

**Conceptualizing Path Dependence through Discourse Analysis:
The Case of Persistent Agricultural Policies**

Hess, Sebastian; Kleinschmit, Daniela; Theuvsen, Ludwig; von Cramon-Taubadel, Stephan
Department for Agricultural Economics and Rural Development
Georg-August-University Göttingen

Corresponding author:

Sebastian Hess

Georg-August-University Göttingen

Department for Agricultural Economics and Rural Development

Platz der Göttinger Sieben 5

37073 Göttingen

email: shess1@gwdg.de

Fax: 0551/39-4621

Tel.: 0551/39-4046

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Abstract

This paper introduces discourse analysis as a theoretical concept and an empirical methodology that may enable the endogenization of path creation and path breaking changes within conventional models of political path dependencies. Discourse analysis implies that specific elements within the political discourse heavily influence and predetermine the policy creation path and, therefore, must be taken into account when political path creation is analysed. Discourses themselves, however, are far too complex to be quantified. Instead, this paper proposes to trace individual story lines over time that may represent important elements of a specific discourse. Therefore, a brief analysis of the discourse underlying the restriction of seasonal farm workers from central and eastern European countries in Germany is presented in order to illustrate how dominant speakers and their story lines have been and currently are interacting to shape this policy.

Keywords: Agricultural Policy, Path Dependencies, Discourse Analysis, Seasonal Farm Workers

1. Introduction

This paper proposes discourse analysis as a new concept to be integrated into the framework of path dependence in order to reconstruct self-reinforcing feedback effects within politics. We argue that discourse analysis presents a potentially fruitful theoretical model that can be applied to empirical analysis.

Path dependencies within politics are marked by self-reinforcing feedback effects that alter the costs of switching from one policy regime to another (for instance, Kay 2005). As a result of such re-affirmative dynamic processes, politics and institutions (North 1990) may get locked into situations that become, once in place, difficult to change. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the EU has frequently been cited and analyzed as an almost 'classical' example in this regard (Ackrill and Kay 2006).

In economics as well as in political science, as Pierson (2000) points out in his comprehensive comparison of the application of the path dependence framework in economics and politics, the concept of path dependence corrects the ubiquity of claims about efficient or functional elements in politics (Pierson 2004). Pierson (2000) further notes that the political phenomena surrounding path dependencies are associated with far more complexity and, due to a lack of easily measureable indicators such as prices and (cash-based) costs, are far more difficult to analyze than cases of purely economic path dependencies (for

instance, the frequently cited examples such as QWERTY keyboards, VHS videos etc. in the field of economics of technology). Therefore, in the literature related to political science, Pierson (2000; 2004) constitutes a rich body of analyses that identifies path dependencies and explains why these dependencies exist within politics, yet without convincing and theoretically deeply rooted explanations of the reasons why certain – potentially inefficient – policies were introduced in the first place. In the economics literature, Dixit and Romer (2006) survey the theoretical and empirical work that investigates whether and why (inefficient) economic policies exist. The authors conclude with regard to the economic literature that there are myriads of models that in most cases explain very specific, sometimes even artificial circumstances under which certain (inefficient) policies exist and persist. Yet, these models largely rely upon stylized and *ad hoc* assumptions about agents' behaviour and the constraints these agents face. Thus, up to now economic models do not allow for general empirical or theoretical predictions of the conditions under which specific policies will typically be introduced and are likely to persist. In other words, path dependency is introduced and treated as largely exogenous in economic models, instead of being at the center of a model's focus, as the concept of path dependency would suggest.

Therefore, in economics as well as in political science the process of path dependence to date largely constitutes a research field with a just emerging and still incomplete theoretical framework (Garud and Karnøe 2001; Schreyögg, Sydow and Koch 2003). In addition, no empirical methods have so far been widely used that would allow general predictions of the causes and circumstances under which specific policies are introduced and the way they have been introduced in reality, implying that especially the process of political path creation is not well understood yet.

This paper, proposes discourse analysis as a new concept that should be integrated into the framework of path dependence in order to reconstruct self-reinforcing feedback effects in politics. Since empirical results are not available yet, discourse analysis is also introduced as a methodological approach to empirically explore the processes of path creation and path dependence¹. We argue that discourse analysis may enable the use of qualitative as well as quantitative methods to test hypotheses about key influential factors in the process of political path creation.

Against this background, section 2 turns to agricultural policies which have for long been described as especially inefficient. At the same time, many agricultural policies show especially stubborn persistence over time and different political environments. This paper

¹ The paper is the result of the first phase of the project "Agricultural policy between path dependence and path creation" financed by the DFG. This project started in July 2007, and later phases will focus on empirical applications.

focusses on the example of a special agricultural policy in Germany, the regulation of seasonal farm workers from central and eastern European countries (CEEC). We summarize what established theoretical and empirical evidence can say about this policy, and why the concept of path dependency is in this context promises to fill certain gaps in conventional analysis. Section 3 introduces the concept of discourse analysis in connection with path dependencies and outlines a methodological framework that describes how the explanatory power of this concept could be empirically tested. Section 4 presents preliminary insights derived from this perspective that are discussed in section 5, and section 6 concludes.

2. What Explains the Existence and Persistence of Inefficient Agricultural Policies? The Case of Seasonal Farm Workers

In (agricultural) economics, rent-seeking behaviour (Krueger 1974) and the associated activities of lobby groups often provide convincing explanations for the existence of protectionist policies, which in turn have, in many instances, especially distortive effects (Alston, Norton and Pardey 1995). Lobby groups aim at the redistribution of income in their own favour and accordingly lobby actively within politics. Assuming utility maximizing behaviour, the cost of the lobbying effort will be equal to or less than the volume of the actual rent involved (Krueger 1974). In this context, agricultural policies have been analyzed by economists as well as political scientists for a long time (for instance, Kay 2003), and may be considered a classical example of redistributive policies that benefit the various farm lobby groups involved (for instance, Tangermann 1976; Koester and von Cramon-Taubadel 1992; Alston and James 2002).

From the rational choice perspective, politicians can be viewed as aiming to provide best policies given various political constraints (for instance, pressure arising from the activities of lobby groups, see the literature cited in Dixit and Romer 2006). Alternatively, politicians and political institutions themselves can be seen as rent seekers (Olsen 1965: “stationary and roving bandits”) with selfish preferences who are trying to maximize their own benefits rather than being motivated by the best possible provision of public goods. In this context, economists seem to be split with regard to the question whether the election process leads to a selection of the “best” politicians in the long run, or whether elections constitute an institution that introduces increasing returns and path dependencies into policy making (Pierson 2000).

Dixit and Romer (2006) provide a survey of alternative economic explanations for the existence of inefficient economic policies, with many recent approaches establishing links between institutional theories and game theory. However, the analysis of distortive market

policies that are common in, for instance, agriculture describes the incidence of policy (Alston and James 2002) typically as a failure to provide socially optimal outcomes due to some redistribution of income in favour of certain lobby groups (Alston, Norton and Pardey 1995).

These redistributive policies typically create economic rents. Once an economic rent has been created and is assigned to a group of beneficiaries, it can be argued that policy makers may already have induced political path dependency since this rent creates a large potential for self-reinforcement due to the fact that beneficiaries will be unwilling to give up their privileges again (Krueger 1974). In other words, the assignment of rents to a group of beneficiaries constitutes a self-reinforcing momentum (Pierson 2000) that will make the existence of this rent in the future more likely than it has been in the past since it will strongly motivate (and can fund) rent-seeking behaviour by the beneficiaries (Alston, Norton, Pardey 1995).

However, a closer look at different definitions of path dependency on the one hand, and individual agricultural policy measures on the other, does not always clearly suggest that what is observed in reality necessarily fulfils anything more than the broadest criteria of 'path dependency' (e.g., not more than the general argument that 'history matters', Ackrill and Kay 2006). This is especially true if broad aggregates of various policies, such as the Common Agricultural Policy of the EU, are investigated (Kay 2003). Therefore, a closer look at more specific policy fields provides better opportunities for analyzing processes of path creation and path dependence in the political sphere in more detail.

An example of a very specific, highly protective and very persistent agricultural policy in Germany is the regulation of seasonal farm workers from central and eastern European countries (CEEC) who work each year in German agriculture. Although it can be traced back to the late 19th century, this policy does not seem to benefit farmers nor workers and is, at the same time, a perennial source of tensions between lobbyists and politicians (Hess 2004). In *de facto*, if not *de jure*, violation of the EU's common market, Germany and Austria continue to restrict the employment of workers from new EU member states in agriculture and neighbouring economic sectors. Germany and Austria are the only countries in the EU that still apply this restrictive policy.

Under the current regulation for seasonal farm workers from CEEC in Germany, farmers have to apply formally for a certain number of workers several months ahead of the harvest season. Farmers have to prove that they really need these workers on their farms and that they were unable to fill vacant positions with German unemployed persons. In addition, German wages have to be paid under these seasonal contracts, and the workers' housing conditions

and working hours have to meet German standards. In general, farmers are currently granted only 80% of the workers they have requested. Hence, in theory they are obliged to hire at least 20% of their seasonal workforce on the German labour market. In practice, however, German workers are not able or willing to do the work in question. Therefore,, a 20% input restriction is imposed on labour-intensive agricultural products in Germany, or, in other words, an input quota equal to 80% of total seasonal farm labour demand is in place. German farmers are, independent of the size of their farms, all equally restricted by this 20% cut of their labour demand. If rent seeking were the key motivation for the existence of this policy, at least one of the interest groups involved should clearly benefit in monetary terms. The following analysis shows that this is in fact not the case.

Input quotas typically limit the competitive market output of a farm product (Alston, Norton and Pardey 1995). They also reduce the factor price equalisation that would otherwise take place as high wages for farm labour in Germany attract low-priced workers from CEECs. This will, *ceteris paribus*, increase the price of labour as well as of the corresponding output product(s). **Seasonal farm workers** in Germany (both Germans and those within-quota workers from CEECs) clearly benefit through higher wages, while consumers of labour intensive agricultural products clearly lose as a result of higher prices. The impact on farm enterprises that produce the seasonal fruit and vegetable products is ambiguous; as both output and input prices increase.

The political influence of seasonal workers from CEEC in Germany can be assumed to be low. Furthermore, workers in CEEC who do not get in-quota positions in Germany lose as a result of the policy. Hence, it is unlikely that this interest group has had an impact on the introduction and persistence of this policy. Consumers typically have little voice in agricultural market policy (price and trade policy measures) in the EU and specifically Germany, being more concerned with questions of food quality (e.g. pesticide residues in fruits and vegetables) than food prices. It turns out that farmers' organizations are the strongest political opponents of seasonal farm worker regulations in Germany and lobby very actively against this policy. This indicates that of the two effects outlined above (increasing output and increasing input prices), the latter dominates and that farmers would be better off without the quota system.

German farm workers represented by the German **labour union** ("Industriegewerkschaft Bauen Agrar Umwelt", IG BAU) may fear incoming competitors who drive down wages. Therefore, the union might have a strong incentive to lobby against seasonal farm workers from CEEC. However, since Germans are typically not willing to take seasonal jobs, there is

no direct competition and, hence, German wages for year-round employees in agriculture will not be affected by the wages paid for seasonal farm hands. Thus, no direct rent seeking effort by German labour unions is likely to be the driving force behind the politically induced reduction of farm labour migration. On the contrary, from the union's perspective the CEEC workers can be considered safeguards against societal pressure on union members to accept low-paid, arduous seasonal jobs in agriculture.

In theory the quota on migrant farm labour from CEECs creates jobs for **unemployed Germans** in the amount of 20% of total seasonal farm labour demand. It would be reasonable to expect this group to have a vital interest in even more restrictive labour market protection and to be the real beneficiary of the rent that is generated by this policy. Instead, experience shows that the German labour administration initially had difficulties finding Germans who were willing and able to take on this work. Only after special training programs and additional monetary rewards were issued by the labour administration, were a few positions filled by Germans. German farmers have frequently blamed policy makers for the resulting labour shortage. The lack of motivation for unemployed Germans to apply for unoccupied jobs in agriculture indicates that rent-seeking by this group is not a convincing explanation for the persistence of an inefficient agricultural policy.

Land owners are also frequently identified as the ultimate beneficiaries of protective agricultural policies. Although this is likely an important interest group with regard to the market protection of crops that are especially land intensive, less than 5% of total farm land is cultivated with seasonal, labour intensive crops in Germany (although these crops account for about 50% of total sales from crops in Germany). Therefore, there are much more attractive policy arenas for land owners to invest in lobby activities, for instance the emerging extremely land intensive production of bio energies.

Taking into account all the arguments discussed before, it is obviously hard to identify any specific interest group that clearly benefits in monetary terms from the existing policy that reduces farm labour employment. Nevertheless, the policy persists, a fact that obviously requires an alternative explanation.

Excursus: The History of Seasonal Farm Worker Policies in Germany

The history of Polish² seasonal farm workers in German agriculture started more than 100 years ago under very similar circumstances as today.

² Until 2006, more than 85% of seasonal farm workers in Germany came from Poland.

During the 19th and early 20th century, large parts of the rural population in Northeast Germany left for the newly established “boom areas” especially in the western part of the country in order to find jobs in growing industries (“Landflucht”). The influx of Poles from territories occupied by Austria and Russia was welcomed by farmers in the Northeast as replacement farm hands, but it was not welcomed by the Prussian government which feared a political destabilization due to the growing minority of foreigners permanently settling on Prussian territory. In 1885, about 40,000 Polish farm workers and their families were expelled from Prussia because of this fear (Herbert 2001).

At the same time farmers adopted labour intensive crops and, therefore, increased political pressure to re-open the border. Simultaneously, massive irregular employment evolved. As a compromise, the government introduced seasonal work permits for Poles around the year 1890. Workers were allowed to stay on German farms in the summer and fall, but had to return home for the winter. This system of seasonal work permits was retained with minor changes until 1914, and was accompanied by some 20% of irregular employment according to a contemporary estimate (Herbert 2001).

After the end of WWI, the Poles were sent home again within a few months because the administration intended to fill vacant positions with returning soldiers. However, many of these soldiers had been employed in industry prior to the war and were not willing to take jobs in agriculture. At the same time, existing working and housing conditions were regarded to be “unacceptable” for Germans, and the new socialist government grudgingly allowed some 50,000 Poles to work seasonally in East German agriculture, giving in to farmers’ pressure (Herbert 2001). The early 1920s mark the introduction of a political compromise concerning seasonal labour that is still valid today: employment is strictly limited to the agricultural sector and only allowed if no Germans are available for the jobs. At the same time attempts were made to prevent farmers from paying foreigners less than the official wage for Germans – an aim that can still be found nowadays in the official regulations for employment of seasonal farm workers (Bundesanstalt 2002).

The late 1920s, however, mark a period when legal seasonal employment of foreigners came to a halt due to very high domestic unemployment and a conservative shift in government. By 1936, the employment rate had been improved to a level at which farm workers again had become scarce and the Nazi administration again allowed a quota of 10,000 workers from Poland for the agricultural sector. This quota rose to 90,000 legal farm workers by 1939, with significant irregular employment occurring due to an unemployment rate in Poland of some 40% (Herbert 2001). During WWII, vacant positions in German

agriculture were mostly filled by forced labour such as prisoners of war or civilians from occupied countries.

In the former West Germany, the fact that networks between Poles and German farmers had already existed prior to 1989 or even 1945 seems to have played at least a minor role for the establishment of new calculative farm labour networks in Germany. Obviously, there had already been Poles working in West German agriculture and other industry sectors prior to 1989/90. These labourers had been staying legally as tourists (visa on request) in Germany and were working mostly irregularly (“moonlighting”) (Cyrus 1993), but some were also part of legal projects (project-tied workers) (Hönekopp 1997). However, in the case of seasonal farm work there were no legal programs prior to 1991.

Since April 8, 1991, Polish citizens have been allowed to enter and stay in Germany for up to three month without having to apply for a visa. However, work is strictly prohibited for individuals without permits. When this system was introduced in 1991, about 100,000 requests by name were immediately submitted, which shows that informal networks must have been established long before the seasonal work contracts were officially introduced (Velling 1995).

Seasonal contracts for workers from CEE countries are limited to 3 months. In the late 1990s the labour administration tried to regulate and limit the employment of seasonal workers from CEE countries with various restrictions that had to be removed partially only few years later: By 1997, the total employment period of seasonal workers had been limited to six months per year, but farmers could choose to spread these six months over the entire year (Gerdes 2000). In 1997 a minimum employment of 30 hours per week and six hours a day was introduced. Finally, in 1998, an attempt was made to limit the total number of seasonal workers to some 180,000, and allow each farm no more than 85% of the seasonal workers that it had in 1996. Farms that had started to plant labour intensive crops in 1997 and hence had no seasonal workers employed in 1996, were exempted from this limitation. The imposition of a quota of 180,000 contracts turned out to be insufficient to meet the needs of German agriculture. During the years 2000 to 2003, a farm would usually get the requested number of workers subject to the limitation that only 85% of these workers could be from CEECs; the remaining positions had to be filled with Germans (Abrecht 2002; Bundesanstalt 2002).

In 2005, a new coalition of conservative and social democratic parties in Germany started again a joint effort to restrict the number of farm workers by establishing the current legal framework which limits the amount of seasonal workers per farm to 80% of the farm’s total farm labour demand. This regulation had to be relaxed later since in regions with high

demand for seasonal farm labour and low domestic unemployment rate (south west Germany) virtually no German farm workers could be found.

According to German law, farmers shall not receive any financial gain by employing CEEC workers at wages that are below the German level (Cyrus 1993; Bundesanstalt 2002). Hence, farmers are obliged to pay legal tariff wages that are negotiated between the farmers' representatives and the German labour union for construction, agriculture and "environment", which includes gardening and landscaping. However, legal wages in these sectors are low and enforcement is difficult. On the other hand, farmers have to provide housing etc. for seasonal workers (Bundesanstalt 2002).

It is clear that farmers in Germany would have hired more CEEC workers for decades if they had been allowed to. CEEC workers would likely have filled vacant positions and unemployed Germans overall do not show much effort to apply for farm jobs and, thus, do not regard CEEC workers as competitors for domestic jobs. The monetary rents involved in this policy do not clearly benefit any German interest group, and the only beneficiaries due to higher wages have little or no opportunity to lobby in Germany because they are not German citizens and have no legal electoral vote. Clearly, a convincing economic explanation for the existence and persistence of this policy is missing and, therefore, alternative approaches must be considered.

The attempt of the German administration to regulate and limit seasonal farm worker policies has exhibited similar patterns for more than a century and across political systems as varied as monarchy, dictatorship and two democracies. Nevertheless, it would appear that this policy could be changed at any time without damaging the interests of any lobby group. Hence, one might argue that path dependencies should not exist. However, the German administration has not only frequently returned to the concept of regulated seasonal farm labour migration, but it also defends this political approach even today, when most other European countries have already completely freed their labour markets to workers from the new EU member states. The German administration (and policy makers) obviously seems to be locked into a situation, where restrictive migration policies are still considered desirable and unavoidable, although they have to be defended against the protest of almost all the interest groups that are directly involved.

3. Explaining Path Dependence of Political Processes by Discourse Analysis

The example of the restriction of seasonal farm workers in Germany shows that economic criteria such as rents created by a policy do not provide a comprehensive explanation of path dependent political decisions. The basic assumption used in economic as well as in social science theories³ that the capacity of actors to design and implement optimal solutions in the sense of efficiency to the problems that confront them is not compatible with many aspects of social and political behaviour and realities (Pierson 2004). There have to be different sources of positive feedback processes in the political system. Therefore, for theoretically more substantiated and empirically sound explanations of the reasons for path dependent processes, the framework needs to be enriched by an alternative theoretical concept. This concept needs to include reality constituting and designing factors such as discourses in policy analysis (Nullmeier 2001). Discourse analysis is a rich theoretical concept which offers the opportunity to understand social and political behaviour in a specific direction *ex post* and which can also be applied to empirical analyses. The results of these analyses may in future also help to identify path dependence *ex ante*.

3.1 The Concept of Discourse Analysis with Regard to Path Dependence

In a methodological sense, policy discourse analysis is a controlled analysis of politically relevant (mass) texts with the goal of finding basic and extensive coherent areas which can be regarded as the organising core of politics (Nullmeier 2001).

Different concepts of discourses are used in policy analysis (Keller and Viehöver 2006; Kerchner 2006). This paper focuses on the Foucaultian perspective of discourse practices. Foucault expects discourses to actively construct society along various dimensions and hypothesizes interdependencies between the discursive practises of a society and its institutions. Such practices, understood as texts, always draw upon and transform other contemporary and historically prior texts. Any given type of discursive practice, thus, is generated out of combinations of other analyses of collective knowledge orders and discursive practices. Therefore, a discourse is a bounded “positive” field of statement accumulation implying at the same time that other possible statements, questions, perspectives and difficulties etc. are excluded. These exclusions can be consolidated by institutions (Link and Link-Herr 1990). In this meaning discourses have a formative or constitutive power that structures basic definitions and meanings that are later on taken for granted. The historical aspect of discourses is important in forming the identities of subjects and objects (Howarth

³ The rational choice approach is often used in social sciences and features similar assumptions as in economic theories.

2002). In Foucault's opinion, a discourse is a form of power by dominating the field in which it was formed, fixing specific meanings to be employed in interpreting the social situation (Fischer 2003). Therefore, discourse analysis aims at analyzing political and politically relevant texts with the goal of finding the organizing cores of politics (Nullmeier 2001).

Linking the concept of discourse analysis with the framework of path dependence leads to the assumption that discourses and their constitutive character can be seen as explanations for self-reinforcing processes in politics because political discourses are always built on historically prior texts so that the past strongly determines future political actions. The taken-for-granted nature of definitions and meanings structured by discourses creates (psychological and institutional) switching costs for policy makers and administrations.

Critiques may argue that this definition of discourse would never allow a change in politics, something that is obviously in conflict with political reality. At this point and with regard to policy changes, a specific character of discourses has to be discussed. As Fischer (2003) argues, a most fundamental question discourse analysts have to ask is whether the used story line of an issue contributes to a fixed 'homogenized' problem or whether it leads to the opening up or 'heterogenization' of established discourses. In this sense the function of story lines is to condense large amounts of factual information intermixed with normative assumptions and value orientations that assign meaning to them (Fischer 2003). They are the main mechanism for creating and maintaining the discursive order. Other authors define them as "collective symbols" which are "cultural stereotypes", used and established collectively (Drews, Gerhard and Link 1985: 265). The two decisive characteristics of story lines are the determination of rational but also emotional knowledge based on a simplifying nature. Linked to this knowledge is a related logic and option of action. These characteristics are highlighted especially in conflicting discourses when collective symbols can dramatize the interpretation of a situation and at the same time produce the necessity to normalise this perceived situation. Opening routines is facilitated by exogenous crises or shocks. At such points, events especially highlighted by media and politics can have great impact on the direction and quality of discourses (Jäger and Jäger 2007).

Since the breaking of existing paths requires external shocks in order to allow the necessary mindful deviation (Garud and Karnøe 2001a), the mechanism of discourses and the requirement for changing policy are concepts that can provide rich explanations for path dependency, the breaking of paths and the creation of new ones well.

3.2 Discursive Policy Analysis: Methodological Opportunities

Existing rules and conventions constituting the social order are routinely reproduced and reconfirmed in actual speech situations. It is not trivial to break up these routines (Hajer 1995). Discursive policy analysis conceptualizing path dependence has the task to uncover the defining claims of a particular position. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the structure, style and historical context of the arguments to understand why some modes of argumentation serve effectively and justify specific actions, while others do not (Hajer 1995). Against this background, the most promising starting point for applying discourse analysis as a concept of path dependence is an analysis on the micro level. From a Foucaultian perspective, the goal here is to uncover the ways discourses embedded in institutional practices function to reproduce the existing power relationship (Fischer 2003). The discourse analysis can contribute to the understanding of what the relevant utterances mean. This requires approaching the institutional setting as an “argumentative field” in which statements are made.

The concept of discourse analysis combines power and communication on a theoretical meta-level. Therefore, the question is raised how the concept can be applied empirically. Since discourse analysis has recently become very popular in qualitative analyses in political science, empirical studies with a Foucaultian background predominate. However, there are also quantitative analyses that reconstruct existing discourses. A first analysis with regard to path dependence combined qualitative and quantitative analyses in order to mirror the synchronical dimension of the BSE crisis as well as the diachronical dimension of agricultural policy (Feindt, Kleinschmit and Theuvsen 2005).

Discourses take place at different levels: media, politics, science, literature, administration etc. Identifying and explaining positive feedback processes in politics requires, of course, the analysis of the political as well as the media discourse. While the first is a sign of political behaviour, the latter provides a master forum including virtually everyone. It is “*the major site of political contest because all of the players in the policy process assume its pervasive influence*” (Marx Ferree et al. 2002, 10).

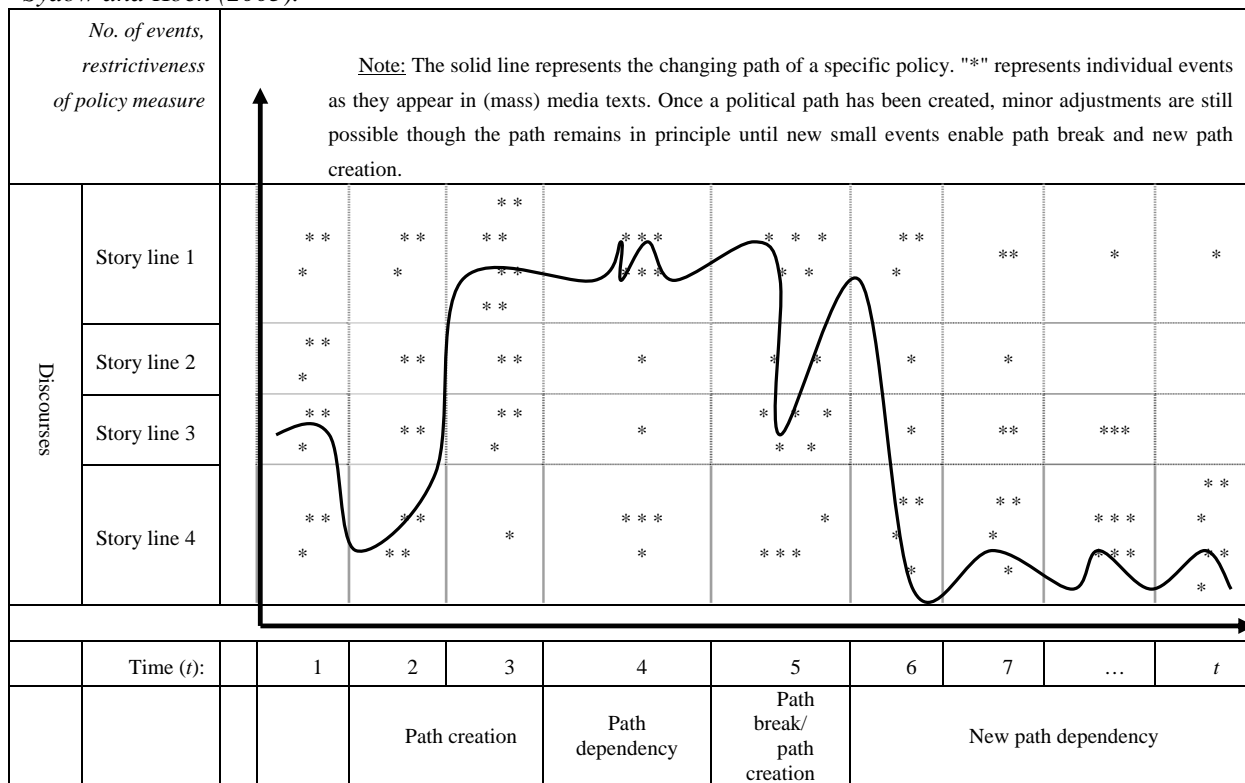
With regard to path dependence processes in politics, two main categories may help to explain positive feedback processes as well as path breaking or path creation: actors and story lines. Those who speak in the discourse represent the interests of collective actors, for instance government, political parties, NGOs, labour unions etc. This position is very powerful, especially in the media. These speakers have the chance to give their interpretative pattern of a problem and, thus, actively shape the discourse, and they can be connected to the

used story lines. Thus, considering the diachronic dimension of the discourse, the prevalence of certain speakers and story lines can be interpreted as path dependence, i.e. the supremacy of a predominant mental model or frame of reference. On the other hand, considerable changes in the composition of the speakers' ensemble or the emergence of new ideas underlying new story lines are indications of path breaking and path creation processes.

Analysing texts is a very important but not the only element of discourse analysis. It is necessary to reflect the context behind the text, because the text is only a sign of discursive activities. Therefore, a comprehensive discourse analysis also has to consider the policy arrangement, such as the affected institutions, actors and their relationships with regard to networks and power.

Figure 1 illustrates the role of texts and speeches (symbolized by asterisks “*”) within various story lines, that in turn are all relevant for a specific discourse. The discourse leads political decision makers to take certain actions and to implement certain policies. This bundle of political actions results from a discourse's stage at a certain point in time as well as in previous stages and is represented by the black line in figure 1. If a discourse is clearly dominant and supersedes alternative discourses, policies will be strongly influenced by the taken-for-granted interpretations represented by this discourse. As a consequence, path dependences can emerge. But the solid line also shows that path dependencies in politics do not necessarily imply that a given set of policies remains completely unchanged. If the relative strength of a certain story line is significantly altered by external shocks, for instance an economic crisis, existing paths may break up and new paths may be created through the imposition of a different mix of political actions.

Figure 1: Discourses, Story Lines and Path Dependency in Politics. Source: Own based on Schreyögg, Sydow and Koch (2003).



3.3 Illustrative Example: Restricting Seasonal Farm Workers: Expected Results of Discursive Analysis

As mentioned above, no results of empirical analyses are available so far. But, nevertheless, at this point of the research project the restrictive policies against seasonal farm workers will be used as an illustrative example to visualize what results can be expected from a discourse analysis.

With regard to the argument that historical aspects of discourses are important in forming the identities of subjects and objects (Howarth 2002), the example of the restriction of seasonal farm workers should be analysed in a diachronical dimension.

One of the first texts on the restriction of seasonal farm workers is part of a letter written by Chancellor Bismarck in February 1885 In which he claimed that even if agriculture were the most important economic sector of society, it is the lesser evil that this sector would lack manpower than that the state and the future would have to suffer (after Herbert 2001, 17). This statement is part of a discourse on the political level. It reveals the story line of the idea of nationality which is threatened by foreigners. The idea of nationality in this regard is strongly combined with the aspect that work is a value in itself. Therefore, foreign workers are seen as a danger that takes jobs that are needed by domestic workers.

The discourse of unemployment is one of the prevailing discourses in Germany. It includes strong emotions which are often used in (conflicting) political as well as media discourses. This dominant story line is backed up by a second one. In this second story line it is claimed that unemployed people who receive money from the state without working for it are defrauding the social security system. The implication is that unemployed people should be forced to do work on the farms instead of seasonal farm workers: “Obvious refusal of work should directly lead to a reduction of benefits.” (Süddeutsche Zeitung, August 10, 2006). Despite their very different basis, both story lines support the restriction of seasonal farm workers.

A third conflicting story line which can be currently identified is the suffering sector of agriculture. A prevailing and often used argument of agricultural actors is that harvesting is not manageable due to a lack of manpower: “German farmers need help from East Europe” (AFP, April 13, 2007) is a typical dictum.

Recently the former two story lines have dominated the discourse on seasonal farm workers. Following the definition of Foucault, the discourse practices are not independent of the social situation. Institutions resulting from the prior historical discourse on seasonal farm workers, such as the government bureau that administers the quota system, take (direct or indirect) part in the discourse with the goal of preserving the *status quo*. But other powerful actors are also taking part in this discourse, for example the German federal ministry of agriculture and the labour union of agriculture (IG BAU). In this regard the discourse is already a result of power, but it also constitutes power. Discourse analyses can reconstruct the speech situation and, therefore, reveal the power relations in the discourse. Analysing the discourse of the restriction of seasonal farm workers will make it possible to identify dominant speakers and their story lines. Thus, the discourses can provide an explanation for path dependent processes, in this case in agricultural policy.

5. Conclusions

Conventional models from economic as well as political sciences explain path dependency of policies by looking back and identifying exogenous elements that cause, shape, and constitute a specific path dependency. A typical explanation refers to the rents generated by a specific policy, and the rent-seeking behaviour of stakeholders who benefiting from this policy. This paper has introduced discourse analysis as a theoretical concept and an empirical methodology that may enable the endogenization of path creation, path dependencies and path breaking in the field of policy analysis.

Discourse analysis highlights that specific elements in a political discourse heavily influence and predetermine the policy creation path and, therefore, must be taken into account when political path dependencies are analysed. Discourses are too complex to be quantified in their entirety. Nevertheless, if story lines of (mass) media and political as well as scientific texts are considered as representatives of the underlying discourses within a society at a certain point in time, and if these story lines can be framed and coded in a meaningful way, then the absolute and relative intensity of certain story lines over time can be quantified and assessed empirically. Political path creation can be modelled as a process that is driven by discourses after they have been approximated in this manner.

As an illustrative example how discourse analysis can be linked with the concept of path dependence in politics, this paper has chosen the policies applied by the German administration in order to restrict the employment of seasonal farm workers from CEEC in Germany. The existence of this farm labour policy cannot readily be explained by economic activities that would benefit one or the other interest group in monetary terms. Instead, the general discourse of unemployment in Germany, and various story lines within this discourse, explain much better the underlying forces that have shaped policy vis-à-vis seasonal farm labour over time. A quantification of these story lines remains to be done and will enable empirical assessments of the question how changes within this discourse over time have changed the policy path. In combination with conventional policy analysis, this method appears to be a promising complement that will allow to explain why some policies turn out to be path dependent and how they become path dependent, and whether the discourses around certain policies can be approximated reasonably well through the qualitative and/or quantitative reconstruction of the speaking actors and corresponding story lines.

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