Policy Design and Non-Design in Policy-Making
Policy Formulation and the Changing Dynamics of Public Policy

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Abstract
This paper addresses the differences between more, and less, analytical and instrumental policy formulation and decision processes and the likelihood of each occurring in a particular policy context. By engaging in a discussion of the intention to engage in policy design, the paper develops a continuum of several formulation processes that can exist between ideal instrumental and problem-solution driven policy design and other more contingent and less intentional processes. Coupled with capacity issues, the papers begins to draw out the implications of these variables for understanding good and poor policy design processes and outcomes.

Introduction: Policy Design, Non-Design and Social Policy Studies Past and Future
Public policies are the result of efforts made by governments to alter aspects of their own or social behaviour in order to carry out some end or purpose and are comprised of complex arrangements of policy goals and policy means. In this view policy design involves the effort to more or less systematically develop efficient and effective policies through the application of knowledge about policy means gained from experience, and reason, to the development and adoption of courses of action that are likely to succeed in attaining their desired goals or aims within specific policy contexts (Bobrow and Dryzek 1987; Bobrow 2006; Montpetit 2003).

Exactly what constitutes a design, what makes one successful and what makes one design better than other are important questions. As Linder and Peters (1991) argued, policy design can be thought of as a spatial activity. That is, as:

a systematic activity composed of a series of choices . . . design solutions, then, will correspond to a set of possible locations in a design space . . . this construction emphasizes not only the potential for generating new mixtures of conventional solutions, but also the importance of giving careful attention to tradeoffs among design criteria when considering instrument choices.

That is, designing successful policies requires thinking about policy-making in such a way as to fully take into account the many purposes which polices can serve and the nature of the multiple levels of policy elements or components which make up a
typical policy: that is, to understand the ‘design space’ (Hillier, Musgrove and O’Sullivan 1972; Hillier and Leaman 1974; Gero 1990) or context in which policy formulators and decision-makers work.

This is significant because the ends and purposes attempted to be attained through such designs are multifarious and wide-ranging and different policies can be more or less systematically designed. That is, not all policies are ‘designed’ in the sense set out above and can rather evolve through less “rational” processes such as political bargaining and/or have their content informed by activities such as self-interested lobbying rather than disinterested analysis.

The exact processes through which policy designs emerge and are articulated vary greatly by jurisdiction and sector, and appear to reflect factors such as the great differences, and nuances, that exist between different forms of government – from military regimes to liberal democracies and within each type – as well as the particular configuration of issues, actors and problems various governments, of whatever type, face in particular areas or sectors of activity – such as health or education policy, industrial policy, transportation or energy policy, social policy and many others (Ingraham 1987; Howlett, Ramesh and Perl 2009).

Attempts to understand the basic conditions for design (vs non-design) and to answer the questions posed above have animated design studies and research in the policy sciences over the past half century. This workshop addresses the significance of contextual and other factors involved in policy-making and instrument choices and their impact in terms of creating propitious or inauspicious circumstances for design efforts.

This paper in particular addresses the differences between more, and less, analytical and instrumental policy formulation and decision processes and the
likelihood of each occurring, in a given policy context. By engaging in a discussion of
the intention to engage in policy design, the paper develops a continuum of several
formulation processes that can exist between ideal instrumental and problem-solution
driven policy design and other more contingent and less intentional processes. The
implications of this, coupled with a concern for policy resources or capacity, for
understanding good and poor policy design processes and outcomes are then
discussed.

The Old and the New Policy Design Literature
Policy design as a field of inquiry has had a checkered history. A design orientation
focusing on rational instrument decisions engendered a large literature in the 1980s
and 1990s under the guidance of such prominent figures in the US, Canadian,
European and Australian policy studies community such as Lester Salamon, Patricia
Ingraham, Malcolm Goggin, John Dryzek, Hans Bressers, Helen Ingram and Anne
Schneider, G.B. Doern, Stephen Linder and B. Guy Peters, Renate Mayntz,
Christopher Hood, Eugene Bardach, Evert Vedung, Peter May, Frans van Nispen and
Michael Trebilock, among others.

After this promising beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, however, the field
languished in the 1990s and 2000s as work in the policy sciences focused on the
impact on policy outcomes of meta-changes in society and the international
environment (Howlett and Lejano 2012; Howlett 2011). Both globalization and
governance studies of the period ignored traditional design concerns in arguing that
changes at this level pre-determined policy specifications. Although some writings on
policy design continued to flourish in specific fields such as economics, energy and
environmental studies (see for example, Boonecamp 2006, del Rio 2010a and 2010b),
in the fields of public administration and public policy the design orientation was
largely replaced by a new emphasis on the study of institutional forms and decentralized governance arrangements. As a result of these processes, for example, many commentators suggested that implementation practices had become more participatory and consultative over the last several decades (Alshuwaikhat and Nkwenti 2002; Arellano-Gault and Vera-Cortes 2005) replacing previous top-down formulation processes dominated by government analysts with more ‘bottom-up’ ones; that is, ones less amenable to design by state elites.¹

However more recent work re-asserting the role of governments both at the international and domestic levels has re-vitalized design studies. This work appreciates that an uninformed emphasis on globalization and the merits of decentralized governance arrangements had a serious negative impact on policy design research. The idea that changes in governance modes entailed both alterations in the abilities of various state and non-state actors to prevail in policy formulation disputes and decisions, as well as shifts in the choices and types of policy instruments used to implement public policy which are at the core of policy designs and designing (March and Olson, 1996; Offe, 2006; Weaver and Rockman, 1993; Scharpf, 1991), suggested that design was largely functional and automatic.²

More recently, however, the government-to-governance thinking behind these models has been challenged by studies which revealed the continuing high profile and important role played by governments both in contexts of social ‘steering’ and in more traditional areas of policy activities (Capano 2011; Tollefson et al 2011; Howlett et al 2009). These studies have found that even in ostensibly high-network areas of activity such as social policy and health, governments (or more generally, public institutions) still have the prime responsibility for governing society and choosing governance techniques and policy content although they may choose to modify the
way they perform this role if they feel the need to be more effective in dealing with stakeholders, or they wish to avoid paying an excessive political costs for their actions.

**A New Emphasis on the Need to Accurately Assess and Understand the Design Space**

Accurately describing and understanding the nature of the policy design ‘space’ or context thus remains a crucial activity for policy designers and students of policy design. Much of the original design literature in the 1960s and 1970s focused attention on ‘technical’ analysis. That is, upon efforts to assess the functional capacities of specific policy tools and how they could be applied to achieve policy goals in abstract or imagined unconstrained policy-making circumstances. The newer design literature keeps this focus but adds to it the need to also assess contextual factors involved in tool choices and use, especially political ones (Schon 1992; Gero and Kannengiesser nd; Gero and Kannengiesser nd; Baliga and Maskin 2003; Maskin 2008).

That is, designers must avoid simply advocating ‘stock’ solutions unless this is called for by the limited nature of the space available for new designs. Rather they should ‘consider the range of feasible’ options possible in a given circumstance and package these into sets of ‘competing strategies’ to achieve policy goals (May 1981). As David Weimer (1992: 373) has argued, ‘Instruments, alone or in combination, must be crafted to fit particular substantive, organizational and political contexts’.

The new design orientation focuses attention on the construction over time of policy packages operating in complex multi-policy and multi-level design contexts such as those found in most policy-making areas which are expected to address multiple goals and objectives (del Rio & Howlett, 2013). And the field is interested in better describing the nature of the bundles of tools which can be used to address policy problems and to help understand the interactive effects which occur when
Multiple tools are used over time (Doremus, 2003; Howlett et al., 2014b, Howlett, 2014; Jordan et al. 2011; 2012).

Re-focusing on the issue of policy design in this way is a promising effort to better understanding the processes through which policies are formulated and implemented and see how their content is continuously chosen and developed. From this point of view the “new” policy design wave in public policy is a fruitful way through which different theoretical and empirical streams in political science can join together on a specific strategic research theme related to the nature of policy advice and decision-making dynamics both in theory and practice. In fact to understand how policy design matters in policy-making means to read from a multi-theoretical perspective on the different stages of the policy-making trying to understand how institutional arrangements, governance modes, institutional behaviors (above all those of governments and parliaments), institutionalized patterns of actors’ relations, conflicting policy ideas interact each other in designing the content of agendas, political decisions, implementation strategies.

Seen from this point of view, to call for a renewed focus on policy design means to call for a convergence of those streams of research, both in political science and in public policy, which study how political and policy decisions are made and implemented, that is, in other words, how the policy design space is delimited and fulfilled.

**What is the Difference between Policy Design and Non-Design?**

Within the policy sciences, “design” has been linked both to policy instruments and implementation (May, 2003) and to the impact of policy ideas and advice on policy formulation (Linder & Peters, 1990). It is usually thought to involve the deliberate and conscious attempt to define policy goals and connect them in an instrumental
fashion to tools expected to realize those objectives (Gilabert & Lawford-Smith, 2012; Majone, 1975; May, 2003). But not all policies are ‘designed’ in this sense, nor are all designs good nor do they all necessarily lead to superior outcomes. Understanding the differences between design and non-design and what causes or leads to good or poor designs is a key question in the new design orientation.

What is Policy Design?

Policy design can be thought of as a specific form of policy formulation based on the gathering of knowledge about the effects of policy tool use on policy targets and the application of that knowledge to the development and implementation of policies aimed at the attainment of specifically desired public policy outcomes and ambitions (Bobrow, 2006; Bobrow & Dryzek, 1987; Montpetit, 2003; Weaver, 2009, 2010).

Policy designs thus can be seen to contain both a substantive component—a set of alternative arrangements thought potentially capable of resolving or addressing some aspect of a policy problem, one or more of which is ultimately put into practice—as well as a procedural component—a set of activities related to securing some level of agreement among those charged with formulating, deciding, and administering that alternative vis-à-vis other alternatives (Howlett, 2011).

Design hence overlaps and straddles policy formulation, decision-making and policy implementation and involves actors, ideas and interests active at each stage of the policy process (Howlett et al 2009). However, it also posits a very specific form of interaction among these elements, driven by knowledge and evidence of alternatives’ merits and demerits in achieving policy goals rather than by other processes such as bargaining or electioneering among key policy actors.
Conceptually, a policy design process begins with the analysis of the abilities of different kinds of policy tools to affect policy outputs and outcomes and the kinds of resources required to allow them to operate as intended (Hood, 1986; Salamon, 2002). This instrumental knowledge is contextual in the sense that it requires a special understanding of how the use of specific kinds of instruments affects target group behaviour and compliance with government aims. It thus includes knowledge and consideration of many constraints on tool use originating in the limits of existing knowledge, prevailing governance structures, and other arrangements and behaviours which may preclude consideration of certain options and promote others (Howlett, 2009a, 2011). It requires both analytical and evidentiary capacity on the part of the government as well as the intention to exercise it.

*What is Non-Design?*

Such a means-ends understanding of policy-making permeates the policy design orientation but, of course, is only one possible orientation or set of practices which can be followed in actual policy formulation and result in policy-outputs (Colebatch, 2006; Tribe, 1972). It highlights the complex processes through which policies emerge and raises the issues of how to distinguish between design and other formulation and decision-making processes (Gero, 1990; Schön, 1988). In the design case, policy formulators are expected as much as possible to base their analyses on logic, knowledge and experience rather than, for example, purely political calculations and forms of satisficing behaviour which also can serve to generate alternatives (Bendor, Kumar, & Siegel, 2009; Sidney, 2007).

Policy design studies, of course, acknowledge that not all policy work is rational in this instrumental sense. That is, not all policy-making is logic or knowledge driven and it is debatable how closely policy-makers approximate the
instrumental logic and reasoning which is generally thought to characterize this field (Howlett et al., 2009).

In contrast to those who view policy-making as intentional and instrumentally rational, for example, many commentators, pundits and jaded or more cynical members of the public assume that all policy-making, as the output of a political system and decision-making process, is inherently interest-driven, ideological and hence irrational in a design sense. This is a very common assumption in many policy studies and constitutes a form of non-design, interpreted from a technical or problem-centered design perspective.

With respect to non-design, however, it bears repeating that the modern policy studies movement did begin with the recognition that public policy-making results from the interactions of policy-makers in the exercise of power, legitimate or otherwise (Arts & van Tatenhove, 2004; Lasswell, 1958; Stone, 1988). Although some of these efforts were noted to be arbitrary or capricious, most were viewed as representing the concerted efforts of governments to intentionally act in an instrumental way; that is, to attempt to achieve a particular policy goal or end through the use of a relatively well known set of policy means developed over many years of state-building experience (Lasswell & Lerner, 1951). Transforming policy intentions into practice is a complex process and crafting the best possible policy in a programmatic or instrumental sense is not always a government’s prime concern. In some circumstances, it can be expected that policy decisions will be more highly contingent and ‘irrational’ than others, that is, driven by situational logics and opportunism rather than careful deliberation and assessment. (Cohen et al. 1979; Dryzek 1983; Kingdon 1984; Eijlander 2005; Franchino and Hoyland 2009).
This high level of contingency in some decision-making contexts has led some critics and observers of policy design efforts to suggest that policies cannot be ‘designed’ in the sense that a house or a piece of furniture can be (Dryzek and Ripley 1988; deLeon 1988). However, many other scholars disagreed with this assessment.3 Paraphrasing Hugh Heclo (1978), governments not only power but also puzzle, and thus they can be genuinely committed to solve collective problems also though real policy design.

In some policy decisions and formulation processes “design” considerations may be more or less absent and the quality of the logical or empirical relations between policy components as solutions to problems may be incorrect or ignored (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1979; Dryzek, 1983; Eijlander, 2005; Franchino & Hoyland, 2009; Kingdon, 1984; Sager & Rielle, 2013). This includes a variety of contexts in which formulators or decision-makers, for example, may engage in interest-driven trade-offs or log-rolling between different values or resource uses or, more extremely, might engage in venal or corrupt behaviour in which personal gain from a decision may trump other evaluative criteria.

These “non-design” situations are well known in political science but have not been well studied in the policy sciences and the extent to which such considerations as political gain or blame avoidance calculations outweigh instrumental factors in policy formulation is a key question (Hood, 2010) which studies of social policy-making are well suited to illuminate.

**Understanding Design and Non-Design Policy Spaces**

In general it is clear that a spectrum of design and non-design formulation processes exists between policy processes informed by instrumental motivations and ones driven by other logics (see Figure 1). While the distinction between policy-
driven and politically-driven processes is clear, the exact boundary between them is not and it is necessary to examine in more detail why one process emerges rather than the other and, secondly, the conditions under which either process can successfully achieve its goals.

Figure 1 – A Spectrum of Design and Non-Design Processes

The Requisites for Good (and Poor) Design and Non-Design: A Capacity Approach

The nature of the constraints on government intentions can negatively or positively affect both design and non-design processes and result in good or poor outcomes in specific sectors. In both the cases of design and non-design situations high government capacity is a significant pre-requisite for success, and the same is true of a lack of capacity and it’s impact on policy failure. For those favouring more rational design process the worst situation is a politicized, religious or ideologically-driven policy process with few governing resources which is a ‘design’ space expected to generate very poor results. However even when design values dominate,
capacity remains a critical pre-requisite for successful policy formulation and implementation.

Figure 2 presents a schematic illustrating how these two different aspects of policy-making – having a design intention and the capacity to carry it out or not - create different policy formulation spaces which enable or lead to the emergence of very different policy processes and outcomes. This sets out a set of formulation spaces taking into account the intention and ability of governments to undertake purposive, instrumental policy design or to meet more political goals when faced with the presence or absence of significant policy resource constraints or tool lock-in affects.

Figure 2. Types of policy formulation spaces: Situating design and non-design processes and outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government Formulation Intention</th>
<th>Level of Government Knowledge and Other Constraints</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More Instrumental</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capable Policy Design Space</td>
<td>Relatively unconstrained formulation via design is possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Policy Design Space</td>
<td>Only partially informed or restricted design is possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Instrumental</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capable Political Non-Design Space</td>
<td>Relatively unconstrained non-design processes are possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Political Non-Design Space</td>
<td>Only poorly informed non-design is possible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Policy capacity is defined here as a set of skills, competences, resources, and institutional arrangements and capabilities with which key tasks and functions in policy process are structured, staffed and supported. Many noble efforts of policy makers in both a design and non-design sense have failed due to lack of capacity to make policies in a systematic instrumental manner whether the intention is technical excellence or more partisan goals. These experiences have led scholars of public
policy to focus on the challenges involved in formulating policies in terms of the capabilities, competences and capacities of governments and their NGO counterparts and civil society actors. Having the necessary skills or competences to make policy are crucial to policy and governance success. However they also rely on their availability and the availability of adequate resources to allow them to be mobilized. These resources or capabilities must exist at the individual, organizational and system-levels in order to allow individual policy workers and managers to participate in and contribute to designing, deploying, and evaluating policies. It includes not only their ability to analyse but also to learn and adapt to changes as necessary.

Just like ‘intention’, policy capacity is a complex topic as government competences and capabilities are unevenly distributed across a range of individual, organizational and systemic activities and actors. Analytical competences allow policy alternatives to be effectively generated and investigated; managerial capacities allow state resources to be effectively brought to bear on policy issues; and political capacities allow policy-makers and managers the support required to develop and implement their ideas, programs and plans. The skills and competences of key policy professionals, such as policy-makers, public managers, and policy analysts, play a key role in determining how well various tasks and functions in policy process but require various kinds of resources if they are to be exercised fully or to the extent they are needed. But resources must also be available at the level of the organization if their members’ ability to perform policy functions as needed is to exist.

Finally, system level capabilities include the level of support and trust a public agency enjoys from its political masters and from the society at large as well as the nature of the economic and security systems within which policy-makers operate. Such factors are critical determinant of organizational capabilities and thus of public
managers’ and analysts capability to perform their policy work. Political support for both from both above and below are vital because agencies and managers must be considered legitimate in order to access resources from their authorizing institutions and constituencies on a continuing basis, and such resources must also be available for award in the first place. The nine components of policy capacity involving these three sets of skills or competences and the three locations of resources or capabilities needed for their exercise are set out in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3 – A Matrix Model of Policy Capacity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level Dimension</th>
<th>INDIVIDUAL</th>
<th>ORGANIZATIONAL</th>
<th>SYSTEMIC</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analytical</strong></td>
<td>Analytical Capacity&lt;br&gt;Knowledge of policy substance and analytical techniques and communication skills</td>
<td>Technical Capacity&lt;br&gt;Capability in data collection; Availability of software and hardware for analysis and evaluation; Storage and Dissemination of operational information (eg. client need, service utilization; budget, human resources.); E-services.</td>
<td>Knowledge System Capacity&lt;br&gt;Availability and sharing of data for policy research and analysis; availability, quality and the level of competition of policy advisory services in and out of government; presence of high quality educational and training institutions and opportunities for knowledge generation, mobilization and use access to information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Managerial</strong></td>
<td>Managerial Capacity&lt;br&gt;strategic management, leadership, communication, negotiation and conflict resolution, financial management and budgeting</td>
<td>Administrative Capacity&lt;br&gt;Funding, staffing, levels of Intra- and inter-agency communication, consultation, and coordination.</td>
<td>Governance Capacity&lt;br&gt;Levels of Inter-organisational trust and communication; Adequate fiscal system to fund programs and projects;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political</strong></td>
<td>Political Acumen Capacity&lt;br&gt;Understanding of the needs and positions of different stakeholders; judgment of political feasibility; Communication skills</td>
<td>Political Resource Capacity&lt;br&gt;Access to key policy-makers; Effective Civil Service bargain. Politicians’ support for the agency programmes and projects.</td>
<td>Legitimation Capacity&lt;br&gt;Level of public participation in policy process; Public Trust; Presence of rule of law and transparent adjudicative system</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is true in general, and specifically in policy sectors where formulation challenges are particularly daunting in dealing with problems which are multi-faceted, intertwined, and rooted in a diverse range of individual, social, and economic conditions, ideological and religious predilections and often highly politicized (Bode 2006). As pointed out above, addressing such problems often results in construction of bundles or packages of tools over time that attempt to simultaneously address multiple goals in overlapping and multi-level and multi-sector contexts requiring high levels of capacity which may not exist. However, many policy formulation efforts in deviate from the instrumental logic and reasoning expected of policy design processes because they deal with more intractable problems in the context of poor/contested/ideologically driven knowledge of causal relations and poorly funded and resourced organizations. This is especially the case when solutions proposed touch on deeply held values and norms that inhibit formulation and implementation efforts at the systemic level.

**The Dynamics of Design and Non-Design**

While such a framework helps to make sense of multiple possible design spaces and their outcomes, it is also important to stress the dynamic nature of all of these processes. That is, key non-design aspects of many policies are negative stretching and tense layering over time, especially when attempting to manage large policy systems which require implementation across different levels or areas such as between federal and local or rural and urban jurisdictions and authorities. In policy areas such as health and urbanization, for example, national and sub-national or regional and sub-regional policy goals are set using frameworks that overlook unique local needs or ignores the externalities arising out of isolated policy design. The resulting institutional stretching and poor layering of policies contributes to weak
outcomes. The contextual constraints in these cases may be so strong that designing policies often take forms only distantly related to solving the problem the policymakers set out to address. When tools are used in combination, as they often are, there are additional complexities which not only promote synergies and complementarities but also contradictions and conflicts in expected and unexpected ways. In addition, the operations and effectiveness of the tools are affected by the surrounding social, political, and economic conditions. This undermines an intentional policy design orientation and it is common in many jurisdictions for policymakers to be guided by political calculations in addressing problems.

In combination with weak capacity in many of the cells of Figure 3 this tends to drive formulation efforts into the bottom right quadrant of Figure 2. Solving difficult problems has meant that policy making needs to continually evolve and innovate. But this is difficult if not impossible to do in a poor political design space. Moving from a poor political non-design space to one more favorable to successful action is needed for this to occur.

As Figure 2 shows, however, both capable and poor policy and political formulation processes exist depending on the capacity context of policy-making and the intention of government in enacting policy. Thus movement towards more successful policy innovation requires at minimum a boost in capacities, which can shift formulation into to a competent non-design space, and/or a shift in the desire on the part of policy-makers to be more intentional and instrumental which can shift policy-making into an intentional design space.

Capacity improvements are thus a *sine qua non* for improvement in social policy formulation. This is because design in complex multi-actor multi-level situations requires not only an understanding of the problem at hand, the features of
the tools relevant to addressing them and how they operate when used individually and in combination with other tools but also the organizational and systemic resources and support which allow those individual level skills and competences to be exercised.

It is not surprising therefore that many approaches to policy reform around the globe focus on building capacity for better policy design through decentralization and the creation of closer operational links between national and sub-national or regional and sub-regional actors. But, as Figure 2 shows, this is not enough if a government wishes to alter existing practices in a more systematic, instrumental fashion. That is, this also requires the adoption of a design orientation towards policy-making, shifting the formulation space towards the upper two quadrants.

A principle driver of such an orientation in a policy sector is the desire on the part of many actors to adopt a more integrated approach towards policy rather than implementing incremental changes or creating siloed policy patchworks. When problems such as elderly care span across sectors, for example, this requires coordinating the health sector, labor market policies as well as the pension system, and others, into an integrated design approach that systematically mixes policy instruments in a way which is likely to result in optimal outcomes as compared to ad hoc layering. Efforts at intermeshing of social policy and social regulation, for example, are parts of such movements. While regulation has been a traditional policy instrument for addressing market failures arising out of negative externalities particularly in the area of environmental policy, it is much less common when addressing market failures in the provision of merit goods such as education, health care and housing. Social regulation is designed to impose certain choices on consumers especially where governments believe that the consumption is sub-optimal.
A design orientation that consciously targets equity as well as efficiency through consumption and behavioural changes is required if such moves are to be accomplished effectively.

**What Does an Enhanced Design Orientation Look Like?**

This all begs the question of what an enhanced design for policy looks like in practice. Systematic design of policy comprises two sets of activities – designing the policy and designing the policy process – each comprising a set of related but distinct activities.

*Designing a policy involves:*

- Understanding and conceptualizing the problem at hand and assessing its depth and breadth.
- Surveying the range of tools available to address the main causes of the identified problem.
- Gathering knowledge about the effects of the different tools on policy targets and the application of that knowledge to the development of policies aimed at achieving goals.
- Estimating the resources necessary for putting the tools into effect.
- Ex ante evaluation of the policy options against the common criteria of effectiveness, efficiency, equity, sustainability, and implementability

*Designing the policy process* is at least as complex and involves distinct activities at each stage of policy-making. These include:

- Agenda-setting. It is about (1) Problem recognition: the government recognizes that there is a problem which requires public action, and (2) Problem Structuring whereby the government defines what the problem is in
terms of breadth and depth and what would need to be done to solve it. Designing the agenda-setting process needs to ensure that the information related to the problem are collected, categorized and analyzed; the problem is examined from different perspectives; all key stakeholders within and outside the government are consulted and their’ divergent perspectives and the factors shaping them are understood. There should be a certain degree of “steering” of the agenda-setting process so that the policy deliberations are not stalled or veer off course and lead government agencies must be established that can identify areas of convergence and divergence among issues.

- Designing the policy formulation process involving setting up processes to ensure that alternative policy solutions are comprehensively identified, classified and compared. Here is it vital to ensure that the range of alternatives are broad but not unwieldy. There should be room for considering new solutions in comparison to the old or existing solutions. The bias for status quo needs to be overcome. This can only be achieved if there is scope for new ideas and actors to enter the process, as well if a government is capable of maintaining its strong instrumental intentionality.

- Decision-making must be based on some acceptable criteria and supported by available and shared conceptions and interpretation of what good “evidence” is.

- Implementation has to be carefully designed and communicated, and must offer appropriate incentives to the implementers. Here the lessons of Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) and Sabatier and Mazmanian (1981) still remain very relevant.
• Evaluation needs to be carefully done and integrated into the policy itself. The criteria for evaluation must be spelled out in advance and there must be constant monitoring of performance if the implementers are to engage in evaluation rather than gaming the process. Learning through monitoring must be the desired process of evaluation and should be clearly incorporated into policy at the formulation stage.

**Conclusion: Moving Policy Design Forward in Theory and Practice**

As Junginger (2013) recently argued, at the present time we continue to know too little about many important aspects of policy design work, especially about the nature of the kinds of policy formulation activities which bring about either a design or a non-design process. As she put it, we know very little about “the actual activities of designing that bring policies into being—of how people involved in the creation of policies go about identifying design problems and design criteria, about the methods they employ in their design process” (p. 3). This highlights the continued need to better understand the mechanics of policy formulation involved in developing policy alternatives in this sector and in most others (Linder & Peters, 1988; Wintges, 2007; Turnpenny et al 2009).

A roadmap for a new “policy design orientation” exists in studies undertaken in recent years into the formulation of complex policy mixes in fields such as energy and environmental policy, among others (Howlett, 2014; Howlett & Lejano, 2013; Howlett, Tan, Migone, Wellstead, & Evans, 2014). The research agenda of this new design orientation is focused on questions which an earlier literature on the subject largely neglected, such as the trade-offs existing between different tools in complex policy mixes and how to deal with the synergies and conflicts which result from tool interactions; as well as the different means and patterns—such as layering - through
which policy mixes evolve over time (Thelen, 2004). Policy practices themselves, including design ones, also evolve over time and the study of fads and fashions in this area – like public enterprises and regulation in the 1930s to 1950s, privatization and de-regulation in the 1970s to 1990s or contracting out and public-private partnerships after 2000 (Ramesh and Howlett 2006) – are also bona fide subjects for future research which will be explored in this workshop.

Endnotes

1 These studies embodied their own notions about what sorts of institutional arrangements and processes constituted desirable and attainable designs and usually treated these as inevitable quasi-automatic processes, therefore requiring only ex-post analysis (Rhodes 1996; Kooiman 1993 and 2000). Ironically, these studies largely ignored the contextual and potentially irrational elements of policy-making and design. That is, in this literature, policy is typically seen as the outcome of decentralized, democratized processes involving the actions and interests of multiple public and private stakeholders and therefore is less ‘designed’ than ‘emergent’, but is still ‘rational’ in the sense that ‘form is expected to follow function’ so that policies match their contexts.

2 Although ‘networkization’ could just have been seen as a new contextual design challenge (Agranoff and McGuire 1999), for many authors the alleged weakening of the centrality of the state as an author of policy was accompanied by a waning in interest in the authorship (or design) of policy.

3 Another strand in the literature did not ignore the irrational elements of policy-making but argued that formulation and decision-making activities could be analytically or practically distinguished and divorced from each other In their many works on the subject in the late 1980s and early 1990s for example; Stephen H. Linder and B. Guy Peters (1988) argued that the actual process of public policy decision-making could, in an analytical sense, be divorced from the abstract concept of policy design, in the same way that an abstract architectural concept can be divorced from its engineering manifestation in theory if not in practice. Such a distinction, they argued, allowed policy design (noun) to be separated conceptually from policy design (verb) and allowed for the development within policy studies of a design orientation even if the ultimate decision on policy content was less overtly rational (Schon 1988, 1992).

References


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