PSJ Policy Studies Journal

The Policy Studies Journal, Vol. 38, No. 1, 2010

Local Media and Experts: Sources of Environmental Policy Initiation?

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Research on the process of policy change often involves a direct or indirect analysis of the roles of policy entrepreneurs and the mass media. In Colorado, beginning in 1998, twelve communities decided to obtain water rights for recreational in-channel purposes such as kayaking and whitewater rafting. These water rights stirred political controversy within some communities in Colorado related to spending public money, appropriate uses of water, and the role of recreation in local economies. Using a comparative case study research method, this research analyzes the role that policy entrepreneurs and local media coverage of recreational water rights played in initiating policy change in local communities. The most critical finding from this study is that in communities where citizens acted as policy entrepreneurs there was more controversy, less positive media coverage, and more media coverage early in the process. This case contradicts the assumption that local media coverage helps to highlight policy problems within communities. It supports the idea that experts wield higher levels of influence than citizens in promoting policy agendas.

KEY WORDS: environmental policy, local government, water rights policy, mass media, policy entrepreneurs, policy initiation

While mass media are generally assumed to influence policy and political processes, rarely is this influence analyzed in the environmental policy literature. This article argues that mass media can potentially help to raise awareness about policy issues, propose specific policy solutions, or broadly advocate for policy action (see Kennamer, 1992; Paletz, 1999; Rogers & Dearing, 2007, for example). Similarly, actors who fill the role of policy entrepreneurs often influence policies and processes in these same ways (Kingdon, 1995). These potentially complementary forces are analyzed here in a comparative case study research design to understand the roles of the media and policy entrepreneurs in initiating policy change in local environmental policy processes.

This article was originally presented at the 2009 Midwest Political Science Association Annual Conference, April 2–5, 2009, Chicago, Illinois. Thank you to Christopher Weible, Peter deLeon, David Konisky, and five anonymous reviewers for their invaluable comments and insight to help improve this article.

Published by Wiley Periodicals, Inc., 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA, and 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ.

This article analyzes the initiation of policy change—an often overlooked point in the policy cycle that overlaps with agenda setting and policy adoption. While some scholars have focused on the importance of information and attention in the policy cycle (see Jones & Baumgartner, 2005, for example), many look past the initial phase of policy initiation to the broader processes of agenda setting and policy change. One of the limitations of studying the policy cycle is the potential to assume a single decision-making venue. In fragmented political systems, however, there are multiple decision-making venues and a decision in one venue often requires approval in another venue. In almost every instance of policy change, there are likely multiple decision-making points when consideration of new policies begin, which may often bleed into later processes. This is especially true with local governments within a federal system.

The study investigates the role of policy entrepreneurs and mass media in initiating policy change within local governments. Beginning in 1998, 12 Colorado communities applied for recreational water rights to maintain stream flows for kayaking and whitewater rafting. This new water right allowed communities to keep water in the river for recreation, an important departure from traditional forms of water rights in Colorado, and one that required significant legal and political effort to pass within local governments and in statewide legislation. The controversy that ensued spanned the state of Colorado. This research analyzes the policy process within each of these Colorado communities, and what factors influenced the initiation of policy change in recreational water rights. Clearly, there are important causal influences in this case beyond just entrepreneurs and mass media coverage, but as is outlined below, these two influences are of particular interest when examining the process of policy initiation in the policy cycle and are, therefore, the focus of this article.

This article begins by summarizing the significant literature related to the study of policy change, and the specific influences of mass media and policy entrepreneurs. The case study is then outlined, followed by an explication of the research methods used. Finally, the data are presented, followed by a discussion of the importance of these data and conclusions based upon the research findings presented. Local media can help to raise awareness about problems, identify solutions, and push for policy change. Entrepreneurs often fill these same roles. Based upon this commonality, this research investigates: *what roles do local media and policy entrepreneurs play in local environmental policy change?*

Literature

Prevalent in the policy change literature are analyses of mass media influence and policy entrepreneurship on policy change (see Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Jones & Baumgartner, 2005; Kingdon, 1995, for example). The literature on policy change demonstrates that both of these forces can be important to identifying policy problems, initiating policy ideas, and directing policy change in certain directions. Based on the literature, we expect that media and policy entrepreneurs will be most

effective in drawing attention to policy problems rather than the specific policy solutions. In addition, we expect that experts acting as policy entrepreneurs may be particularly effective in this role.

Mass Media Influence in Policy Decisions

The literature related to media influence over public policy outcomes is disconnected, at best. Mass communication theories provide the most comprehensive analyses of media effects, but often do not look specifically at public policy processes. Public policy literature, on the other hand, typically does not specifically or completely analyze the role of media in the policy cycle. This section outlines the important areas of previous research, the existing disparities in the literature, and the need for a comprehensive analysis of media influence on policy processes.

Probably one of the most important functions of the media is shaping perceptions of saliency of public policy issues. Media influence on the public's issue agenda can determine the issues that citizens and policymakers consider important (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs, 2005), also called the "transmission of salience" of issues to the public (McCombs, 1997, p. 433). Media coverage of issues, measured by quantity, prominence, and frequency, will translate to corollary placement of those issues on the governmental and public issue agendas. It is not the information contained in media messages itself that is important to agenda setting, but rather that the issue in question garnered the attention to begin with and the corollary societal importance placed on the issue (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Saliency relates to agenda setting and this relation has been summarized by Rogers and Dearing (2007) into three points: (i) mass media influence the public agenda; (ii) the public agenda influences the policy agenda of decision makers; and (iii) the policy agenda can have a direct influence on the media agenda. To expand this theory to a discussion of policy change, from Kingdon's (1995) perspective, through highlighting certain issues and ignoring others, local media are more likely to raise awareness about policy problems rather than promote policy alternatives. In his own research, however, Kingdon argued that media have limited influence over issue agendas because of the fleeting nature of coverage and the lack of depth and substance in reporting.

The salience of issues on the public agenda can have important effects on policy outcomes also by shaping public opinion toward policy issues. Paletz (1999) states that, "the public are recipients, willing or unwilling, passive or active, of this media content, over whose making they have little direct influence" (p. 330). The pervasive influence of media can directly affect public opinion (Entman, 1989). Entman states that, "the only means of influencing what people think is precisely to control what they think about" (p. 77). Media agenda setting relates to the process of policy change because "media content is pervasive and rife with explicit and implicit political meaning" (Paletz, 1999, p. 330) and the salience that media create in relation to a given issue can influence public opinion related to policy issues.

Important to the idea of issue salience is the concept of inference, according to Miller and Krosnick (2000). They argue that journalists select stories based on their

view of what is important in society. By inference, individuals assume that the issues covered by the media are the most important issues of the day. "Journalists, selecting and highlighting a few stories each day, determine which issues are treated as important in the news" (Paletz, 1999, p. 141). Through this inference, journalists determine the salience of certain policy issues over others.

The framing of those local policy issues is also important to policy outcomes. Media can influence issue agendas by portraying an issue as positive or negative; citizens will then be influenced by media to hold similar opinions (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). By discussing local issues in a positive manner, local media can garner support for issues, while the opposite can also be true. Nicodemus (2004) found that of two newspapers in a single community, one framed a local environmental issue in a proactive, positive, communitarian light, while the other emphasized the difficulties of making a difference in the political process and of challenging the polluter. Nicodemus argues that the framing of stories in this context may have impacted the community's likelihood of collective action toward policy change. The argument of causality, however, is weak in this case study.

Beyond the role that media can play in influencing public opinion and policy agendas, the broader political agenda and climate are also shaped through a process by which "social problems originate on the media agenda . . . are subsequently transformed into political issues" (Anderson, 1993, p. 25). Agenda building is the process through which media can influence not only the issues we consider important, but also the political context within which we discuss those issues (Graber, 2006). By directing public attention to certain aspects of the policy process through the transmission of salience, media wield influence over the political process (Kennamer, 1992).

Until now, this review has focused on the influence mass media have on citizens. Also of vital importance is the influence that media messages may have on elected officials—those who actually make the policy decisions. It is a "two-stage process: the media first influence citizens, who in turn influence the elected and appointed public officials who represent them" (Kennamer, 1992, p. 105). "The policy agenda consists of issues commonly perceived by public officials as meriting governmental attention and those actively being considered by them for action. The interplay between politicians and the press produces this agenda" (Paletz, 1999, p. 314).

Some scholars argue that the public agenda influences policy agendas and elite decisions (Rogers & Dearing, 2007) while others argue that this is not the case. Studies have shown that while media coverage may increase the salience of an issue on the public agenda, this may not translate to policy action unless it fits into the plans of political leaders (Yanovitzky, 2007). This is consistent with Arnold's (1990) argument that elected officials will avoid making decisions that are both unpopular and visible. Their personal agendas and plans come into play and, at times, work to promote public agenda items, while at other times those issues are ignored. This is also consistent with Kingdon's (1995) finding that media messages are pervasive, but not as influential as policy actors.

This brief literature review highlights the role of media agenda-setting, or the transmission of salience, framing of policy issues, and the role that media play in

shaping public opinion. All of these processes are at work when scholars make statements and assumptions about media effects on policy processes. These potentially important influences bring together scholarship from mass communication, political science, and public policy. The most important missing elements in these bodies of literature are twofold: (i) most media scholarship related to the policy cycle does not establish causality—this research is largely left to the experimental fields where scholars seek to establish the power of framing (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987, for example); and (ii) there is no consistent and well-developed theory of media influence over policy processes. To this second point, scholars generally attempt to reconcile the theories of media agenda setting, framing, and public opinion. However, in an age of an increasing number of media messages and sources, it is more complicated to establish this theory than in decades past when simple seminal theories of media effects were proposed (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, for example).

Based on this literature, we expect that local media coverage will be influential over local policy decisions. The coverage will likely be *more important in highlighting the salience of problems* to be addressed rather than promoting or developing policy alternatives. This is due in part to the limitations of public attention on the details of policy issues and in part because of the ability of local media to raise awareness about issues and shape our collective issue agenda. This also means that local media may be especially important to translating complex technical issues for citizens. Local media coverage may also be more influential than state, regional, or national media coverage in helping to highlight policy problems within communities. In a local government context, local media are the primary or only sources of information about policy issues for citizens. Not only does this speak to the potential importance of media in a local government context, but it also highlights the importance of limiting the number of media sources when attempting to analyze media influence on the policy cycle. By analyzing local media influences in a local government context, it is possible to eliminate many of the countervailing messages that may confuse state or national research on media influence. While it will eventually be necessary to evaluate more complex media environments, when attempting to reconcile the disparate theories presented above to develop an understanding of media influence on local public policy, simplicity of research design will help develop a deeper understanding of media influences in local policy processes.

Policy Entrepreneurs

The literature on policy entrepreneurship is far more coherent and effectively developed than the scholarship on mass media in the policy process. We know that policy entrepreneurs are advocates for policy proposals who may or may not be affiliated with government. They may be groups or individuals. Their defining characteristic is a "willingness to invest their resources—time, energy, reputation, and sometimes money—in the hope of future return" (Kingdon, 1995, p. 122). These entrepreneurs help to "change the direction and flow of politics" (Schneider & Teske, 1992, p. 737), which in turn results in important policy changes.

These entrepreneurs influence the flow of policy systems, but they do not control the flow. Policy entrepreneurs promote innovation in public policies through "the generation, translation, and implementation of new ideas," but they do not shape policy alone (Roberts & King, 1991, p. 147). The presence of policy entrepreneurs in policy venues increases the likelihood of political consideration of policy choices, but it does not guarantee policy change (Mintrom, 1997). Mintrom argues that policy innovation is related to policy entrepreneurship. These political innovators "generate creative policy solutions, redesign governmental programs, and implement new management approaches to revitalize the public sector" (King & Roberts, 1992, p. 173).

Political or policy elites, citizens, and experts can all act as policy entrepreneurs and their influence may differ according to a variety of political advantages or disadvantages such as personal resources. For example, city managers act as entrepreneurs when citizens demand or require change and elected officials do not provide that change (Teske & Schneider, 1994). This entrepreneurship is based upon their expertise in city governance. Scientific experts can also act as policy entrepreneurs in policy venues relevant to their scientific expertise (Hart & Victor, 1993). Experts and political elites have the ability to influence policy change to a different degree than do citizens. The expertise that political elites or technical experts have may help them to overcome daunting barriers to entry in local politics (Teske & Schneider, 1994).

Regardless of who plays the role of entrepreneur, these actors display common abilities to influence the policy cycle. Mintrom and Norman (2009) describe entrepreneurs as displaying social acuity, effectively manipulating the political process to reflect their definition of policy problems, successfully building teams, and leading by example to sometimes implement successful pilot programs that promote a climate supportive of widespread change. These successful traits of entrepreneurs allow them to effectively shape the outcomes of policy debates.

When considering the importance of policy entrepreneurs, it is also important to consider the potential pitfalls of expert and elite entrepreneurship. These entrepreneurs may "play fast and loose with the public interest," resulting in negative policy consequences for communities (King & Roberts, 1992, p. 173). This potential abuse of power is checked by the deliberative processes in place in democratic governments. Despite the danger of unethical entrepreneurship, "as sources of creativity and innovation, public entrepreneurs are important catalysts for social learning and public sector renewal" (p. 189).

Based on the literature outlined above, we expect that policy entrepreneurs will be important within local community policy decisions. Further, we expect that experts acting as entrepreneurs may be especially influential to policy decisions. Experts acting as policy entrepreneurs may be most important to drawing attention to specific policy solutions within their area of expertise. It is important for this research to note that both entrepreneurs and media should be most effective in highlighting policy problems and drawing attention to issues of importance rather than promoting policy alternatives. As outlined above, we expect that local media will influence policy decisions when coverage of policy alternatives is positive and

consistent, particularly when technical policy issues are under discussion. The literature presented in the previous sections establishes that both policy entrepreneurs and local media are capable of important influences in the process of policy change. Nowhere does the literature state that these influential factors can cause or promote policy change alone, however. There are undoubtedly multiple additional influences at work within any community policy process. This research will focus on the roles that local media and policy entrepreneurs played in the case study setting presented next.

Methods

The concepts outlined above—local media coverage and policy entrepreneurship—are most effectively analyzed in a specific case setting in order to understand the complex influences that they have on policy change. An appropriate case for analysis of these theoretical issues is the case of recreational water rights policy in Colorado. Like many environmental policy issues, water rights are highly technical but still can arouse much political debate and heated discussion (Crow, 2008b; Worster, 1985). Water is a limited and vital resource, so a variety of stakeholder groups often become involved in the debate. In addition, as outlined below, this case provides a setting where a single policy issue can be analyzed across multiple cases in a comparative case study research design.

Case Study Setting: Recreational In-Channel Water Rights in Colorado

In the arid American West, water resources are highly uncertain and limited in quantity, which means that left unregulated, water supplies are likely to be overappropriated or exploited. All American states have established systems for appropriation of water resources, but the western states have instituted significantly more strict legal institutions for managing their water resources. These systems have evolved over time to reflect modern natural resource use values to varying degrees, as is the case of the prior appropriation water rights system in Colorado. Colorado water law, based on the principle of "first in time, first in right," allowed only for irrigation water rights until 1903 (Hobbs, 1997). Over the past century, Colorado water law has expanded to allow for wildlife protection, snowmaking, power generation, recreation, and other uses of water (Colorado Foundation for Water Education, 2004).

What has become known as the "Colorado Doctrine" is a water law system that has been applied throughout the West in various forms (CFWE, 2004; Hess, 1916). Prior appropriation, under this doctrine, gives priority to those water rights that were appropriated first. In order for an individual to obtain a water right, that person must divert or control the water, apply it to a beneficial use, and provide notice to other water users that may be affected by the new right (Getches, 1997). In some states, a bureaucratic process designates permits for water rights, but in Colorado all surface water rights must be adjudicated through a special water court process. Each river basin in the state has a water court through which all water rights claims are adjudicated, and all opposition to those new rights is heard. It is the responsibility of

the state to administer and adjudicate all water rights applications (Hobbs, 1999). All newer, or junior, water rights must allow the senior users on a river to take all of their water right before the juniors take any. This means that in times of drought many junior water users may not have their water right fulfilled, despite their property right to the resource. This priority is the most important element to the prior appropriation water rights system (Hobbs, 2002).

Beginning in 1998, Colorado communities tested the limits of water law in the state by applying to water courts for a new type of water use right-in-channel recreational purposes. To support recreational water uses such as kayaking and whitewater rafting, minimum stream flows are required. This led communities to seek water rights for the maintenance and protection of stream flows for recreation. When granted, these water rights marked a significant change in Colorado water law and heated political and legal battles ensued within the legislature, the courts, and communities interested in applying for the new water right. While these rights are junior to almost all water rights in Colorado (with appropriation dates starting in the late 1990s, compared to senior water rights with appropriation dates in the 1800s), opponents feared that they could have significant effects on river systems in Colorado.

There are two primary concerns that opponents voiced over recreational in-channel diversion (RICD) water rights: (i) the size of the water rights being requested, and (ii) the impact these rights would have on future development of water in Colorado. First, these water rights were very large. Golden's water right was decreed for 1,000 cubic feet per second and Chaffee County holds a water right for 1,800 cubic feet per second. To understand these water rights volumes in perspective, the Denver Water Board owns a water right for 1,020 cubic feet per second, but Denver does not divert more than 750 cubic feet per second as a maximum. This "provides the water supply for approximately 1/3 of Denver" (Kowalski, 2007). Second, even though a junior water right cannot take water before senior users, if a senior user decided to sell a water right to another user, the sale and transfer of that water right would have to ensure that the junior water rights would not be harmed. This has the effect of freezing a river's water supply picture in place from the moment a junior water right is granted. These large recreational water rights, then, can help to prevent future water diversions and development that would deplete the streams. They may also prevent (or at least make more difficult) the most common form of water transfers in Colorado—those where irrigators sell their water to municipalities for use in domestic water supplies. These transfers are increasingly important as agriculture becomes less profitable and as municipalities search for senior water rights that are most secure in times of drought to supply their ever-growing populations.

It is important to note that while any individual or entity can apply for a water right in Colorado, under state statute, recreational in-channel water rights can only be owned by sub-units of state government. There are 271 municipalities in Colorado, 64 counties, and numerous other sub-units of government (such as water conservation districts) that are eligible to apply for recreational water rights. To date, the only entities that have applied for these water rights are municipalities, counties, and water districts.

This research analyzed the process of policy change in these individual communities. Policy change here is defined as the process through which each community went to decide to apply for a recreational in-channel water right. Once filed, the water right application fell entirely under the auspices of the water court system and Colorado's strict legal precedent, statutory requirements, and constitutional principles and was therefore largely outside the realm of political decision making (Crow, 2008a). This policy process at the community level provides an excellent opportunity for developing an understanding of the important influences and concepts outlined above. Because this research and definition of policy change focuses more on the processes at work rather than the policy outputs, it is important not only to consider the literature on traditional policy change, but also to consider that this case may be somewhat different. Perhaps a term such as "policy initiation" or "policy advocacy" is more appropriate. These terms, however, do not fully encompass the power that the policy initiators or advocates may have over the process of change. Instead, consider this recreational water right policy process as a two-stage process. First, the community had to pass a policy to fund and pursue a water right. Second, that application was then beyond local authority, subject to state statutory and jurisprudential authority. This second process was not subject to the media influence and political pressure that the internal community decision process was, and was therefore not the appropriate analysis point for understanding influences over policy change. This dichotomy is not necessarily unique to this case. Local governments often address issues which are beyond local control (or at least that authority is only delegated to local control). Because of this delegation of authority from higher levels of government, this case of local policy change may be relevant to similar cases where final authority does not rest within the local government.

As of 2008, only 12 communities in Colorado had decided to apply for recreational in-channel water rights despite a growing recreational base of the Colorado economy. Due to the differences, potential difficulties of managing this new form of water right, and the entrenched political perspectives that most water rights users and managers hold, the RICD water right proved to be highly controversial. The city of Golden was the first community that applied for what we now call a recreational in-channel diversion water right, although it based its claim on previous legal precedent in cases from Fort Collins, Aspen, and Thornton. The Colorado General Assembly introduced three rounds of legislation to codify and limit this new water right (Colorado Senate Bills 216 [2001]; 62 [2005]; 37 [2006]). In addition to the political turmoil in the legislature, four water rights cases were taken to the Colorado Supreme Court due to challenges by the State of Colorado and other water users. The controversy surrounding the recreational in-channel water right in Colorado was largely settled by 2007, but the communities that applied for these water rights prove to be excellent research cases for understanding the processes of local policy change.

The Local Policy Process

Local government processes, institutions, and resources are much different than those at higher levels of government and suggest that scholars should pay increased

attention to studying these processes, as in the case of recreational in-channel diversion water rights in Colorado. Local governments, such as municipalities and counties, are thought generally to be more prone to capture by special interests (see *Federalist Paper* No. 10). This, however, is dependent on many local inputs such as homogeneity of interest groups and voter ignorance and apathy (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2000). Local governments are also often constrained by resources and personnel (Faguet, 2004).

Despite the limitations of local government capacity in many cases, local governments may, at times, be the most innovative. They are doing more with less, becoming innovative to make ends meet, and competing against one another for business and revenue (Osborne, 1993). The ability of any government to innovate and initiate policy change is likely dependent on a number of factors, which means that comparative studies are best suited to investigate the context of local government policymaking. These differences point to the importance of focusing on local environmental policy processes to a greater extent as we examine cases of policy change.

Comparative Case Study Design

This research was conducted using a comparative case study research design to analyze communities that applied for recreational water rights and the communities that could have, but chose not to. Because this study attempts to understand what Yin (2003) describes as complex social phenomena, case study method is the most appropriate and allows understanding of the complete process of policy change within a community. In this research, the dependent variable is a community's decision to apply for a recreational water right. To avoid selecting on this variable (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994), it was important to include both adopter communities and nonadopters in this case study design. The 12 Colorado communities that applied for a recreational water right were included in this study. This comparative case study research design also included a list of Colorado communities that have built or plan to build a kayak course, but chose not to apply for the recreational water right. By state statute, communities are required to build certain kayak course infrastructure in order to qualify for a recreational water right. A total of 18 communities were studied for this research, listed in Table 1. Research on these 18 communities allowed for a comparative analysis of the policy influences present in the adopter and nonadopter cases.

It is important to note that the nonadopter cases used in this study all depict nondecisions, rather than failed decisions. In each of the six nonadopter cases, the community did not, at any time, pursue the option of applying for the RICD water right.

Three data sources were used within each case study community. Interviews were conducted with 75 local policy participants and statewide water experts in Colorado between 2006 and 2007. Fortunately, in those cases where RICD policy decisions happened first (in 1998 through 2003), individuals within these communities had been interviewed on multiple occasions during the intervening years by local and national journalists, which reduced the likelihood that important details

Table 1. Comparative Case Study Design

Community	River Basin	Study Category
Golden	South Platte	Adopter
Vail	Colorado	Adopter
Breckenridge	Colorado	Adopter
Longmont	South Platte	Adopter
Pueblo	Arkansas	Adopter
Gunnison	Gunnison	Adopter
Steamboat Springs	Yampa	Adopter
Silverthorne	Colorado	Adopter
Chaffee County	Arkansas	Adopter
Avon	Colorado	Adopter
Durango	San Juan/Dolores	Adopter
Carbondale	Colorado	Adopter
Denver	South Platte	Nonadopter
Boulder	South Platte	Nonadopter
Fort Collins	South Platte	Nonadopter
Lyons	South Platte	Nonadopter
Glenwood Springs	Colorado	Nonadopter
Palisade	Colorado	Nonadopter

were forgotten. In these early cases where interviews were conducted several years later, documentation was heavily used to confirm information that interview subjects provided.

Local policy participants were identified using two methods: (i) individuals and groups named in media articles and legal and legislative documentation were contacted and interviewed by the researcher; and (ii) those participants were asked for the names of others with whom they interacted during the policy debates, focusing on adequate representation from multiple political viewpoints. The number of interview subjects selected in each community depended entirely on the policy process within each community. In two cases where very insular decision-making processes were present, only three subjects were interviewed (and these were the only individuals aware of the decision at the time it was made), while in other communities where more controversy and involvement was present, many more subjects were interviewed. The goal of the interview subject selection was not to interview a statistical sample of community members, but rather to interview every individual who was involved in or very familiar with the decision process related to RICD water rights within that community.

Second, all legal and legislative documentation of the decision and application processes was analyzed. Finally, local news media data were gathered from each community's local newspaper. These data were then analyzed to determine the stakeholders, participants, and influences that were important to policy change within each community.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was performed by coding the data and then constructing within-case narratives. These narratives were then compared across cases to determine

common influences of policy change among RICD communities. Data coding techniques used both literature as well as the data itself to create an understanding of the processes at work in the RICD case. Codes were initially created based upon the extant literature (Weston et al., 2001). This literature helps to reduce the number of potential codes from a universe of codes to a manageable number. Because it is important in qualitative research to remain open to emergent categories in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Weston et al., 2001), additional specific codes were created based upon categories that emerged from the data. By breaking down the data into their basic concepts and frames, it was possible to detect patterns in the data and determine influential variables in policy change, while maintaining a focus on the research questions that drove the study. These coding and data analysis procedures were conducted by using NVivo software, which helps to categorize and organize volumes of qualitative data sources. Each interview subject was assigned a code, which is used each time a quotation from that subject is used in this write-up. The alphabetical code describing the subject's affiliation along with a number comprise the subject code. For example, local elected officials are coded as EL. These subjects are assigned codes EL-01 through EL-07.[1]

Two complementary analytical processes were used in this research study, beyond the coding scheme. First, a within-case analysis was conducted to create a case narrative to explain the policy process within each community (Eisenhardt, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1984). These narratives draw on the data that were coded using the procedures outlined above. As data were coded, the multiple sources of data were referenced for agreements in the descriptions of processes and influences. In this manner, a single source did not provide the basis for research findings. Rather, data from multiple interviews along with legal, legislative, and media data provided the basis from which narratives were constructed. Second, a search for patterns was conducted among all cases based on the within-case analyses. The cross-case analysis was used to determine common patterns across case study communities in order to form the basis of research findings (Bourgeois & Eisenhardt, 1988; Eisenhardt, 1989). This second stage of analysis was necessary to develop an understanding of the common policy influences among all RICD communities.

Local Media Data and Analysis

Within each RICD community, archival news data were collected for a period of one year prior to the community's RICD application filing continuing through the conclusion of the RICD case. In nonadopter communities, media data were collected as far back as possible within the statewide window of RICD policy change (1998–2007). Local media sources were selected to ensure that the primary source of local news was analyzed for each community. The newspapers sampled, therefore, represent all of the local newspapers in the case study communities. Because most of these case study communities are small to medium-sized municipalities that are located outside of Colorado major metropolitan areas (Denver and the Front Range), the local source of news was expected to be more important to local policy decisions than statewide media. A total of 17 newspapers were examined in order to provide a

complete archival database of all newspaper coverage related to RICDs and white-water parks in the 12 RICD communities and six nonadopter communities throughout the entire process of policy change. Each individual newspaper article obtained from the 17 newspapers listed above for the time period from 1997 through 2007 was coded. Each paragraph in each article was coded as "positive," "negative," or "neutral," depending on the treatment of the RICD issue.

By focusing on success stories, positive cases involving economic gain as a result of kayak courses, and successful legal cases, some newspapers portrayed a more positive narrative to the RICD story. The following examples provide instances of positive media coverage, as coded in this study.

> Proponents of the recreational diversion say it could help protect the community's financial investment in the river park and economics in the county. (White, 2004b)

> Rafters and kayakers are encouraging the city to secure additional water rights . . . to keep water levels high and in better shape for their businesses. (Miller, 2004)

> Supporters of recreational water rights say it is a way to sustain river activities for fly fishing, tubing and kayaking, even when future development farther up the river calls for more water. (Metz, 2004)

The following examples, contrastingly, were coded as negative mentions of RICDs because of their focus on the arguments commonly used by opposition groups and potential reasons that an RICD water right could harm the community.

> Participants in a panel discussion . . . agreed a recreational in-channel diversion water right would not benefit Chaffee County. (White, 2004a)

> I don't see a lot of positives coming from this . . . guaranteeing water for recreation at Smelter Rapid could create shortage upstream. (Rodebaugh, 2004)

> Municipalities and landowners upstream fear the city's requested recreational water right would . . . limit any future growth and could cost thousands of dollars in legal fees. (Metz, 2004)

Those paragraphs that were simply factual in nature were coded as neutral. There was minimal neutral coverage in local newspapers. This may be due to the fact that it is the general practice of reporters to report the various "sides" of a story. Neutral content was only that content which stated a fact. Because the majority of news coverage relates the varying perspectives on a given story, most content was coded as either positive or negative. Based on this coding of each article and each paragraph within the article, statistics on the total number of positive, negative, and neutral paragraphs were calculated in order to provide an overall picture of any bias of local media coverage of RICD water rights.

In addition to news content, editorial columns were also collected and analyzed for this study. Editorials that focused on the local RICD water right or on the

statewide issue of RICDs were included in this analysis. Editorials were coded as a single supportive or negative code (as opposed to the paragraph-level analysis conducted for the news content) since each editorial advocated a single issue position with regard to RICD water rights. This analysis of articles then allowed for a systematic analysis of all articles related to RICDs in each community as well as those articles just related to the local RICD application or decision in each community.

Research Findings

Local Media Influence

Interview subjects in many RICD cases discussed the nature of local news media coverage about the community's RICD application and legal case. In other cases where interview subjects did not initiate discussion regarding media coverage, questions were posed to determine the perceived nature of media coverage as well as the quantity of media coverage in RICD communities. Recall that in order for media to influence the policy process, we expect that both positive and frequent coverage of the policy issue is necessary.

In five RICD communities, interview subjects did not report a large amount of media coverage on the RICD issue.

> I just don't recall a lot of press. [LG-13]
> It's not something that they seem to think is very newsworthy. [EL-07]
> It hasn't been very newsworthy. [WA-04]

In six of the other RICD communities, media coverage was largely described as favorable toward the RICD filing.

> It was editorialized wonderfully. [LW-06]
> The editorial board strongly favored the RICD. [LW-08]
> The articles were of the view that the city needed to obtain the RICD. [LW-05]

The following table is based upon this coding and content analysis for all media coverage for the time period outlined above (Table 2).

Based on this content analysis, it is clear that even in Chaffee County, where interview subjects described media coverage as mixed or opposed to the RICD, media coverage in 10 of the 12 RICD communities was supportive of RICD water rights and the legal cases related to obtaining those water rights. This table is limited to those articles related to local RICD cases (38.8 percent of total articles) and local editorials (4.6 percent); the additional articles that were published in local newspapers addressed local kayak courses (13.5 percent), other communities' legal cases (13.2 percent), other kayak courses (2.9 percent), legislation related to RICDs (18.5 percent), and general RICD issues (7.3 percent).

One potentially surprising finding based on Table 2 is that there are not higher levels of media coverage of this issue in newspapers with larger circulations. Golden and Denver are both covered by the Denver Post and Rocky Mountain News (which

Table 2. Local Media Coverage of RICD Water Rights

Community	# Local RICD Articles	% Positive RICD Paragraphs	% Positive Quotations in RICD Articles	% Positive RICD Editorials (of Total RICD Editorials)
Aggregate Data: Adopters	168	67.7	72.3	80.1
Golden	10	53.5	65.4	85.7
Vail	5	72	83.7	—
Breckenridge	6	74.6	92	100
Longmont	2	80	57.1	—
Pueblo	36	68.7	70.8	60
Gunnison	9	87.1	85.7	100
Steamboat Springs	23	56.4	61.6	—
Silverthorne	7	66.6	76.9	—
Chaffee County	30	58.4	57.3	40
Avon	—	—	—	—
Durango	31	39.7	50	100
Carbondale	2	87.9	94.7	—
Aggregate Data: Nonadopters	2	64.7	50	—
Boulder	—	—	—	—
Denver	—	—	—	—
Fort Collins	2	64.7	50	—
Lyons	—	—	—	—
Glenwood Springs	—	—	—	—
Palisade	—	—	—	—

closed in 2009). It was actually smaller newspapers in Pueblo, Steamboat Springs, and Chaffee County where the most local coverage was printed. This is counterintuitive only in the sense that small newspapers generally do not have the staff to conduct in-depth reporting. However, it may not be surprising in the sense that within these local communities the RICD issue may have been relatively more important than in a large municipality with many more political decisions and debates being considered.

In order for mass media coverage to influence policy change within local communities, this media coverage would have had to begin prior to policy decisions being made. This, however, was not the case in RICD communities in Colorado. Table 3 depicts the timing of the start of media coverage in each RICD community. Nonadopter cases are not included because there is no relevant policy decision to relate media coverage timing to. This table shows that in the 12 RICD communities, media coverage began after the date of RICD application filing in half of the communities (Table 3).

In the six communities where media coverage began prior to RICD application filing, the coverage still started after the decision to seek a RICD water right in four of the communities (Pueblo, Gunnison, Steamboat Springs, and Carbondale). In fact, the first article in each of these communities focused on the news that decision makers had already decided to apply for the RICD. Due to the public nature of the policy process in both Chaffee County and Durango, there was local coverage related to the issue prior to the decision to file in both communities. It is clear that overall

Table 3. Timing of Local Media Coverage

Community	Date of First Local Article	Date of RICD Application
Golden	03/01/01	12/30/98
Vail	06/25/02	12/26/01
Breckenridge	05/27/01	12/28/00
Longmont	04/13/04	12/27/01
Pueblo	11/05/01[a]	12/31/01
Gunnison	Fall 2001[a]	03/29/02
Steamboat Springs	09/27/03[a]	12/22/03
Silverthorne	03/09/05	12/27/04
Chaffee County	10/25/04[b]	12/30/04
Avon	N/A	12/27/05
Durango	06/08/04[b]	02/28/06
Carbondale	04/06/06[a]	05/02/06

[a]Communities where local media coverage began before the paperwork had been filed to apply for the RICD water right.
[b]Communities where local media coverage began before the policy decision had been made to apply for the RICD water right.

media coverage did not influence policy decisions related to RICD water rights applications in at least 10 of 12 RICD communities. Media coverage in nonadopter communities likewise did not have the ability to influence local RICD decisions based on the general dearth of nonadopter community media coverage related to local RICD water rights.

Arnold's (1990) hypothesis that political decision makers will refrain from making unpopular *and* visible decisions suggests that the potential for negative press may influence policy decisions as well. It is, therefore, possible that policymakers were influenced to select policies with which their electorate would agree in order to avoid negative press. This is an important topic for further research in similar policy settings. The findings presented here indicate that while we would expect media coverage to be an important influence in raising the salience of local policy problems (McCombs, 1997, 2005), media did not play this role in RICD communities on the whole. Another explanation must then account for RICD water rights being placed on local policy agendas and being promoted within Colorado communities.

Policy Entrepreneurs

In each case study community, policy participants were asked how the RICD issue arose, about the people or groups involved in promoting the decision to apply for an RICD water right, and the level of influence held by these people. The interview data provide clear conclusions that policy entrepreneurs, as expected from the literature, were important in each RICD community. The most important role filled by entrepreneurs was to initiate the policy idea and highlight the policy problem of maintaining water in the local river for recreation and tourism. These policy entrepreneurs came from within and outside of government and included issue experts in the field of water rights (referred to as expert policy entrepreneurs) and citizens (referred to as citizen policy entrepreneurs). The individuals who promoted the idea of applying for recreational water rights fell into three primary

categories. In six RICD communities, the water rights attorney acted as a policy entrepreneur.

> The idea came . . . through our attorneys. [LG-12]
> I think the impetus for that . . . came from our water attorney. [LW-11]

Attorneys representing a client often respond directly to the requests of that client, so it may not be surprising that attorneys were initiators in this case. In several cases interview subjects who were attorneys suggested otherwise. The interview data show that some of these attorneys were actually personal advocates for this issue.

> You had to be very passionate. You had to exude that passion, otherwise I don't think we would have won. [WA-10]

While this may not be the case for a typical attorney, it does call into question the automatic assumption that attorneys only respond to their clients' requests rather than initiating policy ideas with which they personally agree.

In six communities, government staff or elected officials acted as policy entrepreneurs, either alone or in combination with another actor.

> The lead proponent of that was a council member. [LW-05]
> The idea actually came from one of the council members. [LG-22]

Finally, in three communities, citizens advocated the idea of the RICD water rights.

> This was something that I came and lobbied council as a citizen. [EL-13]
> I think the fact that it came from a citizen and not from the government directly says something. [LR-02]

Keeping in mind that this is a technical policy issue in which we might not expect as much citizen involvement as in other environmental issues, it is critical to find that citizens were active in at least three of the case study communities.

In three communities a combination of actors promoted and advocated for the RICD water right application either collaboratively or separately. Policy entrepreneurship played a central role in the process of RICD policy change across all communities. In addition, it was water experts in 8 of the 12 RICD communities that were the entrepreneurs of RICD water rights. An important note about these findings is that when interview subjects referred to experts or elected officials as policy entrepreneurs, the most important action that was taken by these people in order to convince local government to apply for an RICD was to initiate the idea. On the other hand, when citizens were the policy entrepreneurs, they had to "lobby" or "fight" for the water right in city council meetings and other government venues. This speaks to the greater level of influence, access, and trust that expert policy entrepreneurs and elected officials had in local government policy processes (Crow, 2008a).

So based upon these data, did media or policy entrepreneurship influence RICD water rights policy in Colorado communities? Table 4 synthesizes the primary findings outlined here.

Table 4. RICD Policy Initiation

Community	Entrepreneur	% Positive Paragraphs	Timing of Media Coverage
Golden	Staff	54	After
Vail	Attorney	72	After
Breckenridge	Attorney	75	After
Longmont	Attorney	80	After
Pueblo	Attorney	69	After
Gunnison	Staff	87	After
Steamboat Springs	Citizens/City Council	56	After
Chaffee County[a]	Citizens	58	Before
Silverthorne	Attorney/Staff	67	After
Durango[a]	Citizens	40	Before
Avon	City Council	—	After
Carbondale	Attorney/Staff	88	After

[a]Communities where citizens acted as primary policy initiators.

First, we see that experts were the primary policy entrepreneurs for RICD water rights within their local communities. Second, we note that local news coverage was highly supportive of RICD water rights. Finally, in all but two case-study communities local news coverage of RICD water rights began only after policy decisions had been made. Based on these findings, this article proposes that expert policy entrepreneurs were more influential advocates and initiators of RICD water rights within Colorado communities than citizens or local media. In the cases where citizens initiated the idea of the RICD water right and local media covered the issue earlier in the debate, the controversy erupted not because elected officials opposed the idea (in fact, local officials agreed with citizens in each of these cases), but rather, because a greater number of opposition stakeholders became vocal during the process.

Contrary to our expectations based upon the literature, local media coverage did not raise awareness about RICD water rights as a policy solution or the underlying policy problem associated with obtaining those water rights (protecting the stream flows for use in recreation and tourism). This does not suggest that media are incapable of influencing local policy decisions, however. It is clear from these findings, specifically those where media coverage began prior to decisions being made and controversy ensued due to involvement by a greater number of competing stakeholders, that when media do decide to cover policy issues in a timely manner, we can expect that a greater degree of public conversation will take place.

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings from this research show that local media coverage, however supportive of RICD water rights, was unable to influence policy decisions within local communities because it began after policy decisions had already been made in 10 of the 12 case study communities. This article proposed that media coverage would likely be influential in promoting policy change by highlighting policy problems within communities. This, in fact, was not true. What the data show is that in these Colorado communities, successful policy change actually led to local media cover-

age, rather than the inverse. In RICD communities, it was expert policy entrepreneurs that raised the issue salience of RICD water rights rather than local media. Further, it was within those communities where we saw early media coverage of RICDs that we also saw some of the least supportive media coverage. Finally, these communities where there was more negative and early media coverage were also the communities where citizens were the policy entrepreneurs. In the communities where media coverage was positive and began after decisions had already been made, 8 of those 10 communities saw experts as the policy entrepreneurs for the RICD water right. Findings related to the influence of local media are especially important in this rapidly changing media landscape where newspapers are closing, journalists are being laid off, and local media are struggling to meet the demands of the changing economy. Additionally important, of course, are the potentially different influences of digital media sources over public and policy agendas (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002) and the potential effect that this could have on policy outcomes. This is an area of importance where this research could be expanded to include multiple media sources beyond local newspapers.

For those scholars who study citizen involvement in policy decisions and politics (Entman, 1989; Eveland, 2004) these findings may be disconcerting. Not only were experts far more involved in promoting policy change than citizens or elected officials, those experts were generally more effective doing so within local communities. The three communities where we saw citizen policy entrepreneurs, Chaffee County, Steamboat Springs, and Durango, were also three of the most contentious case study communities with regard to their RICD policy debates. In addition, local media coverage of these policy decisions generally began only after policy decisions had been made, was overwhelmingly supportive of policy decisions, and aided the ability of experts to push through policy change without a great deal of community debate or critical analysis on the part of outside political actors such as citizens and stakeholder groups. It appears that an absence of local media coverage allowed experts to exert a greater degree of influence over policy processes.

This research presents interesting findings related to the transparency and effectiveness with which policies are made in local communities. The especially interesting findings presented here are those related to the interaction between these forces. When investigating and analyzing policy change, it is important to consider these influences and policy changes in their appropriate context, which involve multiple forces interacting over time. This study indicates that transparency of political debates and local media coverage, which are linked normatively to democratic deliberation, are not necessarily compatible with expert policy entrepreneurship, which appears to be a common way in which policy ideas are initiated. In addition, experts may be highly effective at initiating policy discussions, while local media may actually be ineffective in this regard because many journalists decide not to cover policy discussions while debates are taking place, instead waiting for news to happen in the form of a decision.

While the findings presented here are interesting, and perhaps unsettling for some, they are based upon in-depth research conducted in 18 communities in one case study setting. It is important to follow this research with further analysis. Two

components to future research designs will be crucial to determining the generalizability of these findings: greater variety of case studies and a larger universe of cases. While the depth of this research allowed for a thorough understanding of the processes at work within Colorado communities, the ability to generalize these findings will provide the most benefit in future studies. It is important to include a larger number of cases in order to isolate the influences of these variables that are quite likely interacting.

Within this case of RICD water rights, it would also be helpful to examine other explanations of policy change. For example, because this broad case study took place over a decade, it may be possible that policy diffusion concepts can help explain the statewide process of policy change. Policy learning from other communities may be partly responsible for the expansion of this water policy throughout Colorado. In addition, local environmental attitudes and local economic dependence on the water resource may play important roles in the policy outcomes presented here. While the data presented here demonstrate that there were influential actors involved in promoting the RICD, policy change generally cannot be explained simply by pointing to one variable. It is likely that several complementary or competitive processes can help to explain what happened across Colorado between 1998 and 2007.

Finally, recreational in-channel diversion water rights may be different than other environmental policy issues due to their technical nature and their decision context (largely in water courts). Future studies should focus on a variety of environmental policy contexts, and those within which we may expect a greater degree of citizen interest. In addition, in this case there is one possible solution to protect in-stream recreational flows—the RICD water right. Scholars conducting future research may consider testing these findings in cases where there are multiple potential outcomes, and within which there may be the potential for collaborative processes rather than primarily adjudicative ones.

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Note

1. Codes for interview subjects: EL = Local elected official; ES = State elected official; CW = Colorado Water Conservation Board employee; CO = Other state agency employee; LR = Local recreation interest; WA = Water attorney; LG = Local government employee; LW = Local water provider; WP = Other water provider; ER = Environmental or recreation interest; RE = Recreation engineer.

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