended," "only a temporary effect," and "it is not known what the situation would have been without the policy." In most cases, it cannot be said to what extent a goal was realized, as the goals were not quantified. But, there had often been a development in the direction of the objective.

The results of the aforementioned research projects on the success and failure of public policies can be relativized in other respects as well. It is quite possible that the degree of goal attainment varies with the policy area addressed and with the problems to which the policy is directed. An analysis of the goal attainment of three Dutch cabinets between 1970 and 1980 with regard to thirty-one goals made clear that the successes of the Dutch welfare state during this period had to do with income distribution and such more or less technical problems as traffic safety and the building of water purification installations. The failures concerned especially economic growth and the reduction of the costs of governmental policies (Hoogerwerf, 1980).

The results of research mentioned earlier fit the same picture. Policies in the areas of water quality and rent subsidies were relatively successful. All the other policies dealt with in the research projects were less successful. It

may be that it is easier for a government to influence technical matters or to move money than it is to change human behavior. However, policies that might at first glance seem to be purely technical, such as water quality policy, influence human behavior in industries and elsewhere by means of economic incentives in the form of effluent charges. A statement like that of Wildavsky (1979, p. 23)—“Policies don’t succeed so much as they are succeeded”—is too general, at least as far as the Netherlands is concerned.

The research results concerning the failure of governmental policies should be differentiated in still another way. In general, it is not well known how much time must pass before one can expect results from a policy. It is quite possible that in some cases the policy bears fruit only in the long run. So, the evaluation research may have been carried out too early. Another possible objection that can be raised against the supposed failure of public policies is that in most evaluation research only one particular policy is evaluated. It is not unthinkable that a particular policy has only limited success, whereas combined with other policies it may lead to structural change. Time series on various social changes since 1900, such as infant mortality, the housing situation, the average income, and participation in higher education, lead to the hypothesis that these changes would not have been realized without the policies of the welfare state (Hoogerwerf, 1977).

Another point that deserves attention is that the failure of public policies is not necessarily accompanied by the success of private policies. To reach a more balanced view, research on the success and failure of governmental policies should be combined with research on the success and failure of private enterprises and nonprofit organizations. Such research is, however, very scarce (Boorsma, 1981; Coumans, 1981; Zuidema, 1982; Knipscheer and Jansen, 1982). Finally, it should be remarked that many tasks would simply not have been accomplished if the government had not done them.

Political Culture and Policy Effectiveness

The search for an explanation of the success and failure of public policies is not new. Machiavelli wrote that half our deeds are controlled by destiny and the other half by ourselves. He also remarked (1940 [1532], p. 204): “It is often seen that of two prudent persons one attains his goal, the other not. Conversely, it is quite possible that two men, of whom one is prudent and the other tempestuous, both succeed. The reason for this should be sought in the nature of time, which is or is not in agreement with the applied means. . . . So I arrive at the conclusion that men, because fortune changes, succeed in their ventures as long as they remain on good terms with her; however, as soon as disharmony comes into being, no venture can succeed.”

Explanation of the success or failure of public policies will here be sought partly in the policies that are implemented and partly in other factors. Moreover, a policy and the underlying policy theory should be harmonized with the situation in the sector of society toward which the policy is directed.

Taking the political culture into consideration, it is possible to generate several hypotheses (Hoogerwerf, 1982; Hood, 1976; Glasbergen and Simonis, 1979; Bressers, 1982; Maarse, 1983). First, the attainment of a goal of a public policy will vary positively with the purposiveness of the policy maker and other supporters of the policy; it will vary negatively with the purposiveness of the opponents of the policy. Second, the attainment of a goal of a public policy will vary positively with the relevant information of the policy maker and other supporters of the policy; it will vary negatively with the relevant information of the opponents of the policy. Third, the attainment of a goal of a public policy will vary positively with the power of the policy maker and other supporters of the policy; it will vary negatively with the power of the opponents of the policy. Fourth, the attainment of a goal of a public policy will vary positively with the internal and external integration of the policy maker and other supporters of the policy; it will vary negatively with the internal and external integration of the opponents of the policy.

These factors will now be examined in relation to research in the Netherlands concerning the success and failure of public policies. For the sake of brevity, the analysis will be concentrated on the policy makers and their supporters. In effect, this analysis involves the use of political culture variables to explain and evaluate the effects of major policies.

Purposiveness. A policy can be considered purposive insofar as its goals receive high priority; insofar as the goals are formulated explicitly, specifically, and systematically; and insofar as the means are attuned to the goals. The purposiveness factor has received little attention in Dutch research concerning the success and failure of public policies. Bressers (1982) used this variable in his research concerning the effectiveness of water quality policy. He found no support for the hypothesis that the success of efforts directed at sanitation of organic pollution of industrial wastewater varied positively with the priority placed on the goal of sanitation. The relation between the indicators for the priority of this goal and the relative success appeared to be spurious.

Other researchers consider adequate plans to be one of the conditions needed for an effective policy. Without such plans, a policy will consist of uncoordinated, ad hoc, and short-run actions. Adequate provincial policy memoranda and regional plans for physical planning were a necessary condition for efforts by the physical planning policy of the central government to steer local authorities. As long as the provinces had no memoranda and plans containing adequate criteria, they could control local physical planning only marginally. Therefore, the provinces were unable to slow the growth of suburbs around the big cities (Glasbergen and Simonis, 1979).

There is also the important question of how one means is more effective than another in attaining a given goal. For instance, it is possible that the use of law to combat drunk driving is much less effective than education, because alcohol is integrated into the whole pattern of life in the Netherlands.

Information. The information that influences the attainment of goals of public policies consists in the first place of the information that is relevant for

policy making. Information is, among other things, important for the policy theory, that is, the whole set of suppositions that underlie the policy. These suppositions concern not only the empirical relations between the application of the policy instruments and the goal to be attained but also the empirical relations between variables in the policy field (that is, in the sector of society toward which the policy is directed) and the goal attainment.

The policy theory leads to the choice of particular means for particular purposes. The failure of many public policies may be due at least in part to erroneous policy theory, although an accurate policy theory is not a sufficient condition for an effective policy. The Dutch government's physical planning policy aimed at slowing the growth of suburbs in the west of the country was based on an adequate policy theory. That the goals were not attained was due to inadequate means (Glasbergen and Simonis, 1979).

For an example of erroneous policy theory, consider subsidies for the purchase of works of art. The policy was based on the supposition of price elasticity, which held that reducing prices by means of subsidies would cause more persons from all strata of society to purchase works of art. In practice, this policy worked only with higher-income people who were already interested in purchasing works of art. The theory of price elasticity for works of art did not hold for lower-income groups and for those with little or no interest in art (Welters and Eykman, 1976).

When studying the success and failure of public policies in the context of political culture, it is also appropriate to question the extent to which the policy was based on a well-articulated policy theory. In many cases, policy memoranda spell out the relationships between means and ends and by implication the underlying causal suppositions incompletely or incoherently. There are goals for which no means are mentioned, and there are means that have no explicit goal. It is therefore not easy to discover the suppositions of policy makers concerning the causal connections between the application of policy means and the attainment of policy goals. The same can be said about the assumptions of policy makers regarding policy processes in targeting actions. In many cases, the policy memorandum contains only scattered remarks about causality in the policy field and certainly no empirically based and coherent causal model. Thus, in evaluating the policy aimed at redivision of Dutch municipalities, Derksen (1983) concluded that there was a gap between the analysis of the situation and the arguments for redivision. A reasonable justification for the policy expectation that a municipality should have at least 10,000 inhabitants was lacking.

In some cases, one can also question whether an adequate policy theory and an effective public policy are even possible. A study of public policies concerning drug problems concluded that the government could exert very little influence on such problems. The Council for Welfare Policy (1981) asked whether drug abuse prevention policy could ever be effective. According to the Council, the drug abuse prevention policies of the Dutch government were not

based on adequate theories. The Council's theory was that hard drug addiction could be reduced only when government welfare workers and other "coactors" stopped their actions, thereby making the main actor, the user, solely responsible for his or her enslavement. According to the Council, the government was in no position to play a therapeutic role in regard to individuals.

Information is important not only for the making of public policies but also for their implementation. For example, higher-income groups receive more from public expenditures than they should, according to norms derived from the goals of relevant public policies. The reason is that persons with higher incomes know how to take advantage of public provisions better than persons with lower incomes do. A high income correlates with a high level of education, and persons with a high level of education are more able than others to know the market of welfare goods. A comparable conclusion may be drawn with regard to notifications for income tax. Higher-income tax evaders are less likely to be caught and fined than lower-income people are.

The implementation of public policies and consequently the attainment of their goals depend on the information that policy makers have on the situation in the policy field and the policy process, especially when the policy concerns a situation that differs from place to place. Derksen (1983) demonstrated that the knowledge of local situations at the central government level in the Netherlands was too limited to develop an effective central policy concerning the protection of town views.

Power. Political culture includes the distribution of power. Attainment of a public policy goal will vary positively with the power of the policy maker and other supporters of the policy. How far the power of government can be limited in a democratic country—for instance, by the power of employers, organizations, and trade unions—is illustrated by the words of the former president of the central bank in the Netherlands about the fight against inflation: "The essence of the problem is that the power of particular groups that inflate prices and wages has become greater than the power of the government and the central banks to stop these groups" (Zijlstra, 1973, p. 10).

Not only interest groups but also individual citizens can restrict the power of government agencies. The success of water quality authorities in obtaining building locations and permits for purification plants has been limited by serious delays caused by appeals in the procedures concerned. The person who brings the appeal has a formidable basis of power against water authorities, who want to start building the planned new purification plants as soon as possible (Bressers, 1982).

The power of the central government is also restricted by the power of provincial and local governments. Such restriction can be illustrated by the policy of the central government of the Netherlands directed against the fast growth of suburbs in the western part of the country. The norm of the central government was that the number of inhabitants of a suburb should increase by no more than 1 percent a year. That norm was exceeded, because the suburbs

wanted to grow faster and because they had the power to do so (Glasbergen and Simonis, 1979).

It has been noted that the effectiveness of central policies varies directly with the willingness of local governments to cooperate in their implementation. In this connection, the paradox of centralization has been formulated as follows: Dissatisfied with the failure of local governments to cooperate in the implementation of central policies, the central government shows a tendency to increase centralization; this, however, further decreases the effectiveness of central policies (Derksen, 1983).

Integration. Attainment of a public policy goal will vary positively with the internal and external integration of the policy maker and other supporters of the policy. In this connection, a distinction should be made between structural and cultural integration and between horizontal and vertical integration.

The structural fragmentation of the governmental apparatus impairs the effectiveness of public policies. The fragmentation is fertile soil for endless discussions, consultations, bureaucracy, conflicts, and stagnation around policies. Insufficient horizontal coordination — for example, between departments — has consequences for the vertical coordination between departments and local authorities. When strict agreements between departments are lacking, departments can promise nothing to local governments, so the policy cannot be implemented, and it cannot be successful.

The success of a public policy depends also on cultural integration. Such integration is weak when different government agencies have contradictory goals. A striking example of this phenomenon can be found in a study on public employment policy (Maarse, 1983). The ultimate goal of this central government policy was to reduce intolerably high regional unemployment, particularly in the building industry. In order to achieve this objective, the Department of Social Affairs tried to stimulate public investments by subsidizing public works, such as the building of schools or swimming pools. The subsidy instrument was used to encourage local governments and central government departments to make additional investments in public works. These investments were to reduce unemployment. What happened, however, was that local governments and central government agencies used the subsidies partly for other purposes. For example, they used the funds to reduce their own expenditures. The result was that investments in public works increased less than the Department of Social Affairs had intended. The goal of reducing unemployment was only partly realized, because the goals of government agencies at the central and local levels were not integrated (Maarse, 1983).

How the goals of public policies can be thwarted by organizations other than government agencies is illustrated by efforts to control health care costs. The central government has taken several measures to limit the rise of costs in general hospitals. However, the medical staff and the managers of hospitals have their own goals, particularly with regard to the quality of medical care,

personnel, and size of the medical establishment. These goals stimulate an increase in the volume and costs of medical care in hospitals (Honigh, 1983).

The success of public policies also depends on cultural integration between authorities and individual citizens. When citizens have about the same goals as the government, they will be more inclined to cooperate in the implementation of public policies. One indication of the growing distance between government and citizens in the Netherlands is the increasing incidence of tax fraud.

Structural or cultural cleavages between government agencies or between public organizations and citizens can to a certain extent be bridged by consultation and other forms of communication. So, the success of public policies can be furthered by efforts to improve communication. Some empirical evidence for this position was found in Bressers's (1982) research on water quality policy.

Conclusion

This survey of attempts in the Netherlands to explain the success and failure of public policies has focused on four kinds of factors: purposiveness, information, power, and integration. There is a growing consensus among researchers on the importance of these explanatory factors. The results of research are far from definitive. However, there is already some support for the position that a public policy is more able to attain its goal when the government acts purposively, on the basis of relevant information, with power, and with integration. This position makes policy formulation and implementation depend directly on an understanding of political culture.

Those who think that public policies should be more successful should note that not all explanatory factors can be manipulated in the same way. In a highly differentiated, pluralistic society and a democratic political system, the purposiveness of public policy will in many cases be limited, because opinion is very diverse, and compromises are necessary. For the same reasons, not only the purposiveness but also the integration and the power of the government have to be limited. One factor that is probably more susceptible to improvement is information, especially in pluralistic societies and democratic political systems, which are more open to information than dictatorial and totalitarian systems are.

How can information further the success of policies? For a public policy to be successful, it should be based on an adequate policy design. An adequate policy design should be based on an adequate policy theory. An adequate policy theory should be based on adequate empirical research concerning the policy field and policy processes. The public policies of the welfare state fail in many respects. Perhaps the greatest failure of the welfare state is in not mobilizing scientific knowledge, particularly the knowledge produced by the social sciences, for the solution of social problems.

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