

CHAPTER EIGHT: Conclusions

8.1 Recapitulating: From puzzle to approach

This concluding chapter, first, readdresses the study's central puzzle and the approach it inspired. In section 8.2, I return to the central findings of this thesis in order to highlight the two-fold focus developed here: a comparative analysis of food (safety) policy discourse and an analysis of Europeanized food (safety) policy. I conclude by pointing to the main contributions as well as limitations of this study and by indicating further avenues for research in section 8.3.

The present research project was inspired by the observation that the food scares of the past decade were interpreted in divergent ways across the studied contexts (England, Germany, and the Netherlands), while at the same time a transnational approach was mobilized that seems to transcend those divergences. I find that 'food safety' took on different meanings across contexts and over time, while relative stability regarding the discursive foundations is observable at the same time. Beyond this finding, I conclude that the process of Europeanization relies on the development and the enactment of shared understandings - captured here as integrative 'nodal points' - that are flexible, elastic, and malleable enough to transcend contextual divergence with respect to meanings of food (safety). These nodal points, and the broader integrative notions they produce, make EU policy discourse seem coherent and 'natural'.

The apparent paradox between divergence on the national level and convergence at the level of the European Union (EU) is then not a paradox; instead, it is a product of discursive (re)negotiation. This (re)negotiation was made possible by a series of moments over the past decade that functioned to disconnect the concept of 'food safety' from its previous meanings, along with the roles, rules, and responsibilities associated with the governance of food (safety). Among the most significant moments of transformation I found were the discovery of a possible link between BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy) and its fatal human variant, a new variant of Creutzfeld-Jakob Disease (nvCJD), food contaminations with dioxins and the discovery of elevated acrylamide levels in certain foods, as well as animal health scares such as Classical Swine Fever and the outbreak of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD). Whilst this study was not concerned with what the food scares of the past decades 'really' were (e.g. the nature of diseases that for the most part did not affect human health but were nonetheless taken up as food safety issues), this thesis explored what was made of them, that is, how they came to be interpreted across different contexts and over time. In order to address what initially appeared to be paradox, the following research questions guided this study:

1. *How has food safety been taken up as a policy issue in England, Germany, and the Netherlands since the 1990s?*
2. *How can we explain the different ways in which food safety has been taken up across the national contexts?*
3. *How can we explain the emergence of a transnational policy approach, given the divergence on the national level?*

From an interpretive, discourse-analytical perspective, I explored the ways in which food safety was taken up as a policy issue in the three country case studies as well as the level of the EU. In order to explain these differences on the national level and the relative convergence on the transnational level, I explored the divergent socio-historical contexts through a discourse-analytical lens and then studied the key moments of *dislocation* (Laclau 1990), that is, moments through which the hegemonic policy discourse came to be disrupted and when ‘food safety’ became disconnected from its previously sedimented meanings. These moments, I argued, called into question the ways in which this policy discourse was routinely performed. Subsequently, I studied the key moments of institutional transformation and then provided an in-depth discourse analysis of contemporary policy discourse across England, Germany, the Netherlands, and at the level of the EU. This discourse analysis, first, proceeded on the premise that a distinction between discourse and practice is not sustainable and, second, used dramaturgical metaphors in order to capture the relations between the two in a non-essentialist fashion, as I shall discuss further below. Moreover, I rejected the rationalist assumptions in more conventional accounts of policymaking and instead of presuming defined actor-categories – the policymaker, the scientist, the members of the industry, and citizens’ groups – I began by parsing the logics that inform those and hence produce particular actor constellations, or discursive clusterings.

Consistent with such an approach, each empirical chapter therefore considered three dimensions: the socio-historical context, viewed through a discourse-analytical lens; the disintegration and evolution of policy institutions; and the changing discursive practices within those institutions. Across these three dimensions, the objects of the empirical analysis were (i) the different meanings of food safety, (ii) the discourses which inform these meanings, (iii) the notions that make up these discourses and the related discursive constellations, and (iv) the particular practices in which meanings are produced, contested, and enacted. Given these premises, the empirical chapters were guided by the following four questions in descending order of generality and abstraction:

1. What does food safety mean?
2. What discourses have shaped the meaning of ‘food safety’, and what notions bind those discourses together?
3. How do those discourses inform the policymaking process, and what kinds of discursive formations do they produce between policymakers, scientists, citizens, and the food industry?
4. How, by what means, and with what effects are the diverse meanings associated with food (safety) performed?

In order to access these dimensions of meaning, discourse, and their performative expression in policymaking, extensive qualitative analysis of policy documents from various organizations and governmental institutions was conducted, as well as over sixty interviews with civil servants, environmentalist organizations, consumer advocates, journalists, academics, and members of the food industry (see appendix A). These sources were complementary and equally useful pools of resources. Based on this material, the objective of the discourse analysis consisted in disentangling the seemingly coherent policy discourse in these locations. In doing so, I inductively distilled five discourses: the discourse of ‘good governance’; ‘environmental sustainability’; ‘market efficiency’; ‘consumer protection’; and ‘public health’. While, for the sake of comparability, equivalent labels (i.e. titles) were assigned to these discourses, they vary in strength and composition across the countries studied. Below, I revisit the discourses, highlighting differences and similarities across the studied contexts.

8.2 Dynamics of discursive change and continuity

8.2.1 Good governance

Across the studied sites, the food scares over the past decade were interpreted as symptoms of a crisis of governance. More specifically, the crises called into question the ‘classical-modernist’ modes of governance (Hajer 2003) that had shaped the previously hegemonic way of governing food (safety). With this dislocatory experience, restoring and sustaining trust became the concern of policymakers, scientists, and members of the industry alike, producing particular clusters of practices in this discourse that were aimed at ‘restoring consumer trust’. Another key ‘good governance’ notion concerned the relation between ‘science’ and ‘policy’, for it pinpointed the need to construct an interface, or even a re-connection, between policymakers, scientists, and their ‘audience’ in response to the perceived gap produced by the dislocatory experiences related to the food scares. The debate around the ‘science/policy nexus’ led to substantial institutional

rearrangements across the studied cases. Only in the United Kingdom (UK), however, did science and policy come to be integrated in one institution. On the contrary, in Germany, the Netherlands, and at the level of the EU, ‘good governance’ was expressed in the construction of (in praxis, unstable) institutional boundaries between the two spheres of practice in order to restore citizen trust in food (safety) and those in charge of ensuring it.

Whilst good governance notions of a need for transparency and openness emerged across the three countries as well as at the level of the EU, the notion of a need to remove ‘the smell of stables’ from food (safety) policy has not found substantial resonance in the Netherlands so far. Instead, notions of ‘cutting red tape’ and improving efficiency and coordination emerged as prominent notions to shape and redefine institutional practice and self-understandings. By employing these notions and entering into alliances with some members of the industry, the Dutch authorities were able to work towards minimizing the discursive friction observed in Germany and England, and could thereby handle the crisis instances in more ‘efficient’ ways. The good governance discourse across the studied contexts also generated a shift towards more reflexivity, away from a notion of science-for-policy where only experts could ‘speak the truth’. Moreover, calls for transparency and openness on the part of scientists and policymakers increased and a range of innovative participatory policy practices were introduced, turning the laboratory into a ‘public space’.

To conclude, good governance has come to denote openness, transparency, the independence of experts, and administrative efficiency in very context-specific ways. In this discourse, one can observe new actor constellations emerging; more specifically, policymakers and scientists come together under this discourse as mutually constitutive actor-categories – given the constant renegotiation of boundaries between the two spheres. Especially in the UK, the good governance discourse, in conjunction with the discourse of consumer protection, as will be further discussed below, put scientists and policymakers in an equivalential position vis-à-vis ‘the consumer’, as is reflected in the Food Standards Agency (FSA). The most central notion that emerges in this discourse across all contexts is the notion of ‘being a stakeholder in the food chain’. In its quality as a nodal point, it functions to bridge the number of seemingly disparate actors and creates a sense of ‘being in this together’ across institutional and national boundaries.

8.2.2 Environmental sustainability

When BSE was discovered in domestic herds in Germany in 2000, the food safety problematic was immediately placed onto the environmental agenda, whereas in the Netherlands, BSE was considered to be a ‘technical problem’ related to food production. Dutch policymakers

dismissed the German call for a thorough rethinking and reform of intensive agriculture whereas in England, the twin-crises of BSE and FMD facilitated the re-emergence of a discourse of environmental sustainability that comprised notions of landscape preservation, a natural environment, and an emphasis on animal welfare. Enacted in the promotion of organic farming, local food, and continuous research on 'food miles' – that is, the ecological impact of food production - this discourse informed institutional rearrangements and the self-understandings of scientists and policymakers in significant ways in England.

As chapter five argued, in Germany, the emancipatory force of dislocations made possible the re-emergence of a previously marginal discourse with a specific, socially constructed notion of 'nature', and the employment of the notion of the food chain as a source of empowerment, particularly for environmental movements, animal welfare advocates, and consumer groups. In the Dutch context, we can observe an environmental sustainability discourse with a particular focus on animal welfare, following the imagery around swine fever and FMD. These two epidemics, as I argued in chapter six, produced a discursive mismatch between the historically sedimented notion that intensive agricultural food production was beneficial for all and a scientifically founded necessity, and, on the other hand, the reality of burning carcasses. The renewed discourse of environmental sustainability observable in the Netherlands, however, is far from coherent; on the contrary, it is often wrapped into a dominant market efficiency discourse (to be discussed in subsection 8.2.3). We can observe this dynamic, for instance, in the ways in which organic food production and consumption are encouraged and in the use of the sustainability concept, with its focus on 'people, planet, and profit'.

Regarding the Europeanized dimension of the environmental discourse, the sustainability of both agriculture and the environment has come to form a key notion in today's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and, increasingly, we have also seen an emphasis on the role of farmers as preservers of landscapes and vanguard of the 'cultural heritage' of Europe. In a related notion at the level of EU policy discourse, European societies as a whole are expected to bear the costs of environmentally friendly production, whereas in the Netherlands, for instance, the significant price gaps between conventionally produced and organic food are frequently lamented.

Beyond these different elements of the notion of sustainability, the notion of being a member of the 'food chain' has brought to the fore a sense of collective responsibility, which has supported the development of shared understandings regarding food (safety). Notably, this terminology is used by nearly all the actors involved at the EU level – the European Commission, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), non-governmental organizations

(NGOs), industry and farming representatives, retailers, and consumer advocates, which indicates the discursive ‘bridging effect’ of the notion of the food chain. Rather than a linguistic category, this notion has, in fact, produced tangible actor constellations and new modes of cooperation that are equally based on the notion of ‘holding a stake’ in food (safety) and on the metaphor of a chain, a sense of mutual dependence.

In conclusion, we can observe different uses of the same concept – sustainability – across contexts. In other words, the composition of this discourse varied substantially. In particular, the different meanings of ‘nature’ and the divergent understandings of the importance of ‘profit’, ‘planet’, and ‘people’ in terms of environmental sustainability produce tangible consequences in policy discourse and practice. Despite these differences, we have seen a growing discourse of environmental sustainability at the level of EU policy discourse and an apparent convergence of meaning in this arena. A discourse-analytical approach, however, can explain this apparent paradox between divergence at the level of countries and relative convergence at the transnational level by way of identifying the key nodal points in this discourse that produce shared understandings and a sufficiently flexible quality of interaction. In the present discourse, the notion of being a member of the food chain carried particular weight.

8.2.3 Market efficiency

The discourse of market efficiency has structured the debate on food (safety) across all cases, but its manifestations and enactments are contextually contingent. In the Netherlands, the German call for de-intensifying agriculture was dismissed, as mentioned above. Instead, the Dutch authorities adopted a language of prices, international competitiveness, entrepreneurship, product innovation, and a fear of ‘lagging behind’ their European neighbors. Although private food (safety) labeling or quality assurance schemes have been put in place across the studied contexts, an amalgamation of the good governance and the market efficiency discourses in the Netherlands produced a particularly strong notion of ‘improving administrative efficiency’ in which the industry (‘the food chain’) is primarily responsible for food safety, whereas the government may act as a ‘facilitator’ – even though the policy program ‘For a different kind of government’ (*Programma andere overheid*) has not necessarily been successful. The comparatively strong status of the market efficiency discourse helps explain the comparatively limited debate in the Dutch context, as in this discourse, food safety and food quality are constructed as ‘amoral’ categories, that is, a matter of economic, rather than socio-ecological deliberation and implications. Conversely, in the discourses of environmental sustainability and public health, which take on a more substantial role in England and Germany, food safety and food quality

take on more holistic meanings. For instance, the discussion of food prices – that is, the difference in prices between organic and conventional foodstuffs – although not absent, is led quite differently in the latter two cases. Neither is the organic food sector talked about as a ‘market opportunity’ in Germany and England, but rather as a good thing *by nature*. The relative lack of a debate around the observable price differences in Germany, however, may foreclose a debate regarding food inequalities and the related health inequalities in different socio-economic segments of society.

The discourse of market efficiency also continues to structure food (safety) policy in the EU context and has found alliances with the discourses of consumer protection as well as environmental sustainability. This discourse, and specifically the previously hegemonic notion of the free movement of goods within the internal market, however, came to represent uncertainty, lack of protection, and disease, when food (safety) became *re-cited* as a European issue, for instance, in the European Parliament’s Medina Report (EP 1997). In such a way, the food scares of the past decade linked issues of trade and competitiveness, on the one hand, and issues of safety, public health, and consumer protection, on the other hand. Here, the food chain is now employed to promote ‘non-competitiveness’: By referring to the food chain as a collection of non-competitive, interdependent actors, food safety comes to be constructed as a universalistic aim. Put differently, the notion of the food chain functions to partially neutralize the market efficiency discourse in favor of new modes of cooperation and participation in the policy process. The notions within a market efficiency discourse and those in a consumer protection discourse have grown together in some contexts, pushed for by new discursive actor constellations, as we shall see in the next subsection.

8.2.4 Consumer protection

In the English context, the discovery of the link between BSE and its human counterpart nvCJD was followed by the emergence of a discourse that was critical of the influential position of the agricultural lobby within governmental institutions, such as the National Farmers’ Union (NFU) in the Ministry for Agriculture, Food, and Fisheries (MAFF). As a result, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) was set up under the motto of ‘independence, transparency, and putting the consumer first’. In England, a brief genealogy of the consumer movement indicates that the discourses of consumer protection and consumer rights, even in conjunction with food (safety) specifically, were already established before the series of food scares in the late twentieth century. This background, viewed through a discourse-analytical lens, helps explain the comparatively successful mobilization of a discourse of ‘putting the consumer first’ and, simultaneously, the institutional blurring of the boundaries between ‘science’ and ‘policy’: The

empowered consumer emerging in this discourse came to be entitled to having a say in both 'science' and 'policy' and policymakers and scientists came to merge under the discourse of consumer protection.

In the German context, similarly, a pervasive critical discourse emerged that attacked the influence of the agricultural lobby in the agricultural ministry at the time, which led to an institutional separation of agricultural policy from food safety affairs in (both the UK and) Germany. Consumer protection came to be strongly linked to food (safety) policy in Germany as well as the UK. In the German context, however, the discourse of consumer protection had previously primarily existed as the technical application of the precautionary principle particularly in the environmental policy domain. In addition, a particular set of values partly shaped by Christian beliefs (Hendriks 1987) had prevented the emergence of an equivalent consumer rights discourse in Germany. The dislocatory effects following the discovery of BSE in domestic herds, however, facilitated the re-emergence of such a discourse, which was supported by a specific notion of the food chain and the notion of being a stakeholder. Historically, the institutionalized precautionary principle, whereby governmental authorities attempt to determine a particular problem and then take measures in advance to prevent the exposure of citizens to (public health) risk, constructed the consumer as uninformed and in need of protection. More recently, however, particularly over the last decade, the concept of the consumer has changed, and she is considered more and more as an informed agent vis-à-vis other (market) actors, with certain entitlements and rights to claim, yet still with certain responsibilities vis-à-vis environmental sustainability and 'society as a whole'. While notions of consumer choice feature strongly in this discourse, one can simultaneously observe (a sometimes more implicit) discursive construction of a specific 'right' choice – for organic food, for example. These discursive tensions became evident in the discourse analysis of the case of Germany.

Across the three studied national contexts, notions of a 'right to information', sometimes a right to involvement in policy, and notions of choice have marked the discourse of consumer protection. In the Dutch context, this has taken a particular shape. Here, the individual citizen is constructed as a market agent and a rational being who, by nature, values price over (different understandings of) food quality. Although marginal discourses have indeed contested this understanding (including critical voices within the agricultural school of Wageningen University), the notion of a distinction between 'the consumer' and 'the citizen' remains pervasive in food (safety) policy discourse. The notion that one naturally comes to act as a 'consumer' when in the market sphere' entails tangible political ramifications. The distinction suggests that, as market agents, we are private agents and that, in this 'private sphere', there is no space for expression of

our concerns as ‘citizens’, such as those over environmental sustainability or our support for fair trade. Even though some social-scientific research suggests that price may not necessarily be the main priority for citizens (Baltussen et al. 2006), policy discourse continues to reproduce such a notion. This distinction also resonates in the notion that prices for organically produced foodstuffs may be too high and should be lowered.

An examination of the discourse of ‘consumer protection’ at the level of EU policy discourse demonstrates that the discursive category of the consumer has become a key notion in contemporary policy discourse in (and beyond) this domain. First, the notion that food safety risks can affect ‘society as a whole’ connotes a sense of collectiveness, and a move away from a purely individualist notion of risk. Second – and in some tension with the former notion – a key notion as far as the category of the consumer is concerned is that of *choice*. By constructing consumer choice as a universal (European) right (‘we are all consumers’), a common language is appealed to, and ‘consumers’ are directly identified as such in a performative, authoritative fashion. At the same time, the Commission emphasizes that it does not seek to ‘micromanage’ European citizens but, rather, to permit ‘fully-informed choice’ (COMM 2004) - a claim that resembles the notions we find in the Dutch (and to a lesser extent in the English) context. The discursive friction within the discourse of consumer protection again points to the finding that EU policy discourse is contingent and not necessarily as ‘harmonious’, as the degree of harmonization in this policy field would suggest to some observers whose analysis moves at the surface of policy contents, rather than the overlapping, but also conflicting discourses that inform policy.

Overall, my findings indicate that the nodal points of ‘the consumer’, ‘the stakeholder’, and the ‘food chain’ have enabled so-called civil society to take part in the policy process in novel ways, both in formal mechanisms at EU institutions and in more informal modes of cooperation, such as in ‘stakeholder alliances’ among NGOs.

8.2.5 Public health

Finally, the discourse of public health has also informed food (safety) policy discourse across contexts in different ways. In the German context, food (safety) was traditionally understood as a public health issue, which echoed in the scientific debate regarding BSE and the proactive role of Germany in developing an EU policy on BSE before it was even discovered on the European continent. In England, the Netherlands, and at the level of the EU, in contrast, food safety was primarily regarded as an issue that could hinder intra-European trade for a considerable period of time, until the discovery of BSE on the European continent between 1999 and 2000 called

into question the constructed, yet institutionalized boundary between national and transnational, as I suggested in chapter one and chapter seven.

Since then, the public health discourse has functioned to blur the boundaries of what ‘food safety’ means even further. For instance, notions connecting public health and consumer protection, such as the notion of being entitled to nutrition information, expressed through the labeling of foodstuffs, are evident in contemporary policy discourse on food (safety). Observable shifts in the public health agenda regarding obesity, vitamins, and labeling across contexts present an interesting amalgamation of the discourses of consumer protection, good governance, and public health. The growing tendency to define the meaning of ‘food safety’ in terms of ‘hygienic’ qualities reflects this amalgamation, even though it has been met with resistance by environmentalists and consumer advocates: While the former, specifically in Germany, continue to push for notions that define ‘food safety’ as ‘naturally produced’, the latter claim that consumers are often misled by the appearance of products. For instance, vacuum-wrapped meat may well be rotten, even though neither color nor appearance will necessarily indicate as much. The changing notions of hygiene have also implied, I would argue, a relocation of food safety to the private sphere, as in this discourse consumers are held responsible for food safety as much as producers are.

When the notion of BSE as an exclusively British problem was revealed as constructed and when the contamination with dioxins called into question the transnational traceability of foodstuffs, the public health discourse took on a new meaning at the transnational level, too. Competencies in this policy area had previously been reserved for member states, aside from the non-regulatory statements regarding public health in, for instance, the Maastricht Treaty. The emergence of a transnational public health agenda, institutionalized in the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Health and Consumer Protection (*Santé et Protection Consommateurs*, DG SANCO), therefore constitutes a remarkable development that was made possible by the dislocation of the two institutionalized boundaries that had previously structured the hegemonic policy discourse: first, the distinction between national and transnational and, second, the differentiation between animal and human health.

The Europeanized discourse of ‘public health’ has come to feature an unusual combination of the discourses of market efficiency, consumer protection, and a discourse that emphasizes *individual* health. Particular clusters of practices – such as private labeling schemes and nutrition campaigns – speak to these findings. Until the food scares of the 1990s, the hegemonic position of the discourse of (internal) market efficiency foreclosed other alternative meanings, such as a link between food (safety), consumer protection, and public health. The dislocatory events of the

past decade, however, facilitated the re-emergence of alternative meanings and discursive constellations. As a result, EU policy discourse on food (safety) presently combines notions related to public health with those belonging to a consumer protection discourse, as is observable in the number of institutional rearrangements. It is further interesting to note that, also here, one can observe traces of ‘older’ notions of a market efficiency discourse that frames health as a factor in economic competitiveness and obesity as a cost factor in public health policy. Such findings expose that we cannot speak of either pure change or pure continuity after dislocations, but that both logics are at play simultaneously.

In conclusion, the public health discourse, despite its relative novelty at the transnational level, contributed substantially to the fixation of meaning of food (safety) in EU policy discourse, based on the nodal point of *stakeholderness* and that of a European consumer with certain entitlements and rights. While EU health competencies vis-à-vis member states remain limited, the study of food (safety) policy demonstrates that even in sensitive policy areas, Europeanization can take place rapidly, even though never without friction, by means of the re-citation of meanings and the performative appeal to nodal points.

To conclude, whereas in the individual countries, one can observe highly specific and contextually contingent compositions of policy discourse, in the EU arena, those contradictions seem to disappear by virtue of an open and elastic policy discourse that has been mobilized. This is not to say that we find discursive *harmony* in *harmonization* – as one would be led to believe by the fact that the majority of food safety regulation is formulated at the EU level – even though this is difficult to quantify, given the fluid nature of food (safety) itself and the ways in which it cuts across multiple policy areas, as this thesis demonstrated. Rather than harmony, one can observe contradictions and contingency only through an in-depth comparative discourse analysis: The inevitable contradictions are ‘hidden behind’ the key integrative nodal points of the stakeholder, the consumer, and the food chain, which produce and reproduce overlapping, yet also conflicting sets of notions across the studied countries. The nodal points then make for an open yet relatively stable policy discourse, which, in its flexibility, leaves room for diverse actors to come together, to enter alliances, but also to negotiate contradictions and produce shared meanings of ‘food safety’. Moreover, these findings indicate that, in order for Europeanization to be successfully mobilized, sufficient flexibility is required to secure the adaptation of policies on the national level. While the present study was not concerned with the effectiveness of EU policies and the frictions entailed in implementing EU regulation on the national level, its findings could provide a useful basis for such an inquiry.

In light of my findings regarding the relative stability of the EU policy discourse, it is important to note that this stability is, of course, not definite: As I argued in chapter three of this thesis, discourses are always vulnerable to dislocations. Moreover, by virtue of the inevitable exclusion of some discourses that the hegemonic production of meanings will entail, policy discourse, as coherent as it may seem, will remain ambiguous and full of contradictions. While these contradictions tend to become hidden away in successful Europeanization, moments of dislocation can function to expose the constructed and fragile nature of policy – as the food scares of the past decade did to the post-WWII policy discourse.

To sum up, the approach developed in chapter two and three facilitated both a contextually sensitive comparative mode of analysis and an analysis of a successful case of Europeanization against the observed heterogeneity on the national level. By exploring, in detail, the different compositions of policy discourses across contexts, this study demonstrated the capacity of discourse analysis, when combined with a focus on practice, to (i) explain the different degrees of discursive openings witnessed across the studied contexts, (ii) to explain the ways in which these openings were discursively managed, and (iii) to demonstrate the ways in which new and previously hegemonic discourses become materialized, actively performed, and also contested in institutional practices. Beyond these specific avenues, this study also showed that policy actors do not exist in a discursive vacuum, nor are their strategies and cognitive abilities predefined and stable. Rather, they are informed by a specific, and necessarily limited discursive horizon that make some actions and strategies possible, and not others. Their self-understandings and identities are shaped in relational and mutually constitutive ways by virtue of overlapping, yet also conflicting discourses.

Following this presentation of the five interlinked, yet also conflicting discourses across the three countries studied here as well as the level of EU policy discourse, below, I address contributions and limitations of this study and then suggest further avenues for research. I focus specifically on (i) the study of institutional sites (in crisis), (ii) the study of Europeanization, and (iii) the usefulness of an approach that combines poststructuralist discourse theory with an analysis of policymaking.

8.3 Contributions, limitations, and further avenues for research

Studying institutions

In chapter three, I emphasized that meanings are never entirely fixed and rival discourses are always at play. This stance also implies that institutions feature a chronic ambiguity, which becomes acutely visible in moments of dislocation. An approach that integrates the concept of

discourse and practice allows one to expose how policymakers draw on previously institutionalized practices in the attempt to preserve institutional authority and to maintain their rehearsed performances in times of crisis and ambiguity.

These performances and routines make for organizational culture and the self-understandings of policymakers and scientists. The in-depth interviews conducted for the purpose of this study constituted a particularly useful pool of resources in observing organizational culture in both established institutions such as the European Commission and relatively recent institutions such as the EFSA. While the Commission could preserve some of its organizational authority, the EFSA constitutes a recently established, more dynamic and, as it appears, more accessible institution to research.

In order to clarify both the stimulating and the challenging nature of studying institutions from a discourse-theoretical, interpretive perspective, it is worth restating some of the methodological issues I raised in chapter three. Regarding the Commission in particular, the sense of being over-interviewed – a ‘crisis effect’ indeed - impeded access to potential respondents of the pre-BSE regime. The number of respondents who were directly involved in one or another crisis was also limited, especially at the transnational level. As far as actually available respondents are concerned, the organizational culture affected the procedural aspects of interviews – such as cancellations at short notice, unannounced delays, and the insistence on conducting interviews in office-ial settings, as mentioned in chapter three. In addition, the settings and organizational practices undoubtedly affected what could be said, and the types of questions that could be asked by either of the interview partners. Equally interesting to note are the frequent declarations of not giving an ‘opinion, just information’, by which officials enact and reproduce the ‘apolitical’ organizational culture at the European Commission. In other cases, the respondents asked not to be quoted on a specific issue (while they had agreed to the interview being recorded), although the information they were giving would have been accessible otherwise, too. Whilst this can be frustrating for the researcher, in-depth interviews lead as closely as possible to a position from which we can observe these mechanisms of power and institutional gate-keeping that also resonate in the researcher-respondent relationship. Regrettably, shadowing officials and scientists, as ethnographers might recommend, was not possible at the European Commission nor at the EFSA.

While this thesis pointed to a number of instances of conflict and the way they may find expression in scientific disagreements, more could be done to study the micro-level interaction between ‘transnational scientists’. The EFSA has not (yet) replaced national scientific agencies and, for the sake of scientific diversity and experimentation, this will most likely remain so. This

structure also generates questions as to how, where, and to what effect new scientific discoveries or evaluations of foodstuffs are taken up, interpreted, and why one, and not another, interpretation becomes dominant. For a better understanding of the interaction between ‘actors’ and ‘audience’ in and beyond scientific disputes, studies of open board meetings would be a useful method and would enhance our understanding of meaning-making at the micro-level. A thorough analysis of dramaturgical mechanisms in meetings and public performances would have gone beyond the scope of this study, yet recent work has sought to engage with this dimension in more detail (e.g. Hajer forthcoming; Hajer and Laws 2003; Hajer and Uitermark 2008). Such a methodology promises to enrich our understanding of post-‘classical-modernist’ policymaking and could equally provide illuminating insights to those who want to study ‘crises’ in policymaking.

Studying Europeanization

The particular framework of analysis used in this study made it possible to point to the imprints of ‘national’ meanings and interpretations at the level of the EU without necessarily establishing causal connections between those two localities. I also want to argue more generally for comparative, yet contextually sensitive, work in the field of Europeanization, provided the policy area under consideration allows for such an analysis. Most importantly, interpretive, poststructuralist research need not shy away from comparative case study research, but careful attention must be paid to the mode of selecting cases. The present study, for instance, emerged from the very observation of divergence across three accessible and familiar countries and set those against convergence at the level of the EU. It was then a puzzle that inspired research, rather than a pre-given presumption of the need for a comparative research design. Moreover, this thesis sought to avoid subsuming phenomena under overarching laws and, instead, concluded by emphasizing diversity and contingency.

In future research, scholars from different epistemological schools as well as those interested in the political economic aspects of EU food and agricultural policy may consider further investigating the imprints of ‘national’ discourses at the level of EU policy discourse by assessing and trying to explain the respective influence of, first, national policymakers, and second, what some would refer to as ‘lobby groups’. In other words, whilst this study moved from discourses to notions and to actors, scholars of ‘interest politics’ may consider discourse in a more instrumental way and explore the quality of interaction between different interest groups or actors in the policy process. The analytical framework developed here would provide a useful basis for such studies, regardless of methodological orientation.

The approach to Europeanization developed here could also be useful for studies beyond Europe. As paradoxical as it may seem at first, I would suggest that the Food and Drug Administration of the United States of America (US) could be studied from a similar perspective, given that food and drug control was exercised principally by federal states until the early 20th century, and control mechanisms and standards were markedly different across states; its current institutional shape was only developed in the late 1930s. Federal competencies only developed gradually in the subsequent decades, and the Food and Drug Administration as an institution has been shaped in part by political pressure, new scientific discoveries, consumer advocacy, and industry involvement. A study of these movements would be insightful, as would be an exploration as to why, in the US, competencies for health, pharmaceuticals, and foodstuffs are combined, whereas at the level of the EU, pharmaceuticals and food are evaluated in separate agencies.

A weakness of this study lies in the fact that the studied cases were defined as nation-states (plus the EU as a whole). The discourses analyzed were assigned to whole countries, whereby some of the diversity and pluralism within states gets hidden away. In other words, a comparative angle was chosen at the expense of more detailed analysis of, for instance, social movements in the field of food (safety). A related limitation lies in the limited capacity of this study to generate findings regarding the relative penetration of the Europeanized policy discourse in national states. The analysis, however, did point to the integration of notions of 'stakeholderhood' at the national level, whereby even the term itself is left untranslated. Interestingly enough, the term 'stakeholder' is not included in the 'Eurovoc' database, a thesaurus that legal experts as well as policymakers employ when writing up policy documents, and which is now available in 21 official languages of the EU. Perhaps the very inclusion of the notion in the thesaurus would break its magic, as its elasticity makes it so powerful in facilitating both policy formulation and implementation across contexts.

A related limitation of this study was its relative emphasis on governmental institutions. Whilst the analysis did include environmental NGOs and (transnational) consumer advocacy groups, studying newly emerging food (safety) movements may be productive. The different findings across contexts and the relative strength of one or another discourse could then raise questions as to the role of NGOs in pushing particular discourses, and not others, and regarding the ways in which discursive rivalry between different groups could play out. Consumer groups and environmentalists do not 'naturally' come together (as they also did not at the EU level); rather, the negotiation of a shared discourse may fail in some instances. In such cases, one could

explore the dynamics of rivalry, the reasons for failure or success, and the political ramifications regarding the policy agenda.

As for other European policy areas, one could equally consider areas of environmental policy, such as concerning transport policy, where we can witness the significance of contextual contingency as well. For instance, to some actors, the building of a tunnel, a bridge, or a new road may represent innovation, efficiency, and an improvement of the free movement of goods, whereas to others it may symbolize the disruption of 'nature'. In these instances, one could produce an inquiry concerning the specific challenges posed to Europeanization and how, and to what effect, these divergences of meaning come to be reconciled, if at all. Likewise, one could study policy areas that fail to become Europeanized (such as, notably, in the field of social policy) and, by investigating the production and reproduction of (divergent) meanings, move away from the notion that supposedly clearly definable and stable 'national interests' are to blame.

Particularly valuable would be a study of Europeanization while it develops, rather than only ex-post, as I did in the present study. A present-focused study would certainly bring with it specific challenges, yet it would also allow one better access to the production of meanings at a micro-level. For example, we could study the immediate impact of new findings in biotechnology and how – in some contexts, not others – these become linked to public health. Another case in point would be research that links forms of cancer to particular foodstuffs and the effects this may have on the perception of food (safety) more generally across contexts. In such subject matters, ethnographic methods could be useful, such as the 'shadowing' of officials while they engage in the production of meaning and their struggle to make sense of events that cannot be fully grasped within the hegemonic policy discourse and the discursively sedimented routines and practices available to them.

Another specific example where Europeanization is only gradually and slowly developing would be the field of cancer prevention, a subfield of public health policy. Only recently, medical scientists discovered a probable link between cervical cancer and the Human Papilloma Virus. The practices of prevention and screening, however, remain remarkably diverse across European countries concerning the age of women who get access to screening as well as the frequency thereof. Moreover, discussions around the 'ethical' implications of the introduction of a vaccine against some strands of the virus are diverse in terms of their discursive composition and their ramifications for actual practice. The divergence observed here would inspire and justify a comparative approach and, in addition, could lead to an innovative and fruitful combination of

discourse theory, interpretive policy analysis, and insights from the field of Science and Technology Studies.

(Policy) discourse analysis

Beyond the empirical double-focus and the ambition to find a way to account for Europeanization in new conceptual terms, this thesis sought to advance the link between (interpretive) policy analysis and discourse theory. Two points deserve reiteration here.

First, a major contribution of this study was the conceptual linkage between ‘dislocation’ (Laclau 1990) and ‘institutional ambiguity’ (Hajer 2003). This conceptual innovation, as explicated in chapter three, allowed me to use ‘dislocation’ as a truly empirical category, as I took institutional ambiguity to be a symptom of such moments in addition to a chronic feature of institutions. The linkage also opened up a plurality of points of observation, whereby the combination of extensive document analysis and over 60 in-depth interviews became a useful pool of resources.

At the same time, this link required an additional category that would strengthen it, make it accessible, and would help to capture the specific ways in which policy actors come to act the way they act and what dislocations mean for those routines. To that end, I introduced a performativity perspective that draws on, amongst others, Judith Butler (1997) and her notion that (gender) identity is not essentially given but must be constantly rehearsed and that this rehearsing materializes in particular practices. She further argues that, while terms such as ‘gender’ are *iterable*, that is, they can be inserted into other (linguistic) contexts and there will be a minimal remainder of meaning, this re-insertion, or re-citation, is empowering and can function to disconnect a term from its previously sedimented meanings.

Translating this notion of rehearsal and *re-citation* onto a policymaking level, I employed dramaturgical metaphors and asked, what happens when the script no longer makes sense to either ‘actors’ or ‘audience’? What if the script, and the artefacts on that stage, are no longer useful and convincing enough for telling a story? What if the rehearsed routines and the actors’ training no longer fulfil either their artistic ambitions or the audience’s expectations? In moments of dislocation, instability, and ambiguity, the rehearsed relations between the actors on stage, the assistants backstage and the audience no longer ‘make sense’. In particular, the elements of authority implicit in these relationships are called into question and the constructed, mutually constitutive nature of the two categories becomes exposed.

By drawing on performance as a metaphor in this way, I was able to conceptualize role in the policymaking process in a non-essentialist way. Dislocations and acute institutional ambiguity, I

argued in chapter three, ‘force’ institutional agents to reconstruct their own roles, rules and responsibilities. This process entails the production of meaning and, at the same time, the act of ‘writing’ policy functions to control the flow of interpretation and meaning-making in an authoritative way.

Beyond this non-essentialist conception of policy actors, a performativity perspective enabled me to access the dimension of concrete policy practices. While I highlighted publicly staged performances, such as a minister’s visit to a farm, I also pointed to instances where policymakers and scientists came to appeal to a ‘new approach’. By calling upon a difference in the script between ‘before’ and ‘after’, a particular interpretation of the situation is appealed to in a performative way. The third, and most micro-level, dimension of performativity I pointed to consisted of instances where organizational culture was being formed anew in discursive rehearsals. Here, I highlighted, for instance, the constant negotiation of the institutional boundaries between ‘science’ and ‘policy’, the new technologies employed in order to form a relationship between ‘actors’ and ‘audience’, and material discursive practices – for example, the fact that the FSA, informed by a discourse of good governance, changed its documents to a new, ‘more modern’ font.

To those sceptical of discourse analysis, let us recall that the poststructuralist approach taken here does not merely imply a study of linguistic categories. Instead, a poststructuralist discourse analysis can indeed tell a story about politics by emphasizing the performative force of language in informing meaning, identities, discontinuity, as well as relative stability of some hegemonic formations, and not others. By starting at the level of discourse, rather than the level of seemingly independent policy actors, it becomes possible to uncover the clusters of practices (or discursive actor constellations) that policymakers, scientists, citizen groups, and members of the industry enter into by virtue of being informed by overlapping discourses. In other words, next to national boundaries, institutional boundaries can be revealed as constructed when we find seemingly disparate actors come together to collectively articulate the same discourses and shared notions, for example, the specific notion of ‘putting the consumer first’ as a ‘stakeholder’ in the discourse of consumer protection.

As briefly suggested earlier, a political economy approach could benefit from discourse-theoretical insights, in particular the assertion that hegemony is necessarily incomplete and vulnerable to dislocations. In recognition of this chronic instability of policy discourse, we can return to a notion of agency that is non-essentialist, a notion of agency that does not rely on an understanding of a ‘given’ structure. The role of retailers and private governance schemes, for example, are then not taken as given, but as the result of previous dislocations as loopholes for a

market-efficiency discourse. These schemes deserve further attention, particularly on a global level, where one could study the shared understandings on which notions of ‘corporate social responsibility’ are based. Finally, discourse analysis would be useful in a unique way to actually ‘liberate’ notions of ‘the consumer’ and of being a ‘stakeholder’. One could explore the discursive actor constellations in more detail that ‘hide behind’ these notions - for instance, behind the repetitive assertion that ‘the consumer wants’, be it strawberries imported from overseas all year long or the individualization of public health. To uncover the politics behind these notions, as this study could only do to a limited extent, would make for a productive research project.

With this thesis, I sought to demonstrate that discourse analysts can quite confidently make explanatory arguments without departing from their specific ontological and epistemological orientation and without resorting to establishing stylized causal claims. Three specific points seem important. First, the interpretive methodology employed here facilitated access to empirical dimensions that would have otherwise been neglected. The ‘logics of contestation’ explicated in chapter two and even more so their empirical elements demonstrated this analytical capacity. Second, the particular analytical framework I developed here allowed me to demonstrate the discursive, contextually contingent dimension of food (safety) that can account for the specific compositions of policy discourses across the studied contexts. In sum, I have produced innovative accounts of the impacts of food scares across three countries; I have constructed contextually-contingent explanatory insights into the divergence between them by means of interpretive, discourse-analytical methods; and, finally, I have studied the qualities of a successfully Europeanized policy discourse. With this study, I expect to have contributed to not only the empirical field of research, but also to a better understanding of the capacity of discourse analysis by those sceptical of this approach or of interpretive methods more generally. Poststructuralist discourse analysis does not impose a distinction between the linguistic and the material – rather, the very rejection of the distinction makes it powerful and widely applicable.