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A Discursive Institutional Perspective on Change within the Common Agricultural Policy

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# The institutional construction of a policy field: a discursive institutional perspective on change within the common agricultural policy

Kennet Lynggaard

**ABSTRACT** This paper explores the dynamics giving momentum to the institutional construction of a policy field. This objective is pursued through the study of a case: the articulation and institutionalization of a policy field concerned with organic farming within the auspices of the common agricultural policy (CAP) of the European Union (EU) from 1980 to 2003. Applying a discursive institutional analytical framework focusing on the dynamics of institutional change it is concluded that – when it comes to the study of ideas – perhaps: (1) the CAP is not *as* sectorized a policy field as it is commonly considered to be, and (2) the European Parliament also has a role to play as an agent of change within the CAP.

**KEY WORDS** Common agricultural policy; discourse; idea; institution; organic farming; policy field.

## INTRODUCTION

The common agricultural policy (CAP) of the European Union (EU) is commonly considered highly resistant to change (Coleman and Tangermann 1999; Daugbjerg 1999; Lenschow and Zito 1998; Skogstad 1998). The gist of the matter is that the CAP is considered very much set as to the types of agents participating in the formulation of the policy, the political processes guiding the field, and clear boundaries on which issues are included and excluded from consideration seem to exist. At the same time, a policy field concerned with organic farming had attained at least some degree of institutionalization within the CAP by 2003. A policy field can be said to exist in so far as it is possible to identify: (1) a system within which disputes evolve around something of common concern (2) among a set of agents, which (3) operate according to commonly recognized processes and (4) in so far as it is possible to distinguish this field from other fields of concerns, agents and processes (Andersen 1995). In keeping with this definition, this paper wishes to explore the institutional construction of a policy field, and the dynamics giving momentum to such a field, by example of the articulation and institutionalization of a policy field

concerned with organic farming within the auspices of the CAP from 1980 to 2003. It is proposed that the articulation and institutionalization of a policy field concerned with organic farming within the CAP was given momentum by processes of translation, a series of conflicts over meaning, and the exercise of policy entrepreneurship. It is argued further that the existence of two alternative discourses is a necessary condition for processes of institutionalization and, thus, institutional change, and ideational crisis is conducive to institutional change.

The paper is organized as follows: The first section contains an outline of the discursive institutional approach to the study of institutional change including considerations on the conditions for, and dynamics of, institutional change. The second section contains an empirical analysis of the institutional construction of a policy field concerned with organic farming within the auspices of the CAP. Concluding remarks are made in the third and final section.

## **I. THE DYNAMICS OF INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE: A DISCURSIVE INSTITUTIONAL APPROACH**

The discursive institutional approach to institutional research argued here takes its point of departure in a logical sequence which binds together the concepts of idea, discourse, and institution (Andersen 1995; Andersen and Kjær 1996; Kjær and Pedersen 2001). Ideas are thought of as the final point of reference in which discourses are anchored in the sense that ideas enable the production of discourse and, for instance, enable the articulation of problems and solutions, while also act to delimit other problems and solutions from being identified in a particular context (Andersen 1995). This does not mean that there exists a complete consensus on the articulation of ideas embedded in a given discourse but, rather, that agents need to express themselves for, against and through a set of ideas in order to produce relevant and meaningful statements.

Discourses unfold as ideas are articulated and, over time, are turned into rules-based systems of concepts and conceptions. A discourse may thus be defined as 'a system of meaning that orders the production of conceptions and interpretations of the social world in a particular context' (Kjær and Pedersen 2001: 220). To be able to talk about the existence of a discourse, a system or common set of rules for a collection of concepts and conceptions must be identifiable. Institutions, in turn, are authorized and sanctioned discourse. The set of rules governing a discourse are referred to as institutions when these rules, through processes of institutionalization, have attained some degree of authority and been linked to sanctions (Andersen 1995). Together, the institutions identified through a discursive institutional optic are those creating expectations about viable political activity in a particular context by constituting a set of authorized and sanctioned rules on, for instance, acceptable and valid statements, and the formulation of relevant problems, their sources and their solutions (Kjær and Pedersen 2001).

The logical sequence between ideas, discourse, and institutions also gives rise to two distinct understandings of change. Accordingly, change appears (1) as

ideas are turned into discourse and (2) as discourse is turned into institutions. The process of ideas being turned into discourse is one of articulation, and the process of discourse being turned into institutions is one of institutionalization. Since discourses are rules-based systems of concepts and conceptions, processes of articulation progress through the establishment of some sort of discursive rules and, since institutions are authorized and sanctioned discourse, processes of institutionalization progress through authorizations and the establishment of some sort of sanctions.

### **Conditions for institutional change: alternative discourse and ideational crisis**

The discursive institutional approach holds that the existence of at least *alternative discourses* is a necessary condition for institutional change. The reason for this is that it is only in such a situation that a particular institutional context may be contested through disputes over the articulation of the ideas embedded in this context (Campbell and Pedersen 2001). Moreover, *ideational crisis* is conducive to institutional change in the sense that it may create a space of possibility for alternative ideas to be adopted in a particular discursive and institutional context or policy field, which is the focus of current study (Campbell and Pedersen 2001; Hay 2001). An ideational crisis may be said to exist when conceptions of crisis are widely expressed across a policy field. For instance, whereas non-uniform articulations of problematic issues may easily be identified within a given policy field, an ideational crisis is more extensive in the sense that it involves – if not unanimous agreement – a high degree of concord of its existence among the involved agents.

### **The dynamics of institutional change: conflicts over meaning, translation and policy entrepreneurship**

The conceptualization of *conflicts over meaning* implies, on the one hand, that the 'fit' between ideas is related to the nature of the rules or institutions governing alternative articulations of ideas. To the extent that, for instance, an idea finds several non-uniform expressions, yet its articulations are still governed by a set of rules that have similarities, the way should be paved for such articulations to mutate and possibly for discursive and institutional change. For instance, dissimilar problems may notwithstanding be formulated as having similar causes that, in turn, may pave the way for the transfer of solutions. On the other hand, rather than emphasizing ideational 'fit' or 'persuasiveness' (Hajer 1995; Hall 1993; Kingdon 1995),<sup>1</sup> the conceptualization of conflicts over meaning wishes to uphold that disputes over the articulation of ideas contain an important dynamic of institutional change and, as above, such conflicts appear around the rules governing discourses. For instance, even if a particular solution may have obtained an institutionalized position in a particular context, conflicts may still evolve around the nature of the problem that the

solution may resolve. The conflicts, through which a problem is refined, may in turn lead to readjustments in the solutions conceived of as legitimate and, hence, the way is paved for institutional change.

Conflicts over meaning may leave the institutional context unchanged to the extent that the already institutionalized discourse remains intact and its alternatives are rejected. This outcome is referred to as a strategic choice and is the most common outcome since institutionalized discourse, by definition, has the upper hand by already being authorized and linked to sanctions. However, the outcome of conflicts over meaning may bring about institutional change to the extent that the alternative discourse is institutionalized alongside already institutionalized concerns. When conflict over meaning gives momentum to the institutionalization of alternative discourse alongside already institutionalized concerns, future conflicts over meaning must be expected to appear since conflicts are, in this situation, essentially institutionalized. Finally, the outcome of conflicts over meaning may give momentum to institutional change to the extent that a mutation appears out of the meeting of alternative articulations of ideas. A mutation is thus the term used to describe the outcome of an interaction between alternative articulations of ideas that, for instance, have produced a combination of problems, their sources and solutions, which differ from how they appeared prior to the interaction and which through a process of institutionalization come to constitute institutional change. Opposed to the institutionalization of alternative discourse alongside already institutionalized concerns, when the outcome of conflict over meaning is a mutation, the level of conflict must be expected – at least provisionally – to decrease. While the concept of conflict over meaning has similarities with the advocacy coalition line of thinking (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993), it also differs from it in the sense that: rather than putting emphasis on the degree of coherence within belief systems and among groups of agents, the concept of conflict over meaning gives more emphasis to incoherence and inconsistencies within discourses and among the agents referring to such, and thus, it is argued here, emphasis is given to a significant endogenous dynamic of institutional change.

The second concept proposed to capture a dynamic of institutional change is that of *translation*. Translation may be described as the ‘process whereby concepts and conceptions from different social contexts come into contact with each other and trigger a shift in the existing order of interpretation and action in a particular context’ (Kjær and Pedersen 2001: 219). The concept of translation proposes that agents operating in one social context or – as it is used by current study – in a particular policy field may select from concepts and conceptions made available to them through contacts with other policy fields. The concepts and conceptions selected by agents involved in a particular policy field may in turn be connected to concepts and conceptions already embedded in this field and, essentially, trigger displacements or mutations in the existing discursive and institutional order (Kjær and Pedersen 2001). That is, translation is somehow a more complex process than those of, for instance,

diffusion and isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Strang and Meyer 1994). Translation then has to do with the spread of ideas, yet the discursive institutionalism argues that ideas may be, and perhaps often are, translated in a selective way and may displace or mutate with already existing articulations of ideas in a given discursive and institutional context. Essentially, in the extent to which such displaced or mutated articulations of ideas are institutionalized, institutional change may be said to have taken place. Whereas any process of translation acts as an illustration of a policy field being less than wholly sectorized and showing some degree of openness for new ideas, processes of translation which give rise to a displacement of ideas may demonstrate a higher degree of openness than processes of translation which give rise to a mutation of ideas.

The final conceptualization of a dynamic of institutional change proposed is that of *policy entrepreneurship*. Policy entrepreneurship may be defined as a political role upheld by individuals or collective agents and from where momentum is given to processes of articulation that may give rise to discursive change, which in turn, through a process of institutionalization, may bring about institutional change. A typology of policy entrepreneurship may be established which distinguishes between translators, creators of forums for communication and carriers.<sup>2</sup> First, the concept of policy entrepreneurship prepares the field for the study of the agency, which contributes to processes of translation. This is considered the more vigorous type of policy entrepreneurship since it is exercised through the linking of concepts and conceptions in one policy field to concepts and conceptions in another field. Second, policy entrepreneurship may also be exercised in relation to the establishment of a 'meeting place' or forum for communication. This type of policy entrepreneurship prepares the field for the study of the agency, which contributes to the establishment of a meeting place that brings together agents and enables the production of meaning. Third, the concept of policy entrepreneurship prepares the field for the identification of those individuals or collective agents that contribute to the carrying of those concepts and conceptions institutionalized over time which, in turn, come to constitute an institutional change in a given policy field. The latter is considered the less vigorous type of policy entrepreneurship. All together, this dynamic of institutional change draws inspiration from the concept of policy entrepreneurs, suggesting that the performance of certain key agents may be enhanced by the institutional environment in which they operate (Kingdon 1995). However, rather than attributing policy entrepreneurs with extraordinary resources and skills including psychological predispositions, which are not easily investigated empirically, a move is suggested towards the study of policy entrepreneurship as a position enabled by the rules governing a particular discourse. It is thus important to note that policy entrepreneurship is a position which different individual or collective agents may take up at different points in time and they may exercise policy entrepreneurship individually, yet most likely different agents will exercise policy entrepreneurship simultaneously or successively due to the basic collective nature of ideational change.

### Analytical strategy: empirical measurements and material

The articulation of problems (including their sources and solutions) may be seen as particularly illustrative of ideas embedded in a discourse or meaning system (Pedersen 1995; Kjær and Pedersen 2001; Hajer 1995). In order to come up with approximations of institutional change, measurements are thus needed for when a problem – as an ideational symptom – has been turned into rule-based discourse and for when a problem has been institutionalized. Accordingly, a problem may be seen as having been turned into rule-based discourse within the CAP to the extent that it is possible to identify a set of common discursive rules for the articulation of this problem among concerned agents within the European Parliament (EP), the Commission of the European Communities (CEC or Commission) or the Commission services, and the Council of Ministers (Council). A problem, in turn, has been institutionalized within the CAP when the discursive rules governing the articulation of the problem on hand have been authorized and tied to sanctions.

The research technique used by current study is document analysis, and by introducing a 'hierarchy' of documents representing different degrees and scope of institutionalization within the CAP, it is possible to identify how certain articulations of ideas may be elevated from less to more authoritative texts and, thus, identify institutional change. Along these lines, problems as articulated in *legal texts*, such as directives and regulations adopted by the Council, may be seen to represent the highest degree of institutionalization. The reason for this is that such texts have usually gone through protracted formal and informal processes of selection and authorization among a wide range of agents and are – if infringed – often linked to various kinds of formal as well as informal sanctions. Problems as articulated in *Commission Green/White Papers and other Commission communications* are considered to represent a certain degree of institutionalization since the elaboration of such documents involves a wide range of agents, which refer to these documents as authoritative even if infringements are dealt with by more informal sanctions. That is, agents that do not express themselves for, against, or through the problematic issues raised by these documents may not be taken seriously in the debate.

Problems as articulated in *EP resolutions, reports, debates and questions to the Commission* may not necessarily represent a high degree of institutionalization within the CAP. Rather, if nothing else is known, problems as articulated in such documents are taken to represent a degree of institutionalization within the EP depending on the extent to which the various texts are endorsed by the members of the EP (MEPs). Likewise, problems as articulated in *policy papers, conference speeches, member state reports and parliamentary debates* are, if nothing else is known, taken to represent a degree of institutionalization within the organization, administrative unit, member state or party, which has published the document in question. Articles from *Agra Europe*<sup>3</sup> (and a few other newspaper articles) have also been consulted. *Agra Europe* is to

some extent used as a 'seismograph' of ideas articulated and institutionalized particularly – but not exclusively – among EU member states. This is done since information about member states' contributions to the production of discourse within the Council is otherwise difficult to obtain. Moreover, by consulting texts such as speeches by Commissioners and Commission bureaucrats, speeches by Agricultural and Environmental Ministers, policy papers and *Agra Europe* articles about links between the CAP and organic farming, it is possible to identify alternative and conflicting ideas articulated among the involved agents. Table 1 is an overview of the number of documents consulted per source and type of documents.

## II. THE INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRUCTION OF A POLICY FIELD WITHIN THE CAP

The articulation and institutionalization of a policy field concerned with organic farming within the CAP can be seen as being enabled by a number of discursive and institutional changes within the CAP from 1980 to 2003. Three periods may be identified and characterized in terms of distinct discursive and institutional developments linking organic farming and the CAP: the first period runs from 1980 to 1985, the second from 1986 to 1992, and the third from 1993 to 2003. The analysis of the period from 1980 to 1985 is based on

*Table 1* Overview of the empirical material

<i>Sources</i>	<i>Total no. of documents per source</i>	<i>No. of documents per type of document</i>
<i>Agra Europe</i> (and other newspaper articles)	N = 82	<i>Agra Europe</i> n = 75; others n = 7
Commission and Commission service	N = 32	Communications n = 15; speeches n = 9; answers to EP questions and press releases n = 8
European Parliament	N = 48	Reports and resolutions n = 6; speeches n = 35; questions n = 7
Council	N = 15	Legislation and declarations n = 9; press releases n = 6
Member state <sup>4</sup> reports and speeches	N = 20	DK n = 5; NL n = 2; AT n = 2; DE n = 3; EL n = 1; SE n = 2; UK n = 5
Organized interests	N = 11	COPA <sup>5</sup> n = 2; organized organic farming interests n = 7; EEB <sup>6</sup> n = 2
Total	N = 208	



consultation of a total number of eighteen documents and articles. Ideational developments outside the CAP in the late 1970s/early 1980s are considered as they appear to have been conducive to change within the CAP during the first period identified. The analysis of the period from 1986 to 1992 and the period from 1993 to 2003 is based on consultation of 55 and 135 empirical documents and articles respectively.<sup>7</sup>

### **The translation and institutionalization of environmental ideas (1980–1985)**

The most significant institutional change within the CAP in the period from 1980 to 1985 for the subsequent institutionalization of a policy field concerned with organic farming was related to the translation and institutionalization of environmental concerns among all of the central agents within the CAP. Hence, problems linking intensive agricultural production to the depletions of the environment have been translated and institutionalized within the CAP alongside other already existing concerns such as surplus production and budget pressures by the end of the period. In turn, processes of agricultural modernization and technological progress have been translated and institutionalized as the sources of these problems (Commission 1985). The conception that there is a link between intensive agricultural production and environmental depletion was attached, of course, with varying degrees of legitimacy among various agents. It is thus important to note that while further intensification of agricultural production was endorsed by the Council as a matter of concern in relation to environmentally sensitive areas, a clear-cut causal relationship between intensive agriculture and environmental depletion had still to be articulated within the Council (Council 1985). Specifically in regard to organic farming: by 1985, organic farming had not been authorized and linked to sanctions and, hence, had not at this stage assumed an institutionalized form.

#### *The conditions for, and dynamics of, institutional change (1980–1985)*

In the first half of the 1980s, institutional changes relating to the institutionalization of environmental problems and solutions within the CAP appeared against the background of widespread concerns with the still present energy crisis and economic recession. Such concerns could be found within the Directorate-General (DG) for Agriculture, the Commission, the EP Committee on Regional Policy, the EP at large, the Council, and amongst agents involved in alternative agriculture (Commission 1981, 1983; European Parliament 1981; Soil Association 1979).

The translation and subsequent institutionalization of environmental concerns within the CAP also appeared against the background of the existence of alternative conceptions of agricultural problems and solutions outside the CAP: in part, within the emerging European Community (EC) environmental policy and, in part, among agents involved in alternative agriculture. Claims that

there is a link between the protection of the natural environment and agricultural policies were thus first institutionalized within emerging EC environmental policy during the 1970s (Council 1973, 1977). However, although this conception was translated within the CAP in the first half of the 1980s, the process of translation was selective in the sense that the idea that technological progress supplies solutions – as was held within EC environmental policy – was not adopted within the CAP. Rather, it was commonly upheld that technological progress constituted a central source of problems in agriculture related to surplus production and environmental depletion.

Alternative ideas linking organic farming to the CAP were made available in the late 1970s/early 1980s by agents operating outside the CAP but involved in alternative agriculture both at the EU level and in certain member states. In most Community member states, organic farming was not attracting attention in this particular period, yet in France and towards the end of the period in the Netherlands and the UK, the first sporadic links were established between organic farming and agricultural policy objectives in these countries and occasionally links were formed with the CAP (Agra Europe 8.5.1981; Agra Europe 29.6.1984; House of Commons 1985). At the EU level, agents involved in alternative agriculture envisaged a CAP that encouraged small farm units, less intensive production methods and in this regard organic farming through subsidies. Organic farming was articulated as a potential solution to the rising expenditures of intensive agricultural production on energy use and agri-chemicals. Whereas it was doubtful whether organic farming contained the potential to address problems of agricultural surplus production in Europe, organic farming was conceived as counteracting the adverse environmental effects of intensive agriculture and, essentially, contributing to an 'ecological balance' that is needed for sufficient food supplies in the long term (Agra Europe 19.10.1979; Soil Association 1979). This diagnosis of the central problems of the CAP as well as the potential solutions was echoed at an EEB seminar on the CAP in late 1978. Additionally, it was explicated that the CAP contributed to 'trends towards specialisation, concentration and industrialisation in agriculture' (Soil Association 1979: 17) and, in general, that the CAP ought to support less intensive farming, smaller farms and rural society. Whereas the CAP was identified as the prime source of the current problems of industrialized agriculture, a changed CAP may also address these problems among other ways by supporting organic farming and initiating complementary research. The practice of resolving problems in agriculture through the CAP was not called into question.

To be sure, the exercise of policy entrepreneurship *vis-à-vis* organic farming within the CAP was conditioned by other institutional developments such as, for instance, the institutionalization of the conception that intensive agricultural production has effects on the environment and that the CAP should strive towards counteracting such effects. Against this backdrop, the more vigorous types of entrepreneurship, which contributed to processes of translation and the establishment of forums for communication, were exercised by groupings within the EP, in particular by the EP Committee on Regional Policy.

The EP Committee on Regional Policy exercised policy entrepreneurship by establishing a forum for communication (own initiative report) and, more specifically, by contributing to the articulation of organic farming as a potential solution to problems within the CAP. For instance, in order to counteract 'increasing uniformity in agricultural produce', it was suggested that initiatives should be taken to set up legislation to 'guarantee the origin of "ecologically sound" products' and European quality labels should be introduced in order to identify certain production methods and the geographical origins of particular agricultural products (European Parliament 1981: 6). By the end of the current period, organic farming had been endorsed by the EP at large, the Commission, the DG for Agriculture and the Council as an acceptable and affordable solution to certain consumer demands. Yet further research was needed to establish its potential and organic farming was not at this point conceived of as a readily available solution and institutionalized concern of the CAP.

### **The institutionalization of organic farming as a sector (1986–1992)**

After 1985, the CAP came to evolve not only around issues of, for instance, agricultural surplus production, budget pressure and the distribution of public support among farmers and regions, but also around intensive agriculture and environmental depletion. Towards the end of the period, these essentially institutionalized conflicts over meaning appeared to have given momentum to the institutionalization of a mutation of problems related to environmental depletion and problems related to surplus production. Thus, by 1992, the conception that intensive farming is the source of both problems of agricultural surplus production *and* environmental depletion was institutionalized among all the central agents within the CAP. Moreover, by 1992, organic farming had been institutionalized as an agricultural sector for Community regulation and links had been institutionalized between, on the one hand, organic farming and, on the other hand, problems within the CAP, consumer demands, the fulfilment of CAP objectives related to environmental protection, the maintenance of the countryside and, under this broad umbrella, the conception that organic farming constitutes an employment opportunity in agriculture and potentially profitable niche production for farmers (Council 1991, 1992; Commission 1991).

#### *The conditions for, and dynamics of, institutional change (1986–1992)*

At the beginning of the period, conflicts over meaning are found within the Commission and the Commission Services, between the Commission and the EP as well as within the EP. Conflicts over meaning within the Commission Services and the Commission appear as the articulation of a number of uncertainties about the causes of problems within agriculture in the beginning of the current period (Commission 1987, 1988). It is, however, within the EP that the eventually institutionalized conception holding that intensive agriculture is the source of both problems of surplus production and environmental

depletions is first articulated and, likewise, organic farming is linked to both of these, at this time, most pressing problems within the CAP.

On the one hand, the link between modern agricultural production and adverse environmental effects is questioned by the EP Committee on Agriculture, and further – even if the link could be shown to exist – the scope of environmental problems related to agriculture remains unclear and it is questioned whether the Community has the means to address such problems (European Parliament 1986; Attached Opinion). With these reservations in mind, it is not contested that the extensification of agriculture should be encouraged by the CAP. That is, while it was considered that alternative farming – not specifically organic farming – should be subject to Community regulation due to its contribution to the maintenance of the countryside, it was also held that alternative agricultural production methods were not to receive extraordinary financial support.

On the other hand, the EP Committee on the Environment conceived of agriculture as ‘not the enemy of the environment’ and ‘intensive farming is not the only cause of the deterioration of the rural environment’ (European Parliament 1986: 13). Yet the principles of operation of the CAP – that is, ‘market unity’, ‘Community preference’ and ‘financial solidarity’ – and its instigation of intensive agricultural production are identified as the cause of environmental problems in rural areas (European Parliament 1986: 19). Solutions were considered to be found in a CAP in support of extensive agriculture and it was emphasized that ‘[e]nvironmental issues must be treated as a *key element bound up with the problems of agricultural surpluses* and questions of prices and economic incentives in relation to *types of production and production methods*’ (European Parliament 1986: 21; original emphasis). Along these lines, ‘biological farming’ was articulated as a potential solution to some of the problems of the CAP. This type of production method was considered to: counteract the adverse environmental effect of intensive farming, lessen the use of energy in agriculture, improve the quality of land and food products, constituting an employment opportunity in rural areas and having a positive effect on animal health.

From mid-1988, these conceptions were broadly accepted within the Commission Services and the Commission. The status of organic produce *vis-à-vis* quality food products, which is also a link first articulated within the EP during the previous period, was, however, still unresolved within the Commission and the Commission Services. Organically produced food products were seen, on the one hand, to be linked to food quality concerns primarily by the DG for the Environment (Commission 1988). On the other hand, it was emphasized primarily by the DG for Agriculture (Commission 1989) and the Commissioner for Agriculture that organic food products were not in fact superior to conventionally produced food products. By the end of this period, it was the conception that organic food products were not of superior quality which was institutionalized within the CAP, but the conflicting conceptions reappeared in the subsequent period from 1993 to 2003.

In the early 1990s, the Agriculture Council adopted two Regulations which saw organic farming in the context of a general reorientation of the CAP and together they marked the end of the process of institutionalization of organic farming as a sector for Community regulation within the auspices of the CAP (Council 1991, 1992). All together, certain agents, including the DG for Agriculture and the Commission, changed their conception of the sources of agricultural problems in Europe. By the end of this period, problems relating to surplus production and different problems relating to environmental depletion had mutated in the sense that both types of problems were now being caused by intensive agriculture.

Against this background, a series of agents may be identified as translators, as establishing forums for communication, and as carriers of concepts and conceptions, which were institutionalized during the current period and which link organic farming to the CAP. As carriers, the EP, the EP Committee on Agriculture, the Commission, the DG for Agriculture, the DG for the Environment, the Agriculture Council and a number of member states (UK, DK, ES, NL, DE and FR) have all contributed to the institutionalization of conceptions linking organic farming to the CAP. However, the more vigorous type of entrepreneurship, which contributed to processes of translation and gave momentum to the institutionalization of organic farming within the CAP, was exercised by the EP Committee on Agriculture and, more particularly, by individual MEPs, and the EP Committee on the Environment. Finally, unlike the EP Committee on Agriculture, individual MEPs and the EP Committee on the Environment also gave momentum to processes of institutionalization by contributing to the establishment of forums for communication (questions in the EP and own initiative report).

### **The institutionalization of organic farming as a policy field (1993–2003)**

The period from 1993 to 2003 may be characterized by the articulation and institutionalization of a number of problems related to rural development, food safety and food quality (Commission 2003). Although problems related to food quality and food safety had been voiced within the CAP previously – first and foremost within the EP – it was not until the late 1990s that such problems were elevated to institutionalized concerns of the CAP. It is in this context that the institutionalization of a policy field concerned with organic farming now took place.

#### *The conditions for, and dynamics of, institutional change (1993–2003)*

Particularly illustrative of the institutionalization of a policy field concerned with organic farming within the auspices of the CAP is the articulation and institutionalization of a number of conflicts over the boundaries of organic farming. These conflicts have to do with what distinguishes organic farming from other concerns, what sorts of processes should guide decision-making on matters concerned with organic farming, and which agents should be included

in, and excluded from, a policy field concerned with the regulation of the organic farming sector (see Table 2).

Importantly, it is rarely challenged that such conflicts should be resolved within the 'new' or changed CAP. More specifically, it is considered that the development of organic farming in the EU should be approached through a common European Action Plan addressing the sector as a whole (e.g. Commission 1999; Danish Ministry for Food 2001; Council 2002). To be sure, the point is

*Table 2* Conflicts over policy field boundaries concerned with organic farming (1993–2003)

	<i>Lines of conflict</i>
Conflicts over the boundaries of what distinguishes organic farming from other concerns	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) No biotechnology/biotechnology.</li> <li>(2) Superior food quality/not superior food quality.</li> <li>(3) Health objectives/no health objectives.</li> <li>(4) Organic farming/conventional agriculture increasingly object to strict environmental standards and integrated farming.</li> <li>(5) The potential of organic farming is 10 per cent of the total agricultural sector or more/organic farming remains a niche market.</li> </ol>
Conflicts over boundaries about the sorts of processes that should guide a field concerned with organic farming	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Consultation/co-decision.</li> <li>(2) Increased involvement of organized organic farming interests in decision-making process/unchanged involvement of organized interests, including organized organic farming interests, in the decision-making process.</li> <li>(3) EU-wide regulation/member state and international rules.</li> </ol>
Conflicts over boundaries about which agents should be included in and excluded from a field concerned with organic farming	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Increased inclusion of the EP/ unchanged inclusion of the EP.</li> <li>(2) Increased inclusion of organized organic farming interests/unchanged inclusion of organized organic farming interests.</li> </ol>

*Source:* Lynggaard (2006).

not, for instance, whether the use of biotechnology is included in or excluded from the policy field concerned with organic farming; nor is it whether the EP or organized organic farming interests have become more or less involved in the decision-making process. Rather, the argument is: a policy field concerned with organic farming evolved during the period from 1993 to 2003 in so far as the period is characterized by the articulation and institutionalization of a number of conflicts over which matters should be included and excluded, the role and legitimacy of various agents, and the types of procedures that should guide this field.

Moreover, while most – though not all – of the agents involved are familiar within the CAP, these agents are, on an increasingly regular basis, involved in disputes around an increasing number of issues related to organic farming. Apart from the day-to-day work in the Standing Committee for Organic Farming established in 1991, conflicts over meaning take place in the context of successive conferences – in 1996, 1999 and 2001 (CEPFAR 1996; Commission 1999; Danish Ministry for Food 2001). The successive conferences involve an increasing number of diverse agents, the agents participating are increasingly high-level and increasingly include agents commonly considered to govern the CAP and represent the status quo: member state Ministers (and Vice-Ministers) for Agriculture, the DG for Agriculture and COPA. Importantly, the successive conferences produce increasingly authoritative and sanctioned discourse. For instance, an outcome of both the 1999 and the 2001 conferences is a ‘conference summary statement’ and, in particular, the 2001 conference summary statement is endorsed and authorized by the signing of all central agents involved.

A wide range of agents gave momentum to the formation of a policy field concerned with organic farming within the CAP. As carriers, the EP at large, the EP Committee on Agriculture, the Commission, the Commissioners for the Environment and for Agriculture, the DG for the Environment, the Agriculture Council, a number of member states (AT, DK, EE, FI, DE, EL, IE, LT, SE, UK, NL and FR) and various organized interests (COPA; IFOAM;<sup>8</sup> European Community of Consumer Cooperatives; EEB) have all contributed to the institutionalization of conceptions linking organic farming to the CAP. However, the EP Committee on the Environment, and – much more so – the DG for Agriculture have exercised a more vigorous type of policy entrepreneurship by contributing to the translation of organic farming within the CAP during the period under investigation. For instance, the DG for Agriculture contributed to the translation of the concepts, on the one hand, that agricultural production is the source of problems related to food quality and, on the other hand, that organic farming constitutes a potential solution to such problems. Importantly, the concepts and conceptions translated within the CAP during the current period draw, in the main, on alternative ideas articulated in previous periods – first and foremost within the EP. Additionally, the DG for Agriculture contributed to the establishment of forums for the production of meaning on organic farming including the 1996 conference and a number of reports (e.g. Commission 1994; CEPFAR 1996).

Finally, the BSE crisis was conducive to the formation of a policy field concerned with organic farming within the CAP from 1996 onwards. It has been argued that one of the consequences of the first peak of the BSE crisis was 'an undermining of public confidence in modern systems of farming' (Grant 1997: 129). If by the latter is meant 'modernized and industrialized' agricultural production as opposed to farming methods 'closer to natural processes', the damage done by the BSE crisis to public confidence in modern food production appears to be conducive to the institutionalization of organic farming as a solution to food safety and quality problems from 1996 onwards. Thus, the BSE crisis formed the background to the articulation of organic farming as a solution to food safety and food quality issues within the EP, the EP Committee on Agriculture, the EP Committee on the Environment, and among individual MEPs (e.g. European Parliament 1997a, 1997b, 1999). This was endorsed by the Commission during the second peak of the BSE crisis in late 2000/early 2001 as well as by the Council. It is, however, important to note that the Commission and the Council – opposed to the EP – do not accept a link between organic farming and human health issues. Rather, the Commissioner for Agriculture (Franz Fischler), on the grounds of procedural considerations, states that EU regulation of the organic farming sector 'is primarily concerned with regulating and promoting organic production methods, and thus has no health policy objectives' (Commissioner for Agriculture in European Parliament 1997b).

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In keeping with the definition of a policy field introduced here, this study lends evidence to the fact that organic farming, by 2003, had been established within the CAP as (1) a system of problems and solutions which links organic farming and the CAP, and within this system disputes evolve around the nature of the links between organic farming and the CAP. This system and these disputes evolve (2) amongst a set of agents representing the Commission, the Commission Services, the EP, member states, research organizations and various organized interests. Further, these agents (3) operate according to the consultation procedure, interact at successive conferences, and, importantly, among the agents it is commonly agreed that solutions to existing disputes should be pursued in the context of the CAP.<sup>9</sup> Finally, (4) it is, to some degree, possible to distinguish this policy field from other fields of concerns, agents and processes.

Institutional changes preparing the ground and the eventual institutionalization of a policy field concerned with organic farming within the auspices of the CAP appear to have come about through the translation of ideas which, at first, introduced new conflicts into the CAP, but over time such conflicts over meaning – as additional agents endorsed particular conceptions of, for instance, certain central problems – were resolved and gave rise to, for example, particular regulations of European agriculture. A favourable condition for institutional change



was the existence of an ideational crisis within the CAP. In the first half of the 1980s, the still present energy crisis and economic recession formed the background for the introduction of environmental concerns and, from the mid-1990s, the BSE crises paved the way for the CAP also to have objectives in regard to food safety. In the late 1970s/early 1980s, the existence of alternative ideal conceptions of agricultural problems and solutions within the emerging EC environmental policy and among agents involved in alternative agriculture also constituted a favourable – arguably a necessary – condition for processes of institutionalization within the CAP.

Clearly, throughout the period from 1980 to 2003 a number of agents, at different points in time, exercised policy entrepreneurship regarding the articulation and institutionalization of organic farming. However, groups within the EP appear to have had a pivotal role regarding the translation and articulation of organic farming as a solution to certain problems within the CAP in the early 1980s, and regarding the institutionalization of organic farming as a sector for Community regulation in the second half of the 1980s/early 1990s. Moreover, the EP at large and particularly certain groups within the EP appear to have contributed to the translation of environmental concerns within the CAP in the early 1980s. Even when the DG for Agriculture exercised policy entrepreneurship during the period from 1993 to 2003, the ideas forwarded drew on conceptions already articulated within the EP in previous periods. Finally, the EP also appears to have been pivotal in linking organic farming to the BSE crisis from 1996 onwards. In that sense, this study supports recent research which suggests that the EP at large, individual MEPs and various EP Committees have given momentum to changes within the CAP, even if it is not supported that it is a phenomenon confined to the late 1990s or necessarily explained by the increased legal powers attributed to the EP (Roederer-Rynning 2003; Chatzopoulou 2004).

The CAP is notorious – and no doubt rightly so – for being highly sectorized and evolving in cohesive policy networks. Yet, no policy network is ever completely closed to the outside (Marsh and Rhodes 1992) and, likewise, current study suggests that even a highly sectorized policy field like the CAP is not wholly isolated in terms of the introduction and institutionalization of new ideas. The expression of environmental ideas in the early 1980s, conflicts over meaning within the Commission and the Commission Services in the second half of the 1980s and throughout the period from 1993 to 2003, the role of the EP regarding ideational change and, essentially, the institutional construction of organic farming as a policy field all serve as illustrations of the CAP possibly not being as sectorized as it is commonly considered to be.

As to the case(s) investigated: the institutional construction of organic farming as a policy field clearly has some unusual features in the sense that it is concerned with a farming system rather than particular commodity regimes, which are readily identified within the CAP and have been suggested as being highly resistant to change (Grant 1997). Clearly, the conclusions drawn should be seen in this light: arguably the CAP may be less sectorized and the EP may have

more latitude as an agent of change in areas which have to do with food safety, food quality and environmental issues, rather than in areas which in budgetary terms are considered 'compulsory expenditures' and regarding which the EP has very limited formal powers.

That said, the institutional construction of organic farming as a policy field within the CAP may also be seen as an extreme case (see Flyvbjerg 2001) illustrative of ideational changes within the CAP beyond relevance for the organic farming sector. The ideational changes identified may be seen as involving general conceptual developments related to, for instance, the relation between, on the one hand, agriculture and, on the other hand, the environment, the use of technology, food quality and food safety (see Garzon 2006, who has a broader concern with paradigm change within the CAP, but arrives at conclusions in keeping with the two central points argued in this paper). Finally, overall the CAP may be seen as a policy field 'least likely' to show institutional changes or, in other words, a critical case for the study of ideational change. The CAP thus offers a unique empirical opportunity in the endeavour to refine and develop concepts and methods with the aim of capturing and, ultimately, explaining the type of institutional changes which are ideational in nature.

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## NOTES

- 1 The discursive institutional conceptualizations of the dynamics of ideational and institutional change have similarities with, but also differ from, comparable thoughts found particularly within historical institutionalism (including Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993; Hall 1993) and sociological institutionalism (including DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Strang and Meyer 1994; Kingdon 1995). See Lynggaard (2006) for a more extensive theoretical discussion.
- 2 The first two mentioned types of entrepreneurship of the proposed three-fold typology draw some inspiration from Sverrisson (2000).
- 3 *Agra Europe* is an independent publication, which has followed CAP developments in detail since 1963, and is distributed weekly among farmers' organizations, agricultural ministries and other policy-makers close to the CAP.
- 4 Member state abbreviations used are: Austria (AT); Germany (DE); Denmark (DK); Estonia (EE); Greece (EL); Spain (ES); Finland (FI); France (FR); Ireland (IE); Lithuania (LT); The Netherlands (NL); Sweden (SE); United Kingdom (UK).
- 5 Confederation of Professional Agricultural Organizations.
- 6 European Environmental Bureau.

- 7 The quantity of documents issued concerning organic farming and the CAP has increased since 1980, particularly since 1993. The number of documents consulted in each period under investigation thus reflects this development.
- 8 International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements.
- 9 To this list could be added the 'day-to-day' work taking place in the Standing Committee on Organic Farming, which was established in mid-1991.

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