Power and Influence: The Early Work of Leo Huberts

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In the field of integrity studies, the contribution of Dutch academics, Leo Huberts in particular, has been notable. In the second half of the 1990s Huberts started publishing on corruption first and moved on to the broader perspective of ethics and integrity in public organizations. Perhaps not many people know that Huberts began his academic career in a different field of research. Starting with his master's thesis at the Catholic University Nijmegen (now: Radboud University) in 1978, he spent more than 10 years doing research on power and influence on political decision-making. What is his legacy in this field?

1 Empirical Contribution: Influence of Social Movements and Civil Servants

In 1988 Huberts defended his PhD thesis at Leiden University, on the political influence of non-governmental organizations on decision-making about the construction of national highways (Huberts, 1988). His research project (1982-1987) was part of a larger research programme, at the Sociological Institute of Leiden University, called 'Non-governmental organizations and power', on the influence of movements like the anti-nuclear movement, the squatter movement and that of the environmental activists. A year later he published some of his main findings in the long gone journal *International Social Movement Research* (Huberts, 1989) and concluded that environmental organizations influenced five of the nine decision-making processes he had analysed. Characteristics of the decision-making process appeared to be a more determining factor in the extent of the influence than the characteristics of the environmental organization itself or the activities it employed: when public actors were divided and the opposition of private actors like businesses was weak, the environmental organizations were most successful.

The qualitative method of process analysis that Huberts used for analysing the decision-making processes allowed him to also look at the influence of other categories of actors. Most remarkable are his conclusions about the power of civil serv-

ants, which in the Dutch context is often referred to as 'the fourth power'.[1] He concluded:

> Decision-making about national highways in the Netherlands was dominated by civil service agencies as well as regional and local governments. (…) The role of the bureaucracy as well as its complexity and diversity are often underestimated. Bureaucratic opportunity structures might be more important for the success of influence attempts by movements than responsiveness of politicians and political parties. (1988, p. 423)

Proposition no. 8 of the thesis shows that Huberts was convinced of this bureaucratic power and seemed both worried and reassured by it:

> Top civil servants appear to be more knowledgeable, open, flexible and less suspicious in interview settings than politicians. That somewhat softens the fact that we are governed by civil servants instead of by politicians. (Propositions attached to Huberts, 1988)

Huberts' concern about the influence of civil servants can be traced further back, to the research he did for his master's thesis at the Catholic University Nijmegen (Huberts, 1978). The thesis research was part of a larger research project, at the Political Science Institute, called 'Economy and democracy in city development'. From the Introduction it is clear that Huberts' main motive for the project was the societal relevance of researching the influence of retail businesses on the development of the city centre of Nijmegen. According to him, citizens and citizen pressure groups, who were fighting for a fairer distribution of space, could use it to find out how city development policies of local government are influenced by businesses, with the ultimate goal of fundamentally changing the distribution of power and influence in (local) society. "For several reasons it is impossible to separate political science from politics", he wrote in the preface of his thesis. "In my opinion science could and should contribute to society, and should be political." With that opinion he fitted seamlessly in the politically engaged student community in Nijmegen in the 1970s.

An important conclusion of his thesis is that the civil servants of the city of Nijmegen were strong supporters of the interests of the retail businesses in the city centre, mostly for reasons of strengthening the city's competitive position and probably not as a result of an explicit deal. He described how the executive board of the city of Nijmegen explicitly tried to take the lead in the city centre development process and put the 'technocratic civil service' in its place. The effect of the civil servants' attitude was that the retail businesses achieved most of their goals

1. The term 'fourth power' was introduced in the Netherlands by Crince le Roy (1971, 1976), who referred to the power of civil servants, in addition to the three classical powers of the trias politica model: the legislative, the executive and the judicial power.

without having to undertake many influence attempts. Apparently, these findings have stayed with Huberts for many more years.

2 Methodological Contribution: Measuring Influence

Although Huberts published several journal articles and a book on the position and influence of social movements in the Netherlands (Huberts, 1988, 1989; Huberts & Van Noort, 1988, 1989), his doctoral research has been more influential in a methodological sense. From the start of the project in 1982, he focused not only on the empirical findings concerning the influence of social movements, but also on measuring political power and influence. For decades social scientists have been discussing the difficulties in establishing which actors are powerful in a community or society. Huberts dedicated several long chapters to it in his master's thesis in 1978 and then, after starting his doctoral research in 1982, entered the debate.

In 1983, a year into his doctoral research, Huberts wrote an unpublished report, entitled 'Influence and power: a first exercise' (Huberts, 1983), in which he discussed two main elements of the academic debate on power and influence: the conceptualization of power and influence – two related but hardly distinguishable concepts according to him – and the related problem of measuring power, by establishing a causal relationship between the influencer and the decision that is taken. These two elements of the debate are closely connected: different methods of measuring power and influence are based on different conceptual definitions of power and influence. In the report, Huberts delved deep into the methodological literature on causality ('kausaliteit') in the social sciences, discussing the work of Lukes (1974), Blalock (1964), Tacq (1982) and Braam (1975).

A few years later, when the doctoral research was nearing completion, he published an article (together with colleague Wim van Noort) in which we can see how the methodological 'exercise' had landed (Huberts & Van Noort, 1986). In *Sociologische Gids* they criticized the rather rigid and quantitative methods of the Dutch sociologists Van Goor, Ellemers and Braam (1985), and presented their own method for establishing influence in complex decision-making processes, which was by then called the 'intensive qualitative method'.[2] As causality cannot be proven with 100% certainty in a non-experimental setting, Huberts and Van Noort argued that plausibility is enough and presented an extensive list of tools ('hulpmiddelen') and indicators to help establish the influence of different actors in a decision-making process. The method Huberts and Van Noort described bore a strong resemblance to the decision method developed by Robert Dahl in his famous 'Who governs?' (1961) about the power structure in New Haven. In the academic literature, three classical approaches to examining political power and influence in a community are identified: they are based on power reputations (rep-

2. Later this will become the 'intensive process analysis'.

utation method), on positions of actors (position method) and on decision-making (decision method). Essential for the decision method is that influence is measured by focusing on participation and goal attainment in decision-making processes.

In his PhD thesis in 1988, Huberts built on this methodological framework but added the work of the Australian philosopher John Mackie (1974). Mackie's so-called INUS condition (Insufficient but Necessary part of the set, which is Unnecessary but Sufficient for the result) is a more practical interpretation of the concept of a 'cause', and makes it somewhat easier to 'prove' a causal relationship in a specific situation. The method that Huberts developed on the basis of this interpretation of causality is an intensive method of analysis of a single decision-making process, meant to determine which actors have influenced the final decision and to what extent. Huberts' method takes the final decision and the decision-maker as a starting point and uses (policy) documents, media coverage and qualitative interviews with the main actors for a detailed reconstruction of the (inter)actions, zooming in on the moment that the decision-maker apparently made up his mind and then searching back in time for the influence attempts most likely to have determined this position. The method formulates rules as to how to trace the process, how to identify actors who have exercised influence, how to eliminate actors without influence and how to assess the degree of influence of different actors (Erdoğan, 2016, pp. 85-87).

It took several more years before the method developed for measuring influence got an actual name. In 1990, after finishing his doctoral research and working as a policy adviser, Huberts moved to the Vrije Universiteit, where he started teaching the course 'Methods for measuring influence' with Jan Kleinnijenhuis. The two of them invited several Dutch authors to contribute to an edited volume covering the most important methods (Huberts & Kleinnijenhuis, 1994). In this book, Huberts gave a detailed description of his method and called it – 'for the lack of anything better', as he added – the 'intensive process analysis'. Since then the method (which is sometimes called IPA) has been used by generations of Dutch students for master thesis research, and at least five PhD theses using the intensive process analysis or an adjusted version of it have been published (Arts, 1998; Peters, 1999; Van Keulen, 2006; Luitwieler, 2009; Erdoğan, 2016).

Despite the PhD theses referred to, in an international context the intensive process analysis is less known than the original decision method it is based on. Another link that can be made is that between Huberts' intensive process analysis and the better known method of process tracing. Process tracing is a research method for tracing causal mechanisms using detailed, within-case empirical analysis of how a causal process plays out in an actual case (Beach, 2017). The method is often used in the field of international relations and EU studies, mostly to measure the influence of one (type of) actor, like interest groups or member states. Process tracing as a method is theory driven and relies strongly on theorization about causal mechanisms linking causes and outcomes and then trying to identify the

observable empirical manifestations of these theorized mechanisms. The intensive process analysis, on the other hand, has been developed primarily as a method to satisfy empirical curiosity and is mostly used for collecting empirical data on power and influence in one or more decision-making processes. According to Erdoğan (2016), the intensive process analysis is a more refined version of the process-tracing method, better fit to study the influence of actors on the outcomes of a decision-making process.

3 Power and Decision-Making in the Netherlands

I want to conclude this contribution by acknowledging the influence that Huberts' work has had on my own. In 1999 I defended my PhD thesis at the Vrije Universiteit on power and national decision-making in the Netherlands, on the basis of research using the intensive process analysis (Peters, 1999). Huberts, not a full professor at that time yet, was the co-promoter during my doctoral period, which lasted from 1993 till 1999. I applied Huberts' intensive process analysis to key issues in three different fields of national policy: child care policy, the decision-making about the reform of the Dutch police force, and rural area policy. The analysis focused on six main categories of actors: parliament, cabinet ministers, civil servants, local and regional governments, interest groups and advisory bodies. The results of the analysis were used to test a series of qualitative 'hypotheses', or commonly held assumptions, on the power distribution in Dutch national politics. Examples were the powerless parliament hypothesis, the iron ring hypothesis (on the power of interest groups) and, of course, the fourth power hypothesis (on the power of the civil service).

The Dutch political system appeared to be rather open and pluralist: in every policy field different actors, both governmental and non-governmental, succeeded in influencing major policy decisions. It cannot have come as a surprise to Huberts that civil servants proved to be the most powerful category of actors in all three policy fields. Whether this means the Dutch civil service is a real 'fourth power' is a matter of interpretation, but civil servants definitely had quite some influence in all three policy fields. Only during the months in which a new cabinet is formed ('kabinetsformatie') could civil servants be 'put in their place'; in the process of drafting the coalition agreement for the new government, politicians had the upper hand, only to hand it back to the civil servants afterwards. The importance of cabinet formation in the decision-making on the police reform was the focus of a chapter written for an edited volume on the Dutch tradition of consensus, consultation and compromise, often called the 'polder model' (Peters & Huberts, 1998). Several years later, in an international edited volume, the case of the rural area policy was framed as an apt illustration of 'polder politics' in the Netherlands: the long decision-making process, the dispersed responsibilities, the many actors entangled in a

multiform political arena with no clear power centre; all in all it was a good example of the Dutch consensus democracy (Peters, 2001).

The general theme of power and influence in decision-making has been an important one for me ever since. Trained as a public administration scholar, I entered the political science community with this PhD thesis. My work, both inside and outside of academia, has always been on the interface between politics and administration, often touching upon power and power relations. In 2013, after working 15 years in politics, administration, research and consultancy, I re-entered the academic world as the holder of a special chair in local and regional governance at Maastricht University. In my inaugural speech, entitled 'The Local State', I used the power perspective to identify the many unanswered questions about the political power distribution at the local and regional level (Peters, 2014). Questions about the influence of business actors, whether it is retail businesses, the tourism industry or multinationals, and about the more general power distribution and inequalities in (local) society, are as relevant as they were when Huberts wrote his master's thesis about it in 1978.

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