

# INTRODUCTION TO “CONSTRUCTING POLICY WORK IN A CHANGING GOVERNMENTAL ENVIRONMENT”

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‘Policy’ has become such a central concept in our discussion of government that it is surprising to note that the term does not exist in most European languages (English and Dutch being the main exceptions). This serves to remind us firstly, that the focus on policy as a central organising construct is relatively new, and secondly, how much the discourse about government (both academic and professional) has been dominated by Anglophone perceptions and concerns.

While the word ‘policy’ has been in the English language for a long time (along with ‘polity’, ‘politics’ and ‘police’, all derived from the Greek *polis*, the city-state of ancient Greece), it became a central concept only in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Lasswell’s call for a ‘policy science’ (1951) embodied both a perception of government as goal-oriented, and a conviction that academic knowledge could be mobilised to identify the goals and the best way to achieve

them. This approach meshed with the expanding aspirations for government, both in the UK and the US, in the 1950s and 1960s, and gave rise to an interest in ‘policy analysis’ and ‘policy evaluation’, which was reflected in the creation of positions and organisational forms and procedures, and in the growth (mainly in the US) of graduate schools specifically oriented to ‘public policy’ teaching courses in ‘policy analysis’. ‘Policy’ became a core construct for analysing the process of government, and also the focus of a specialised form of practice: ‘policy work’. By 2000, Beryl Radin could report that (at least in the US) policy analysis had ‘come of age’ as a profession (Radin 2000). This Anglophone discourse became the ‘language in good standing’ (Schon 1971) in international organizations like the OECD, the EU and the World Bank, and in the complex world of development assistance, with ‘policy capacity’ becoming a goal for aid projects.

The policy focus has a strong normative element to it: governmental activity *should* flow from a clearly expressed choice by 'the government', which in turn *should* rest upon expert analysis of the problem and the alternative responses to it. That this was often not the case was a puzzle, a 'disconnect' (Radin 2000: 183) between the actors' experience of the policy process and the map that everyone seemed to have. It is important to remember, though, that 'policy' is only one of the constructs used to make sense of government, and has always been a way of contesting the tacit power of other constructs. Lasswell's call for a policy science, oriented to problems and outcomes, was a way of contesting the force of institutional procedure and partisan allocation in American government – 'a government of courts and parties,' as Skowronek (1982) put it. But the other constructs through which people frame and evaluate government – sectoral interest, professional expertise, institutionalised agenda, organizational jurisdiction, the established order of things, etc. – remain in play, though in policy discourse they tend to be seen only as 'obstacles' to the accomplishment of policy goals.

But while the focus on policy has implicitly been part of a reform agenda in the liberal democratic states of western Europe and North America, it has been even more so in the 'transition states' of eastern Europe, where the collapse of the communist order has been followed by a variety of political outcomes, one of which has been the emergence in the West of missionary projects for the establishment of free-market capitalism and liberal democratic institutions in the former socialist states. The diverse and long-running trajectories

through which the liberal states reached their present political arrangements, and the great political and cultural differences both among these states and between them and the West received less attention than the appeal of a common new order. They tended to be grounded in liberal individualism, and to pay less attention to the collective traditions which have been much stronger in Europe (both the liberal West and the socialist East) than in the US, which is the heartland of this thinking. These missionary projects have flourished in the aid projects of liberal democratic states, in international organizations like the OECD and the EU, and in non-government organizations like the Open Society Foundation.

The challenges for political development faced by these transitional states are nowhere more evident than in the former Yugoslavia, where state-building faces three particular challenges, of identity, political economy and internationalisation. The 'identity' challenge comes from the break-up of the federal state of Yugoslavia, with its constituent elements each asserting an identity as a sovereign state – not without internal conflict (often bloody) and external opposition. While the identities asserted for these states were long-established, it proved difficult to draw boundaries which included all those of one identity and none of any other, so the new states had to assert their claims as nation-states while coming to terms with the presence of national minorities. The 'political economy' challenge came from the collapse of the communist system as such: the disappearance of the Communist Party as a central focus for authoritative allocation, the need to develop new forms of representative govern-

ment, and the problematic relationship of these representative forms to the bureaucratic state structure. The 'internationalisation' challenge is that the new states are emerging just at a time when the nation-state is being subjected to increasing surveillance, pressure and control from outside. At one level, there is the 'global panopticon' (Pal and Buduru 2008) being constructed by bodies like the World Bank and the OECD through the use of 'governance indicators'; then there is the emergence of bodies like the World Trade Organization, whose rules can override the decisions of national governments; and finally, there is the 'shadow of the EU', which most of the countries of the former Yugoslavia have either joined or wish to join: it operates as a source of norms about government, both in terms of practices and substantive content. The new states discover that they have reached independence only to find that the rules of the game have been changed.

It was in this context that researchers on public policy and administration gathered in Dubrovnik to discuss 'Constructing policy work in a changing governmental environment'. It was perhaps not surprising that attention focused first on the European experience of policy, and its impact on policy in the region, because the EU itself has been a prime example of constructing policy work in a changing governmental environment, particularly since the move towards a Single European Market, which called for the reconstruction and standardisation of the regulatory structure across the community. As Badanjak shows, the reluctance of the governments which make up the EU to formally relinquish their decision-making powers led to a change in the policy

process as increasingly, policy questions have come to be argued out in the European Court of Justice. For the same reason, policy practitioners stress the negotiative, rather than hierarchical, mode of policy formation in the EU, taking place at multiple levels through a diversity of participants, and talk about the 'open method of coordination'. Trnski explores the nature of these claims and the extent to which they can be seen as the outcome of a search for efficient modes of coordination, as opposed to a response to the reluctance of governments to surrender power, and Ferle investigates the way in which organised interests in Slovenia (which is now an EU member) have responded to the opportunities open to them in 'multi-level governance'.

The EU and other international organizations are also a source of inputs into the governmental process in other countries. Dolonec shows the way in which the articulation of an EU norm on social policy (the European Social Model) had a profound impact on party programs in Croatia (a candidate for EU membership), defining an ideational framework within which the parties located themselves. Two other papers discuss the significance of Western European models of government as reform programs. Akin describes the way in which local administration in Turkey (also an EU candidate) was targeted by UNDP for 'technical assistance' aimed at 'capacity building' and 'change management', and Mendes discusses the influence of 'New Public Management' on Croatian state administration. But there need not be a specific external actor: De Rosa explores the development of higher education policy in England and New Zealand, showing the spread of ideas among the 'epistemic community'

of higher education policy, so that what could be called 'the Anglo-Saxon model' became a policy norm without a specifically cross-national organisational base.

So while there are external forces for particular sorts of policy change, reform moves do not come only from outside, and Petak focuses on the problem of co-ordination in the bureaucracy, and the way in which policy workers have tried to deal with it. He stresses that this has not led to the adoption of Western formulae of policy practice, but to the development of *ad hoc* modes of bargaining centred on the Ministry of Finance, which became a *de facto* coordinator because of its control of the flow of resources. By contrast, the paper by Petek examines a more explicitly reform-oriented policy area, that of regulatory reform, both in the west and in Croatia, where the issue was carried by policy workers with a neo-liberal mind-set, who faced the challenge of (and the need to engage with) the competing value systems of the previous political order to re-construct regulation as 'constituent policy' in Lowi's terms. Here, Lim presents an interesting contrast of regulatory reform in Korea, where the process of articulating an agenda of regulatory reform led to a re-grouping of the participants and a re-ordering of the support for regulation. The paper by Colebatch emphasises the reformist character of policy and policy work, discussing the way in which the concept of policy has been used as a means of interrogating and challenging the work of government. He stresses, though, that this does not mean simply the imposition of a preferred form of organization and practice, but calls for the scrutiny of the practice of government through a number of perspectives, which need to be used in combination

for both the explanation and the practice of policy.

So the political order in Croatia and the other transitional states is not a *tabula rasa*, a clean sheet on which reformers can inscribe their solutions. While Radin shows the utility of careful scrutiny of opinion survey and party platforms in tracking the development of health policy, Maldini points out that in these transitional states, because so much of the political order has been disrupted, making for losers as well as winners, and the commitment to democratic institutions is so provisional, social policy formation means much more than the drafting of party platforms. And as Röber points out, the domain to be governed may be shrinking as a consequence of the economic change that accompanied the fall of communism. This focus on the moral order of governing is further developed by Marko Grdesic, who identifies a 'weak society, weak state' situation in parts of Europe, both in the post-communist east and the Mediterranean south, where clientelism, corruption and patronage lead to apathy, cynicism, frustration and passivity among the citizens, which means that a pre-condition for policy development is the reconstruction of the channels of communication and trust between citizens and the state. Pinteric takes up this challenge, exploring ways in which ICT can be used by relatively weak movements in civil society to become significant and influential participants in the policy process.

This discussion showed the importance of policy as a form of collective sense-making: generating a meaningful and valid account of the process of governing. Building on Maldini's point about the disruption to the norms and expectations of government that fol-

lowed the collapse of communism, Kustec Lipicer takes up the specific question of the nature of valid policy knowledge in a post-socialist state, how this knowledge might be organised, and what can be learned from Western experience and theorising about expert and discursive forms of policy knowledge. Miller and Stanisevski pick up the first of the 'state-building challenges', identity, and explore the role of government in Macedonia in recognising the multicultural nature of society and developing discourse and practices through which cultural groupings are recognised, conflicts are resolved through deliberative practices, and the work of governing is validated. Other contributors discuss the way that meaning is given to acceptable but broad constructs like 'security', 'fatherland' and 'soldier' (Heinonen) and 'development' (Strpic), and Ivan Grdesic links this discussion of meaning with Kingdon's influential model of policy streams and linkages between them. Durnik links the discussion to another part of the literature, exploring the contri-

bution of the public policy and political economy approaches to the analysis of the conflict between aboriginal interests and the demand for hydroelectric power in northern Canada. Petkovic then locates these specific instances of policy work as sense-making in an overarching concept of 'interpretive policy analysis', and explores the theoretical foundations and central arguments of this approach to policy.

Policy is always a 'work in progress' rather than a completed edifice, and nowhere is this more so than in the transitional states of eastern Europe. This collection opens up a number of lines of fruitful inquiry for understanding the place of policy in the construction of governing. It raises questions rather than championing solutions – there are plenty of consultants doing that – but it lays out a research agenda for social scientists, and an agenda of attention for policy practitioners, and (we hope) will encourage both scholars and practitioners to keep questioning and testing the practices and discourses of governing.

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