

# THE WORTH OF POLICY KNOWLEDGE IN YOUNGER DEMOCRACIES: REFLECTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

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**Summary** Knowledge is supposed to be one of the most important values of our life. When speaking about it we have to be aware of its complexity and integrity. Knowledge is in a way omnipresent in all fields of our every-day living, and this fact makes it a necessary condition for the quality of well-being. In a way we can claim that no single field of our existence can get by without knowledge. In this article the central interest is oriented towards understanding the role of knowledge in the field of policy science and the worth of policy knowledge in and for democratic policy-making. A very special emphasis is in this regard placed on the conditions of policy knowledge in the younger democracies that have evolved from democratisation processes, reaching their zenith in the late 1980s in the territories of ex-socialist systems in Central and Eastern Europe. The article is in this regard seeking answers to the timeless dilemmas of the worth of policy knowledge, and of policy scientists, focusing on selected characteristics of policy-making practices in the case of post-socialist systems. In doing so, the article, which is more or less an academic-descriptive policy-analytical debate, has two main aims – first, to discuss and further define the understanding of policy knowledge through selected theoretical aspects; and second, to disclose the main characteristics of democratic policy and its knowledge in the context of post-socialist experiences of think tanks. As expected, it is revealed that, in the case of think tanks making, the role of policy knowledge in post-socialist systems is peculiar despite its universal meaning. According to its characteristics, it reflects the specifics of democratic development of the broader post-socialist political system. The ‘facade’ of democratic policy praxis often conceals a tight connectedness to the state and foreign-aid structures, political advocacy, as well as the apparent maturity of civil society.\*

**Keywords** policy knowledge, policy process, post-socialist systems, democracy, think tanks

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### Introductory remarks and statements

Academic discussion about policy analysis, and consequently about various types of policy knowledge, was formally disclosed with Lasswell and Lerner's contribution *The Policy Sciences* (eds., 1951), when the authors pointed out together with Robert Merton that researching public policies deserves to be a very special field of social science discipline, which deserves special scientific attention and therefore cannot be objectively and scientifically conducted in an adequate way either by politicians themselves or by any other scientist with no policy knowledge education (Merton and Lerner, 1951: 282-307).<sup>1</sup> Policy analysis as a special scientific discipline has so far been defined in various manners, from definitions laying stress on methodology to those oriented towards more contextual processes of producing policy-relevant information (e.g. policy studies) in and/or of the political settings (Williams, 1971; Hogwood and Gunn, 1984; Dunn, 1994; Parsons, 1999).

The main purpose of this article is to discuss the understandings and roles of policy knowledge in Central and Eastern Europe. Thus we follow two major presumptions:

- a) the definitions and understandings of policy analysis as well as the capital of policy knowledge should be universal and professionally oriented, regardless of the differences in the types of democratic political systems and of policy analysts;
- b) at the same time, however, the differences in democratic experiences of each political system need to be carefully considered with understanding and defining the prevailing modes of the use of policy knowledge.

Based on these presumptions, the article builds on the central importance of policy analysis as a special type of social-science discipline that in its widest sense encompasses producing, synthesising, and transforming of policy relevant information that may be utilised when resolving policy problems. Although as a rule policy analysis is not interpreted straightforwardly and without doubts, but can often be very interest-bounded, meaning in a more professional and also advocacy sense.<sup>2</sup> In spite of great hopes

<sup>1</sup> We have to stress that Lasswell was a reformer, calling 'policy sciences' into existence in order to combat the then existing forms of policy knowledge, particularly partisan distribution (the 'spoils' system) and bureaucratic inertia. He saw policy analysis as offering a more democratic (because more transparent and contestable) basis for governing, and this was implicitly a challenge to the ability of elected democratic representatives to use their majority position to reward their supporters.

<sup>2</sup> When established, primarily as a consequence of pressure from the practice, the discipline of policy analysis with its knowledge was expected to be able to help in overcoming the lacks and insufficiencies of the existing problems, especially in every-day policy-making practices. From then on the field of policy analysis has taken different paths, from that of being understood as a very instrumentalist field, applying technical analytical tools in the early beginnings, to a more value oriented one at the start of the seventies. In that time, as a consequence of the discipline evolution, the first graduate programmes in public policy analysis were established with the assistance of a major private foundation in the USA, as well as the first professional policy analytical associations. Also the Policy Studies Organisation

and ambitions that the new policy discipline would be able to assist in overcoming acute public problems, with time and with the political and societal development in this regard it has become evident that the theory of policy analysis suffers mostly from itself.<sup>3</sup> Multiple problems appeared, some even similar to those because of which the discipline was established, and as a consequence, various competitive and in a way also conflict groups inside the discipline have emerged.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the actual changes in society and politics around the world

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and the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management were founded (Heinemann et al., 2002: 17). Predominantly in the USA and Canada a fostering development of policy analysis as a special sort of scientific discipline appeared, which lead to the necessity of making academics from different expert fields an advantageous and stimulating environment for policy relevant research, all aiming to prepare deliberate and understandable analysis that could influence better governmental decisions (Abelson, 2002: 9-10).

<sup>3</sup> On the latest debates see, for example, DeLeon and Martell (2006), and, specially oriented on prospects for policy analysts, Farr et al. (2006) and Brunner (2007).

<sup>4</sup> Thus some critics have been reacting to the record of policy analysis seen in the lack of a compelling theoretical base, a failure to anticipate unintended consequences, poor utilization by policymakers, displacement by politics, or implementation failures. Others worry that analysis reinforces the role of experts and makes it more difficult for the broader public to have an influence (Hecl, 1978; Hawkesworth, 1988; Fischer, 1990; all in: White, 1994). Apart from the fact that the field of policy analysis has also been subject to evolutionary change and has thus transformed into modes different than it was when it developed in the 1960s (Radin, 2000).

importantly influence perceptions of the worth of policy analysis, and the new wave of democratisation coinciding with the fall of the socialist systems in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), as well as with world-wide (political) globalisation processes, deserves a special consideration.

As a fixed star the roles and potentials of policy analysis and policy knowledge have come out as one of the possible 'savers' of the new societal problems in each of these periods. The questions of the nature of policy knowledge in this regard and the role of science and expertise in shaping public affairs has once more been getting the central attention, just like the traditional debate about the nature of policy analysis as such – whether it is an art and a craft or a science (Wildavsky, 1979). Some of the fundamental answers to the most logical question of why is policy analysis as such regarded an important scientifically founded feature, and what are the beneficial potentials as well as impacts of its knowledge in specific types of democracies, thus represent also the bottom line of the discussion in this article.

Hence, the article, which is more or less an academic-descriptive sample of the policy-analytical debate about the universalities and specificities of policy knowledge in various types of democracies, focuses on two main aims – first, to theoretically discuss and further define the understanding of policy knowledge through the selected viewpoints in general, and secondly, to straiten the discussion to the main characteristics of democratic policy and experiences with policy knowledge in the post-socialist think tanks making.

### What is policy knowledge?

As already indicated, the understanding of policy knowledge is most tightly connected with the understanding of policy analysis as such. Therefore, its understanding is most commonly translated into the debate about how policy relevant information is being used by various stakeholders involved in policy-making processes. Accordingly, we can say that when defining the contextual basis for understanding policy knowledge, it is possible to explain it through a selective number of dimensions, among which I will for the further debate select two interrelated ones: 1) the 'motives' for the actual use of policy knowledge; and 2) the 'producers' of this knowledge.

#### *'The motives' for policy knowledge – policy knowledge in the policy process*

The motives for using policy knowledge are wide-ranged and can in a way, again, be defined through the most elementary understanding of the discipline of policy analysis. According to Weimer and Vining (2005: 48), policy analytical competences needed to be implemented for the purposes of the policy work which encompass the following: a) collecting, organising and interfering relevant information that are bounded by time and can be accessible to the decision-maker; b) framing of the problems; c) technical types of knowledge that enable the prediction and assessment of possible policy outcomes; d) understanding of political and organisational behaviour that can influence public policies; and e) ethical framework. Or, to put it the other way around – policy analysis enables us to get various kinds of policy relevant information that describe the phenomena of the analysed policy process or interpret and prescribe them. Re-

membering Hogwood and Gunn's definition (1984), policy analysis produces knowledge in and/or for public policy processes. In this sense and regarding the policy analytical main competences, the distinction between the scientific and/or practical (client-oriented, advocacy) motivation of the discipline, and at the same time the application of policy analytical knowledge, is one of the most reasonable consecutive facts.

We also have to be aware that each policy process is limited but at the same time also very widespread in the sense of time, encompassing at least five crucial process periods, ranging from: 1) the phase of problem definition, to 2) the selection of the most suitable policy alternatives, 3) their legalisation, 4) their implementation and, finally, 5) the evaluation of the implemented. Although the borders between each of the phase are blurred in praxis, they are regardless of this still specific in terms of the motives and aims, as well as interests of the interested stakeholders in each of them – also when the issue of the use of and motives for policy knowledge is at stake. Thus, it is usual that for the phase of 'problem definition' very convincing arguments about the nature of the social problem need to be put on the official governmental agenda. Various types of policy stakeholders in democratic policy-making have the opportunity and legitimisation to do this – from individual citizens to the organised civil society groups or the governmental players,<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Governmental players are defined in the broadest possible context, meaning all players that undertake any kind of jurisdiction of the local, state or supranational (like the EU or international organisations') authorities, and not solely the executive branch of political power.

and the role of an expert with the policy-based arguments is regarded as highly valuable at this point of the policy process. Very similar characteristics could be attributed also to the phase of 'the best alternative selection', although the role of the governmental players rises enormously as soon as the problem is officially recognised by them, and when they oblige themselves to co-operate in the processes of finding the best possible solutions.<sup>6</sup> 'The legitimisation process' that follows this phase is normally the least demanding and most clearly, legally defined by the procedures of the legislation authorities that officially confirm or reject the selected proposals. In this phase, thus, more or less only the governmental players undertake their voting roles. No interventions by any other stakeholders are predicted in this phase of the policy process. It should then be very similar also to the 'implementation phase', which is usually in the hands of the executive governmental bodies and their administration, which is authorised for implementation of the adopted solutions. But, when and in what forms would this implementation be assessed as being effective and/or efficient or not (e.g. 'the evaluation phase') is then again a more complex and widespread issue. Since, according to many authors, the evaluation phase represents one of the most decisive phases of the whole policy process, while it offers information about the future 'fate' of the evalu-

<sup>6</sup> One might claim that this is not the case in all situations, which is true, although even in the pluralistic types of selecting the best arrangements, the governmental players at the end of this phase again undertake a decisive role when they decide whether the chosen alternatives are to go to the legalisation procedure or not.

ated policy phenomena (see for example Parsons, 1999; Vedung, 2001), the question of the motives for and approaches to evaluation are becoming more variegated, and with that also the selection of the most suitable type of policy relevant knowledge that could be used for the stated purposes.

Considering the policy process 'mixture' that has already been exposed, it is clear that the role of expert policy knowledge is changing not only through time, but also with regard to the interests of the policy stakeholders, just like the nature of the policy process is changing as such. Ripley (1985), for example, stated that in the first period of agenda-setting the role of expert policy knowledge is low, while the experts contribute predominantly by coincidence as being some sort of remainders of the problems, embedded with many other policy players that are normally more powerful, louder and more influential. We could only partially agree with that, especially if we understand policy knowledge as one of the most valuable and desired types of information that the stakeholders possess in the policy process (Pal, 2006). If a stakeholder found her/his interests for the policy relevant knowledge, then probably his/her motives in the process would be uncontested. In the period of the search for the best possible alternative, the role of policy analysts by Ripley grows, while they can offer their expert-based alternatives for the best optimal solution to the problem. Then the strength of policy knowledge decreases due to the nature of the policy-making process, but it gains in importance again in the period of policy implementation, and most decisively in the evaluation phase, where policy evaluators are one of the selective groups of the policy players, seen as those who can

objectively assess the past policy practices, aiming to influence the future policy decisions (Ripley, 1985).

*'The producers' of policy knowledge – the types of policy knowledge and policy analysts*

If we want to know the details of each of the mentioned types of academic and/or advocacy policy work, and if we would like to establish whether this distinction really makes sense, we need to find the answer to the question of who is then the 'policy expert', and what qualifications should he/she possess to provide that kind and type of expert-based policy-relevant information. Here we are moving on to the article's second motive of policy knowledge 'producers'.

Let us start with the simplest possible question – who is a policy analyst? Considering the division of the academic or/and client-oriented policy analysis, and experiences from practice as well, many who do some kind of analysis would label themselves as policy analysts (such as economists, planners, evaluators, budget analysts, statisticians, operation researchers). Up to the 1980s few of those who actually did policy analysis identified themselves as members of this profession (Weimer and Vining, 2005: 31). As discussed by Heinemann and colleagues (2002), the profile of policy analyst is very broad and can include the range of working duties from collection and organisation of data, application of appropriate analytical techniques, clarification of the issues involved, formulation of alternatives for the resolution of a problem, to recommendations for possible future activities.<sup>7</sup> This again leads

us back to the unavoidable discussion of the various sets of analyst's roles, but what the authors emphasise as crucial in the definition of the policy analysts regardless of what role she/he takes is the fact that a policy analyst is a person of professional integrity (*ibid.*: 25), who makes various types of analysis for or/and about the policy process (*ibid.*: 29). I believe that this approach is extremely important, and it will be understood as such in this article, pointing to the fact that expert knowledge is a necessary and, at the same time, a decisive factor for any kind of policy analytical work. But, even though the definition is acceptable, it still doesn't convince us about the policy-analytical profession specifics, while a lot of professions and their knowledge can in some circumstances be useful for analysing some parts or phenomena of the policy process.

Therefore, it is necessary to conduct, at the same time when identifying policy analysts, a classification according to the prevailing type of knowledge that they provide. Many attempts to do this kind of typologisation exist. As Meltsner and Bellavita pointed out (1983), three types of policy analysts could be detected according to their contribution in and to the policy-processes. In the circumstances where the 'pure' scientific approaches without any political ambitions are being used in the analytical work, we can talk about 'technicians or technical analysts'. Vice versa, the 'political analysts' work primarily with the political

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so that the analyst would do all of these tasks at the same time. The decision on what she/he would do depends either on her/his own research interests, on the client's demands, or, as already stated, on the actual phase in which the policy processes are found.

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<sup>7</sup> In a way, their classification clearly reflects the policy process continuum. It is, of course, not

abilities, while the 'policy entrepreneurs' are understood as the analysts that possess a mixture of academic policy abilities and political skills, too, without being actively involved in or burdened with every-day policy-making.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Radin (2000; 2006) proposed a 'modified perspective' of the policy analyst's roles, which she divided into various groups according to the skills that the analyst has to possess for her/his work and the type of clients for whom she/he works.<sup>9</sup> Hoppe and Jeliaskova (2006), on the other hand, introduced a special typologisation of policy 'workers' according to the type of their expertise and loyalty. In doing so, the authors recognised five types of policy workers, that extended from expert advisers to policy advocates (according to professional, analytic or political loyalty), to policy philosophers and neo-Weberians, and to process directors (according to issue-specific and to policy-process-related expertise).

Parallel to the discussion on the various types of policy knowledge analysts, the period of its use and its motives are also decisive. Using Bent Flyv-

bjerg's contribution in the book 'Making Social Sciences Matter' (2001), Tenbensen distinguishes among three types of policy relevant knowledge according to these two criteria.<sup>10</sup> 'Episteme or universal knowledge' is based on the rationalist idea of causal links and chains which is most close to the policy analytical approach of evaluating the consequences of policy alternatives. This type of knowledge gives an answer to the question of 'what is objectively true'. 'Techné or tacit knowledge' concerns knowledge used by those who implement policy, and it refers not only to the practical use of this kind of knowledge, but also to the awareness of its reputation and the techniques used when producing it. The key question of this type of knowledge is – 'what works'. 'Phronesis or ethical, value-oriented knowledge' is the third and most complicated type of knowledge that is dealing with the questions of 'what should be done', and would normally follow the evaluation phase or be a constitutive part of the phase of problem definition and selection of alternatives. As always, we should take the proposed classification in relative terms, meaning that one type of knowledge, regarding the motives and interests that lay behind the use of it, can be significantly used in more than one phase of the policy process (see Picture 1 on p. 194).

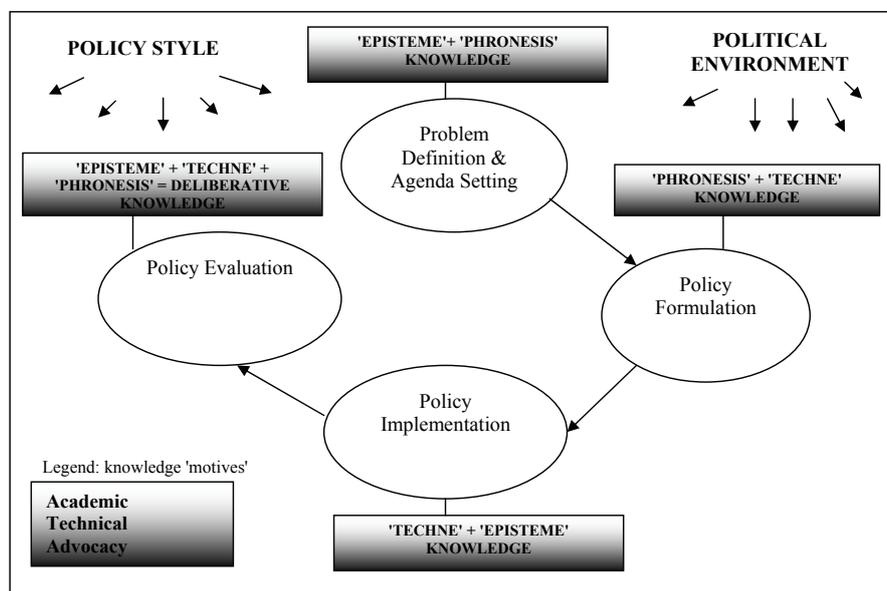
Hence, when speaking about policy knowledge we refer to the utilization of a set of various policy-relevant data/information/evidences, collected by policy analysts with the aim to analytically use them in and/or about the policy-making

<sup>8</sup> While the latter were the most frequent examples of analysts in the USA environments, the Western European practice, and frequently also the EU policy-making processes, have predominantly experiences with technicians (for this see, for example, Struyk, 1999; Radaelli, 1999; Johnson, 2001). The 'pure' political analysts are in policy analytical understandings predominantly a feature of the non-democratic policy practices.

<sup>9</sup> Radin differentiates among the following roles of policy analysts: technicians; researchers; researchers/entrepreneurs; politicians; negotiators; conflict managers; entrepreneurs; brokers; traffic cops; coordinators; experts; institutional memories; consciences and evaluators (Radin, 2000: 44; 2006: 26).

<sup>10</sup> These types originate far back from Aristotle's times, but could be used in or for the policy processes up to the present (Tenbensen, 2006: 201, 202).

**Picture 1.** Policy knowledge and policy processes



process, that is by its nature embedded with numerous kinds of other inputs, too (e.g. actors' interests, strategies, financial sources, advocacy coalitions, values, etc.).

To conclude this widespread debate about policy knowledge, we can say that the following competences can be understood as some sort of necessary conditions for it, encompassing the roles of the policy analyst as a policy scientist who implements various types of work, according to:

- various contextual, time-period and stakeholders' 'demands' in the policy-making processes;
- broader political environment in which policy knowledge is being anticipated and used.

While the a) competences have in their essence very universally applied potentials regardless of the previous experiences and policy-making practices

of one system, point b) gives central priority straightforwardly to the democratic experiences and influences of the broader political and narrower policy systems. I strongly believe that, as such, this component has an important impact on the prevailing nature of policy knowledge in each political environment. Therefore, this component calls for special attention in the remaining parts of this article, too. The following part of the article debates the characteristics of democratic context of and for policy knowledge: firstly through theoretical debate about the elements of (policy) democracy, and secondly through an analysis of the characteristics of policy knowledge in the democratic policy environment in the post-socialist context.

### Understanding democracy and the place of post-socialist systems in it

Although world-wide a lot has been written until now about the understanding of the role of policy knowledge in and for policy-making, its relations to the democratic systemic environment have on the contrary not been as exposed as it would be expected.<sup>11</sup> A very special emphasis in this section is devoted to the discussion on identifying the crucial democratic elements and potentials in the so-called new democracies, with particular stress on their policy capacities.

Remembering Lasswell's 'demand' for policy analysis of democratic improvement (1951), it is more than evident that democratic characteristics of the policy analytical environments and knowledge are prerequisites for all kinds of relevant policy work. Similarly also the consideration of differences in the policy-making practices according to the level of democratic development between the individual political systems in which policy knowledge takes place, is expected and needed. This takes us to the presupposition that policy knowledge works in various types of democratic political systems, and that it presumably varies according to the specificities of those practices. If so, an important task is to determine the key constitutive elements of democracy, although opening the debate about democracy is like some sort of a never-ending and multi-

<sup>11</sup> At this point, we deliberately skip the debate about the directions of influence between politics and policy (for this debate see, for example, the primary source in Lowi, 1972), and we start from the premise that 'real' policy work cannot be done in non-democratic political environments.

layered 'story' which frustrates the academics and researchers in the search for absolute characteristics that would reflect the nature of democracy in an analysed political system. Thus, in this concrete attempt we have to consider that democracy is changing with time, in accordance with the changing ideological orientations of the leading democratically elected state representatives (more on this see, for example, in Held, 1996), according to the redistribution of the political powers (see, for example, Ljiphart, 1999), as well as according to the historical (non)experience with the democratic traditions (Linz and Stephan, 1996).

The aspiration to recognise the nature of democracy most frequently leads us to the positivist approach of measuring the phenomena, which is contextually too broad to be understood as incontestable. The history of measurement attempts is very long and more or less fruitfully distributed between the academic and practical attempts.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> In his classic study, Lerner (1958) measures the level of political democracy by the percentage of the population voting at the national elections. Voting-participation statistics are also used as democracy measures by Smith (1969), Jackman (1973; 1975), Coulter (1975), and Stack (1979) (see Bollen and Grosjean 1981). In the 1980s, for example, Kenneth Bollen (1980) introduced an index of political democracy using two-dimensional sets of indicators that would most appropriately reflect the nature of democracy. This index includes the following indicators: 1) political liberty (being reflected in [X1] press freedom, [X2] freedom of group opposition, and [X3] extent of negative government sanctions); and 2) popular sovereignty ([X4] fairness of elections, [X5] method of executive selection, and [X6] method of legislative selection [and legislative effectiveness]).

According to the proposed measures, it would be, in a way, ideal to follow the conviction that the post-socialist societies could somehow rejoin the trajectories of the democratic Western societies (Habermas, 1996). But different historical experiences and existing general societal and political conditions in which the post-socialist systems operate today would also convince us that they encounter different problems, as did the Western democracies in the early years of their democratic development. Many authors from the Western as well as post-socialist countries have proven that it would as a rule be irresponsible to compare the elements of democracy in both systems, and that we have to be attentive to their specifics (Agh 1993; Gunther, Diamandouros and Puhle 1996; O'Donnell 1996; Fink Hafner 2000).<sup>13</sup> Moreover,

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Later on, for example, the most widespread indicators for measuring were related to what Huntington (1991) connected to the idea of democratic waves. Speaking about democratisation and democratic consolidation, again a new set of proposals have been made for measuring the maturity of the new democracies through the nature of civil society, autonomy of political society, the rule of law, the nature of state bureaucracy, and institutionalisation of economic society (Linz and Stepan, 1996a). Currently various attempts of (semi)professional and/or international expert and nongovernmental measuring of democracy are very popular, extending from those of the Freedom House (2008) to the World Democracy Audit (2008). These attempts most frequently emphasise the set of indicators relating to the civil society status, freedom of the press, corruption, democratic practices of the political institutions, and levels of authority (e.g. polity issues).

<sup>13</sup> In his extensive comparative work, 'The Dynamics of Democratization', Graeme Gill (2000) analyses various types of contexts and

we also have to be aware that all of the nine CEE countries that underwent the democratisation paths in the period between 1989 and 1991 had very different preconditions and bases for democratisation praxis, which have led them to different democratisation outputs until now (Linz and Stepan, 1996; 1996a). All those differences were, on the one hand, connected with the broader historical experiences regarding the modes of authoritarian rule, and also with the economic and societal characteristics that influenced not only the political, but also the polity and policy context of the democratisation processes. In this sense, the agenda of transition in CEE countries was not focused overwhelmingly upon regime change, but especially on economic transformation, state building, and restructuring of society. In a way, the motives overgrow only some ideological needs for change and were more focused on the concrete policy restructuring for which we would expect also that appropriate policy knowledge would be needed.<sup>14</sup>

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indicators that influence the complex and long-lasting processes of democratisation around the world. Reaching the late 1980s, communist transformations in the territory of Central and Eastern Europe as well as Russia, the author confirms that the nature of the regime changes differed so much that a single methodology of the other examples of transformation (in the territory of Southern Europe and of Latin America) was not able to embrace the diversity (Gill, 2000: 189).

<sup>14</sup> We also have to be aware that the differences do not appear only between 'older' and 'younger' democracies, but are an uncontested fact also among the 'group' of well-established democracies (see, for example, the research observations by Pollitt, 2006).

Focusing on the article's central issue, one of the crucial tasks is to be able to define the understanding of policy democracy. In this regard, the selection of a set of democratic *policy* indicators is needed, that would in the first place focus on the public policy aspects of a democratic policy-making, and would at the same time not diminish the importance of the broader political and polity elements. It is important to remind that, despite the already exposed 'trends' of measuring democracy, a very imperceptible share of the debate has until now been devoted to the policy democracy indexes, especially in the context of ex-socialist systems.<sup>15</sup> Bearing in mind numerous classic works on the state of the art of policy analysis (Hogwood and Gunn, 1984; Dunn, 1994; Parsons, 1999; Colebatch, 1998; Colebatch, 2006; Colebatch, eds., 2006; Fischer, 2003; Pal, 2006; Grdešić, 2006; Fink Hafner, 2007), and especially considering Jeremy Richardson's cult typologisation of policy styles (1982), the most elementary set of democratic policy indicators could be established. Being aware that this kind

<sup>15</sup> With regard to this, Ivan Grdešić (1994) identified three types of policy agendas according to the three levels of decisions being crucial in the case of post-socialist systems. The first could be labelled as the fundamental political one, and it concerns the issues of national identity and constitution. The second one is still framed in a broader political context, and it deals with the levels of normative rules, procedures and other frameworks of political and economic systems, while the third one entails the political arena – its actors and making. Grdešić believes that the first level is crucial for the establishment of the policy agenda setting in the CEE, while we believe that all three need to be fulfilled if we really want to speak about a democratic policy context.

of approach would be much desired, but bindingly grounded on an extreme theoretical as well as methodological complexity and considerations, I will just outline one of the possible reflections on indexing policy democracy, which will be further on limited only to the study of one dimension, tightly related to policy knowledge.

The first indicator of policy democracy could relate to the patterns of 'democratic political system' in which policy 'works'. As such, it could include a set of dimensions 'traditionally' relating to the traditions of democratic practice, such as: type of political system, electoral systems and participation, voting participation, division of powers between the institutions of the authorities and between various political levels, integration into international and multinational organisations and associations, civil society engagements, freedom of the press, corruption.

The second indicator could concern the 'prevailing modes of policy-making or policy styles', encompassing information about the modes of co-operation in policy-making processes between (sub)governmental, non-governmental and (when established) supra-national policy stakeholders (e.g. top-down, bottom-up, managerial, network, governance modes), and the complexity of policy goals (the transparency and clearness of the stated goals, measures and mechanisms of individual policy, programme, or project).

And the third policy democracy indicator, as already foretold, could legitimately be completely devoted to the 'worth of policy knowledge' in and/or for the policy-making processes. As such, it could embrace information about the characteristics of the 'providers' of policy

relevant knowledge (their institutional settings, number and type [government, non-government, sub- and supra-government founded]); the nature of the provided policy knowledge (academic or advocacy); the policy field where the knowledge is used; the time period of the use of policy knowledge in the policy process; and the policy implications of the used policy knowledge on a policy field, as well as on the broader economic, social and political environment.<sup>16</sup>

Being aware of the defectiveness of this giant proposal which has just been given, and which incontestably needs a very deliberate and comprehensive contextual and methodological dispensation, I will deliberately orient the remaining parts of this article only to the analysis of the selected contents of the third proposed indicator of policy democracy. In this manner, the key characteristics of the use of policy knowledge in post-socialist circumstances in the CEE territory will be given through the work of think tanks, which are understood as a special organisational type of policy expertise.

### **Democratic policy knowledge capacities in post-socialist systems**

It is indisputably true that policy capacities, and in this connection also the awareness of democratic policy know-

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<sup>16</sup> Ideally, the most mature policy democracies would, according to these indicators, be those with a long tradition of democratic practices, a tight inside- and outside-connectedness, active civil society, free press, and low level of corruption, as well as deliberative policy-making practices that pursue good governance approaches, in which also the worth of policy knowledge and expertise is widely executed and used by interested stakeholders.

ledge in the CEE countries, are growing. In the last 10-15 years, as part of wider political and administration reforms, a significant effort has been made to improve decision making within the public sector by developing the capacity of policy analysis. The reform of government institutions, particularly at the centres of government, often included the role of policy analysis within government. Consequently, some sort of episteme policy networks within the government, in which policy analysts in ministries may work together to put forward policy proposals, have also been developed. With the introduction of the new public management maxims, regulatory policies and good governance principles, the adoption of procedures within governments based on elements of policy analysis has been arising, seen for example in the drafting of policy papers as an instrument of decision making procedures. Parallel to these governmental supported practices, the shifts in the relevance of policy knowledge could also be seen in the wider civil society sphere. There is an increasing number of translations and publications of manuals on policy analysis in local languages, and the same is true also for the training of lecturers and trainers in policy analysis, the development and launch of basic courses in policy analysis in educational institutions, the development and establishment of specialized or concentrated academic programs in policy analysis, as well as courses for in-service training of public servants (Nispa, 2008). It is also important that special organisations which provide fundamental settings for professional and democratic policy knowledge have been evolving.

In socialist times, when because of the authoritative rule of the matrons of

the Communist Party, the elements of democracy were not represented, three major types of expert settings prevailed with markedly different degrees of intellectual and political freedom (Krastev, 2002: 280): a) academic 'heavens' that produced theoretical science and were offering maximum intellectual freedom, although their role was to legitimise theoretically a particular work of the government; b) ministerial 'hells' that worked as social sciences institutes with low academic interdependence and deep involvement with the bureaucratic structures of administration; c) nomenclature 'paradises' of the institutes of the Communist Party that were more directly involved in policy-making. Their knowledge and skills were exploited in the process of preparing party programs, but few were involved in the day-to-day policy-making processes. Regardless of the type of knowledge that each of the three settings provided, it is impossible to even think that any of them produced any kind of policy-analytically relevant knowledge, while all of them were serving solely the self-sufficient purposes and interests of the authoritative political powers. Similarly to what has been described above, the development of political science in ex-Yugoslavia, for example, closely corresponded to the development of the state-driven project of self-management. That kind of attitude towards the academic and expert knowledge in general lasted until the beginnings of the democratisation processes (more on this see, for example, in Fink Hafner, 2002; 2004). After the democratisation, however, faiths in individual countries have undertaken their own ways.

When speaking concretely about policy analysis, in some rare, but un-

contested cases this discipline was deliberately and carefully introduced into the academic and pedagogical circles by their own academic and research staff right after the transition to democracy. In Slovenia, the course on policy analysis has been taught at the Faculty of Social Sciences (University of Ljubljana) from the student year 1991/92 on, both on the graduate and the master's levels, in the programmes Political Sciences – Policy Analysis and Public Administration (the official name of the graduate programme) and Policy Analysis – European Aspects (the official name of the M.A. programme) (more on the scientific evolution in Slovenia see in the works of its founder Fink Hafner, 1993; 2002; 2002a; 2004).<sup>17</sup> But, as will be presented in the following chapter, the predominantly policy-analytical knowledge in the major parts of the CEE territory has been developing much more slowly. Also the experiences with its use in every-day policy practices in the CEE countries do not correspond to its idealistic mission, often being faced with uncertain foreign support, and blending with state interventionism that reminds of the patterns of the previous socialist state advocacy. Thus the intertwining of science and politics remains a very usual occurrence.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> A very similar path to the one described has been undertaken also in Croatia by Professor Ivan Grdešić (1995; 2006).

<sup>18</sup> For instance, a very important share of academics or researchers overstep from their positions to the top state ones. In Slovenia, for example, from the independence in 1991 on, approximately a third of all leading professors in the field of political science accepted the highest governmental posts in the state, including the heading of the ministries of defence and of education and sport.

### **Think tanks – an example of democratic organisational settings of policy knowledge**

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, policy experts from the democratically developed countries started to organise themselves in complex organisational structures, known as policy organisations, policy institutes, think tanks or/and organisations for policy analysis (Weiss, 1992), aiming to provide institutionally-based policy knowledge. From then on, public policy research organisations are defined as public policy research, analysis and engagement institutions that generate policy-oriented research, analysis and advice on domestic and international issues, enabling policymakers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy issues (McGann, 1999). Since nowadays think tanks are the most representative type of policy organisation, this final debate is going to be focused on their experiences in the current CEE policy-making practices.

It is universally known that the home of think tanks are the Western democracies (mostly in the USA, UK, Germany and France),<sup>19</sup> and that one of the latest

growths of think tanks around the world is tightly connected with the growth of new democracies and their need to democratise also the nature of expert knowledge. In this regard, the last decade of the twentieth century not only saw an unprecedented growth of the number of democratic nation-states, governmental organizations, and nongovernmental organizations, but also the explosion of think tanks as a remarkable feature of the political reform processes in the CEE region. The 'birth rate' of independent policy research institutes in those countries is higher than in most other places in the world. According to the Foreign Policy Research Institute data (2008) for all regions of the world, the CEE experienced the most drastic increase in think tanks in the 1990s after the end of the Cold War. Approximately 25 think tanks per year were established in the period between 1991 and 2000 in the region. They represented around 20% of all newly established think tanks worldwide. As discussed by Krastev (2000), there is a general feeling that post-communist think tanks are a powerful illustration of the critical link between democracy and development. In a way, think tank development reflected the march of democracy and the market economy in the wake of the demise of communism. Thus they were seen also as symbols of the growth of civil society, while they were actively promoted as generators and defenders of democracy, civic freedoms and market economy (Sandle, 2000: 136). Words like 'free market', 'liberal', 'democratic', 'civic', and 'reform' are still present in the names of many of the institutes to be found in the Freedom House's Directory (2008). A journey through the web-pages of the CEE public policy institutes gives the impression that papers

<sup>19</sup> Around 90% of all think tanks have been created since 1951, which can in a way be correlated with the academic origins of policy studies as such. In connection with this data, 58% of them were established in the period between the 1980s and the end of the 1990s, while the number of newly established ones has declined over the last 7 years. Most of the think tanks that have come into existence since the 1970s are specialized in a particular discipline or policy issue (among the top think tanks are those connected to international, security and economic strategic studies), and over 50% of them are university-affiliated (McGann, 2007).

and conference reports produced by independent researchers are valuable fragments of the inside story of the transformation of the communist system. In the virtual reality of the web, think tanks appear as serious, influential and knowledgeable, and it would be expected that their role in establishing democratic policy capacities still remains one of the fundamental ones.

But reality is not as promising as would be logically predicted. Let us observe the CEE think tanks' experiences from the Eve of democracy until today through the (non)implementation of the crucial 'dimensions' of policy knowledge that were exposed in the first part of the article.

Working motives and the growth of think tanks as such were in the beginning tightly related with foreign financial and 'know-how' investments. Many CEE think tanks have been sponsored by American sources (both private and governmental), and have at the same time contributed not only to the expert paradigm, but also to the dominance of the non-governmental (NGO) paradigm in general. In the euphoria of the first years of transition, many prominent Western economists took up the burden (and honorariums) of advising the CEE on reforms. They all needed local partners or at least translators, and it was these support groups around foreign advisors that constituted the first generation of policy institutes. As soon as this support was cut down, private expertise was deprived of its financial hinterland and was forced to finish their work or to transform their priorities in a vast number of small, but thematically different kinds of work that crumbled their policy expert capacities. The popularity of the NGO approach in analyzing

post-communist policy institutes is also rooted in the fact that it is founded on a donor-serving approach (Goodwin and Nacht 1995; Krastev 2000a). Because of limited or tightly politically motivated public budget constraints, foreign assistance, as long as it was available, remained a primary source of funds for think tanks that have to compete for funding from the same European and American grant-giving organizations. The emergence of the 'real' domestic independent policy institutes in the CEE was an exception to the rule, or a consequence of the replacement of foreign advisors with local 'free advice brigades' (Stone, 1996: 10).

Structurally, the CEE's think tanks are often small. Of the 101 think tanks surveyed by Freedom House in 1999, only 68 had annual budgets higher than US\$ 50 000. At the same time, budget constraints have also limited the CEE think tanks' ability to hire high-level researchers, who required wages proportional to their level of training. Indeed, staff recruitment was crucially important for a think tank's credibility and its influence (Ebélé and Boucher 2006: 18). Even if they employed around 1000 researchers on a full-time basis, less than 50 could hire more than five in-house researchers. These organizational issues often implied that the staff of research centres devoted a substantial amount of their time and energy to fundraising and management duties. This limited their ability to conduct research, and often hampered its quality. In fact, less than a third of think tanks devoted more than 50% of their time to policy research. Big organisations like the Institute of World Economics in Hungary, or Peace Institute in Slovenia, have around 30 researchers, whereas smaller entities have

less than 5 (Ebélé and Boucher, 2006: 18; Grapulin, 2008). Instead of the 'pure' policy work, most studies focus on the managerial issues of think tanks, their funding, public relations strategies, media/government relations, and their sustainability, but not on their primary mission – providing policy knowledge.<sup>20</sup>

Very similarly as in the past non-democratic times, governmental influence is still retaining an important role. The governments either improved their own quasi 'policy' research capacities, frequently not specialised in policy but in political knowledge and loyalty, or even publicly declared that the worth of expert knowledge in the decision-making processes is inapplicable and needless (Struyk, 1999; Mandič, 2001; Kunej, 2008). Policy-makers frequently view think tanks mainly as 'communicators', useful appendixes to governmental press offices (Krastev, 2000), and do not even employ academically educated policy analysts (Kunej, 2008; Grapulin, 2008). Consequently, many data from already conducted researches show that, as opposed to the Western types of democracies where policy type of research work was part of ordinary work in 82% of all think tanks, the real rate of policy knowledge in the CEE countries is more or less negligible. According to the model from the past, their work is more political than policy-oriented when the applicative types or client-oriented types of researches are being conducted, or very technicistic, oriented towards the issues of the analysed field with no special emphasis on the policy dimensions at all (Struyk 1999; Krastev 2000: 246; Kunej 2008). Think tanks' ideas are more wel-

comed (if at all) in the areas of so-called 'higher policies', especially foreign and monetary, and are almost completely absent on the local government agendas.

According to Krastev's data (2000a), the post-communist think tanks also do not focus consistently on long-term academic research and their studies are neglected in academic circles. Only a small percentage of all those institutes devote more than 50% of their time to policy research. Although the overall production of scientific work is growing, the awareness and public and even professional responses are very rare. As observed by Mandič (2001), public and expert reactions to the new academic and research products are visibly lower than they were in the first years of democracy. This observation needs to be linked also with a more general understanding of the worth of knowledge in the CEE as such, which is becoming more and more neglected or even ousted from the decision making bodies. Although some types of expertise are institutionalised into the governmental expert bodies, the structures of these bodies very often reflect their political rather than expert qualities.

Most authors agree that an exception to the shown pessimist image is the CEE's international, supranational and global orientation. This was by far most obvious in the countries' accession processes to the European Union, in which experts were cooperating in preparing their countries to assimilate the European political, legal and economic acquis, and leading them to a successful integration. A close look at independent policy units that closely follow EU affairs or specialize in this field in the eight central European countries that joined the EU in 2004, underlines the change in focus. For instance, among the 35 think

<sup>20</sup> In this respect see the case of the Peace Institute in Slovenia (Grapulin, 2008).

tanks that follow EU matters more or less closely in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia, 37% were created between 1995 and 1998, just as accession negotiations were starting (Freedom House 2008).<sup>21</sup> A similar development can also be observed in the globalisation processes, in which some influential individuals or non-governmental groups get their chances to promote their knowledge also by passing the state structures.

Despite the fact that the CEE think tanks very deliberately follow the Western think tanks' practices and are often also dependent on their financial and expertise sources, the CEE policy analytical work is very often some sort of a 'copy-paste' or allegiance to the Western models, not being compared to the Western think tanks' practices nor even the democratic preconditions. The CEE think tanks frequently also shift their dependency from the previous authoritarian state-based system to the new dependency on the rich foreign states or international assistance with their own motives. Think tanks are often unexpectedly assumed also to act as non-governmental representatives, while their expert policy relevant work is either second-ordered or even completely ne-

<sup>21</sup> A specific challenge at the European level is the difficulty to acquire sufficient resources to remain relevant in the context of an ever-growing European Union. Opening an office in Brussels may thus be of great help to stay up-to-date, credible, influential, and proactive. Unfortunately, no Central European research centre has yet opened an office in Belgium, whereas some Western think tanks are expanding beyond their national borders. This increases the competition over limited resources, audiences, and ideas.

glected. But, when drawing this kind of a 'dark' conclusion, it is still very important to bear in mind at least two facts. Firstly, even the democratic policy practices of the Western think tanks are not always stainless, showing often their too routine and uncritical dependency on their clients, as well as the fact that, as a rule, not only 'pure' policy roles and responsibilities are undertaken in their work (for example, in Radin, 2000). Secondly, the experiences of the CEE think tanks clearly pointed out enormous differences among them, which are not exceptional also among the more developed democratic systems (Hoppe and Jeliazkova, 2006; Pollitt, 2006).

Hence, as expected from the same starting point, elementary differences between variously developed democratic systems exist when think tank maturity is at stake, but regardless of this, the roots and understanding of policy analytical discipline and policy relevant expert knowledge should always remain universal for all of them, and should never be adapted to the characteristics of democratic tradition.

### Concluding remarks

Bringing the debate about the role of policy knowledge, extended into the post-socialist context, to a close, some incontestable truth could be drawn, although at the same time we have to frankly admit that nothing revolutionary new was discovered when revealing the general understandings and roles of policy analysis, knowledge and democratic environments in various political settings.

First and by far most important is to rethink the real worth of the actual definition of democratic policy knowledge

as being a product of a very specific profession of policy analysis. Although the discipline and knowledge of policy analysis are essentially multidisciplinary, they are very specific and unique. This means that they are 'composed' of different knowledge of other disciplines, but at the same time consider the specifics of policy-making procedures and processes in the value-aggravating democratic circumstances. The future of policy knowledge and with it also policy expertise represents one of the fundamental pillars of further democratic development, not only for the post-socialist countries and their policies, but for polity and political system in general, regardless of the territory or political level of policy-making. The importance of policy knowledge as a specific type of professional knowledge needs to remain permanently high on the agenda of each democratic system, and although policy analysis is changing in response to structural changes in the environment, it has never furthered it as a professional project until now (Hoppe and Jeliazkova, 2006: 55).<sup>22</sup> Therefore it is justi-

<sup>22</sup> Laws and Hajer (2006) very importantly expose also the necessity of tight co-operation between policy practitioners and analysts, which was neglected in this article. They speak about the idea of 'negotiated knowledge' (Nowotny, Scott and Gibbons in Laws and Hajer, 2006: 416), as being a product of negotiation between researchers and non-researchers. This, in a way, very idealistic situation, often also called 'deliberative knowledge' (Fisher, 2003), is absolutely needed and represents an important step ahead in the approaches to social problems solving, although, as was the main message also in this article, when expert analytical work is in question, we have to recognise and give legitimacy to the professional knowledge of po-

lity and professionally responsible to strive for policy knowledge and policy discipline in general to remain a unique and independent political science profession, and not only one of the possible methodological tools of any kind of discipline and any kind of practitioner that is not educated properly for considering the specifics of the policy-making processes and social values.

From the presented post-socialist perspectives many serious warnings can be drawn, too. We have to be aware of the systemic gaps due to the different levels of maturity of democracy among the states, as well as those relating to the policy analytical and policy knowledge practices. If the established democracies prevalently understand the worth of policy knowledge much more as an obligatory 'expert appendix' to the policy-making processes, younger democracies frequently see it only as another elementary democratic postulate that is best to be copied from their 'older' colleagues, without even considering the possibilities of its actual worth. Thus, dependency on the state structures and/or even foreign 'tutors' is an accomplished fact, just like the general understanding of knowledge as being a 'necessary evil' with no real value, or an excellent ammunition for achieving particular political interests. Consequently, policy expertise which should provide policy relevant knowledge rarely has real opportunities to carry out its work. Therefore it was also impossible to disclose any specific period or potential characteristic of the used policy knowledge in it. Regardless of their working capacities

policy analysts in the first hand, and afterwards upgrade it with 'constructive negotiation' with the interested stakeholders.

and motives, it is often most important that on the outside their work is unjustifiably comprehended as a constitutive element of the development of the post-socialist non-governmental sector, and not as an important part of the democratic policy episteme community. Un-

fortunately, the post-socialist majority, which has been attained in most of these countries right in the year 2008, when this article was written, is only a facade that hides many infant epidemics of democracy, starting with the most fatal – selfish exploitation.

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### **Vrijednost znanja o javnim politikama u mlađim demokracijama: razmišljanja i propitivanja**

**SAŽETAK** Znanje bi trebalo biti jedna od najvažnijih vrijednosti našeg života. Kad govorimo o njemu, trebali bismo biti svjesni njegove složenosti i cjelovitosti. Znanje je na određen način sveprisutno na svim područjima našeg svakodnevnog života i zbog toga je nužan preduvjet kvalitete života. U određenom smislu možemo tvrditi da bez znanja ne može opstati nijedno područje naše egzistencije. Središnji je interes ovog članka orijentiran na razumijevanje uloge znanja na području političke znanosti i na vrijednost znanja o javnim politikama u njihovu demokratskom kreiranju. Poseban se naglasak u tom pogledu stavlja na preduvjete znanja o javnim politikama u mlađim demokracijama koje su se razvile procesima demokratizacije, pri čemu su svoj vrhunac dosegnule potkraj osamdesetih godina 20. stoljeća na teritoriju bivših socijalističkih sustava Srednje i Istočne Europe. U članku se traže odgovori na vječne dvojbe o vrijednosti znanja o javnim politikama te o znanstvenicima koji ih izučavaju i koji se usredotočuju na pojedina obilježja prakse kreiranja javnih politika u postsocijalističkim sustavima. Pritom članak, koji je manje ili više akademsko-deskriptivna rasprava o analizi javnih politika, ima dva cilja – prvo, razmatranje i daljnje definiranje razumijevanja znanja o javnim politikama s pojedinih teorijskih aspekata i, drugo, opisivanje glavnih obilježja demokratskih javnih politika i znanja o njima u kontekstu iskustava postsocijalističkih intelektualnih središta. Kako se može i očekivati, otkriva se da je u slučaju intelektualnih središta uloga znanja o javnim politikama u postsocijalističkim sustavima, unatoč njegovu univerzalnom značenju, specifična. Sa svojim obilježjima odražava specifičnosti demokratskog razvoja šireg postsocijalističkog političkog sustava. "Fasada" demokratske prakse kreiranja javnih politika često prikriva usku povezanost s državom i strukturama strane pomoći, političkim lobiranjem te prividnom zrelošću građanskog društva.

**KLJUČNE RIJEČI** znanje o javnim politikama, proces kreiranja javnih politika, postsocijalistički sustavi, demokracija, intelektualna središta