Revisiting Policy Design:
The Rise and Fall (and Rebirth?) of Policy Design Studies

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Paper Prepared for the General Conference of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR)

Section 63
Executive Politics and Governance in an Age of Multi-Level Governance
Panel 52: Policy instruments: choices and design
Panel Session: 7 - Friday, 26 August, 1500-1640

University of Iceland
Reykjavik, Iceland

Draft 4
July 11, 2011
Abstract

However it is conducted, the idea of policy design is inextricably linked with the idea of improving government actions through the conscious consideration at the stage of policy formulation of the likely outcomes of policy implementation activities. This is a concern both for non-governmental actors concerned with bearing the costs of government failures and incompetence, as well as for governmental ones who may be tasked with carrying out impossible duties and meeting unrealistic expectations. Regardless of regime and issue type, and regardless of the specific weight given by governments to different substantive and procedural aims, all governments wish to have their goals effectively achieved and usually wish to do so in an efficient way, that is, with a minimum of effort. Thus all governments, of whatever stripe, are interested in applying knowledge and experience about policy issues in such a way as to ensure the more or less efficient and effective realization of their aims. How this is done, and by whom, however, varies by sector and jurisdiction and less attention has been paid in recent years to this topic than in the past. This paper revisits the design literature of the 1980s and 1990s and reflects on the reasons for its decline. It then combines this early work with more recent work on implementation tools and policy advice systems to help reinvigorate the field and better explain the continuing relevance of designs and design processes in contemporary policy studies.

Introduction:

Policy design is a subject ridden with nuance and complexity. In Davis Bobrow’s (2006) apt phrase, policy design is “ubiquitous, necessary and difficult” but surprisingly little studied and understood in the contemporary policy literature. This is especially surprising since at different points over the past three decades it has received detailed treatment (Bobrow 2006; Weimer 1992; May 1981, 1991 and 2003). This paper discusses why this pattern of (in)attention has occurred and suggests the time is ripe for this particular facet of policy studies to re-emerge.

The purpose and expectations of policy design have always been clear (Dryzek 1983). That is, it is an activity conducted by a number of policy actors in the hope of improving policy-making and policy outcomes through the accurate anticipation of the consequences of government actions and the articulation of specific courses of action to be followed. Regardless of regime and issue-type, and regardless of the specific weight given by governments to different substantive and procedural aims, all governments who wish to have their goals effectively achieved in an efficient way must employ knowledge and empirical data in order to assess the appropriateness of alternate policy means, and hence engage in ‘design’ (Weimer 1993; Potoski 2002; deLeon 1988).
Policy studies are thus aided to the extent that we can be more precise and inclusive in our understanding of the practice and scope of design. But policy design is an area of study in the field of public policy with a curious intellectual history. It engendered a large literature in the 1980s and 1990s oriented to understanding design as both a process and an outcome with prominent figures in the US, Canada, Europe and Australia 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 writing extensively on policy formulation, policy instrument choice and the idea of designing policy outcomes. After the early 1990s, however, this literature tailed off and although some writings on policy design have continued to flourish in specific fields such as economics and environmental studies, in the fields of public administration and public policy the idea of ‘design’ was largely replaced by an emphasis on the study of institutional forms and decentralized governance arrangements.

This paper traces this decline to two related hypotheses about the changing nature of society and policy responses – the ‘government-to-governance’ and ‘globalization’ narratives – which it argues crowded out more nuanced analyses of state options in the policy making process in favor of a more or less a priori preference, emphasis and prioritization of decentralized market and “third” or ‘fourth sector’ collaborative network mechanisms. Importantly, these latter designs are often seen as both inevitable and ‘natural’, obviating the need for reflective studies of design and meta-design processes and outcomes.

Re-inventing, or more properly, “re-discovering” policy design, it is argued, is necessary for policy studies to advance beyond some of the strictures placed in its way by this reification and over-emphasis upon only a few of the many possible kinds of policy designs. Several recent insights gained from recent studies of implementation mixes, policy formulation actors and the impact of policy ideas are put forward as examples of new directions policy design studies can take.
The Origins and Rise of Policy Design Studies as an Academic Field

The roots of policy design studies lie in the origins of the policy sciences. In his early pathbreaking works on public policy-making, for example, Harold Lasswell began integrating aspects of both policy formulation and implementation, pointing to the importance of understanding the range of policy instruments available to policy makers (Lasswell, 1954). This orientation primed other policy scholars to begin studying the multiple means by which governments could effect policy and the context in which they could be used (Torgerson 1985 and 1990). By the 1970s there arose a more explicit focus on the evaluation of the impact of specific kinds of implementation-related tools, primarily economic ones like subsidies and taxes in order to aid policy-makers in considerations of their use and effectiveness (Sterner 2003; Woodside 1986; Mayntz 1983).

Bardach (1980) and Salamon (1981), for example, both argued in the early 1980s that policy studies had "gone wrong" right at the start by defining policy in terms of "problems", "issues", "areas" or "fields" rather than in terms of "instruments". As Salamon put it in 1981:

*The major shortcoming of current implementation research is that it focuses on the wrong unit of analysis, and the most important theoretical breakthrough would be to identify a more fruitful unit on which to focus analysis and research. In particular, rather than focusing on individual programs, as is now done, or even collections of programs grouped according to major "purpose," as is frequently proposed, the suggestion here is that we should concentrate instead on the generic tools of government action, on the "techniques" of social intervention.*

(p. 256)

Following these and similar injunctions, scholars in many countries interested in the links between implementation failures and policy success (Mayntz 1979; O’Toole 2000; Goggin et al 1990) in the 1980s and early 1990ss turned their gaze directly on the subject of how implementation alternatives were crafted and formulated. Studies in economics and law which focused on the ‘ex-post’ evaluation of the impact of policy
outputs (Stokey and Zeckhauser 1978; Bobrow 1987) joined with a growing interdisciplinary literature focused on policy outputs and governmental processes. Legal studies spoke to how laws and regulations mediated the delivery of goods and services, and how formal processes of legislation and rulemaking led to policy (Keyes 1996). On another front, management and administrative studies provided insights into the links between administrative systems and implementation modes, among others (Lowi 1966, 1972 and 1985; Peters and Pierre 1998).

This led to the birth of a specific literature on policy design in the mid-1980s. Scholarly attention at this time focused on the need to more precisely categorize types of policy instruments in order to better analyze the reasons for their use (Salamon 1981; Tupper and Doern 1981; Hood 1986; Bressers and Honigh 1986; Bressers and Klok 1988; Trebilcock and Hartle 1982). Careful examination of implementation instruments and instrument choices, it was argued, would improve both policy designs and outcomes (Woodside 1986; Linder and Peters 1984; Mayntz 1983).

During this period, researchers in Europe and North America shed a great deal of light on the construction and establishment of regulatory and other political and administrative agencies and enterprises; traditional financial inducements, and the "command-and-control" measures adopted by administrative agencies (Landry, Varone and Goggin 1998; Tupper and Doern 1981; Hood, 1986; Vedung et al 1997; Howlett 1991). This new emphasis upon the systematic study of policy instruments lent itself easily to emerging areas such as pollution prevention and professional regulation (Hippes 1988; Trebilcock and Prichard 1983). Researchers also began studying shifts in patterns of instrument choice associated with activities such as the waves of privatization and deregulation which characterized the period (Howlett and Ramesh 1993).

Soon the field of instrument studies had advanced enough that Salamon (1989) could argue that the design or ‘tools approach’ had indeed become a major approach to policy studies in its own right, bringing a unique perspective to the policy sciences with its focus on policy outputs. He framed two important research questions which analyses of the tools of government action addressed: "What consequences does the choice of tool of government action have for the effectiveness and operation of a government program?" and "What factors influence the choice of program tools? (p. 265).
These questions were taken up by the policy design literature in the 1990s (Salamon 1981; Timmermans et al. 1998; Hood 2007) and by the late 1990s, work on instrument selection had progressed to the point of beginning to systematically attempt to assess the potential for developing optimal policy mixes, moving away from the single instrument studies and designs characteristic of earlier works (Grabosky 1994; Gunningham et al. 1997; Howlett 2004). Studies such as Gunningham, Grabosky and Sinclair’s work on ‘smart regulation’ led to the development of efforts to identify complementarities and conflicts within instrument mixes or ‘portfolios’ involved in more complex and sophisticated policy designs (Buckman and Diesendorf 2010; Roch, Pitts and Navarro 2010; Barnett and Shore 2009; Blonz, Vajjhala and Safirova 2008; del Rio et al 2010).

The Decline of Policy Design Studies

Despite these advances, however, “policy design” as a subject of academic inquiry began to decline precipitously in the mid-to-late 1990s.

Figure 1 tells part of the story. To construct this figure, a title keyword search, using JSTOR, was conducted of articles about policy design over the period, 1961-2005. And compared to articles on the emergence of two other fields of policy research, that of “governance” and “globalization”. The central contention made is that the weakening of interest in policy design research was related to a broader decentering of policy studies away from centrality of authority and state-centeredness, as seen in the concurrent rise in the literature on collaborative governance and on the effects of globalization in undermining state capacities and capabilities.

In the earliest literature, from Laswell onward, the most central actor in policy design has been the state. But many commentators in the post 1990 period argued that state practices were being transformed by improved information and communications technologies to become ever more complex networks of inter-organizational actors (Castells, 1996; Mayntz 1993). This increased ‘networkization’ of society, it was argued, meant that many functions and activities traditionally undertaken exclusively by governments increasingly involved ever-larger varieties of non-governmental actors,
themselves involved in increasingly complex relationships with other societal, and state, actors at both the domestic and international levels (Foster and Plowden, 1996).

Figure 1. Chronology of Journal Articles on Policy Design, Governance, and Globalization (5-year increments)
(Source: http://www.jstor.org accessed February 7 and 14, 2011)

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’. 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; ones less amenable to conscious design by state elites. This movement towards the development of networked societies, it was argued, has reduced government capacity for independent action and limited their design choices and alternatives (Dobuzinski 1987; Lehmbruch 1991). As networkization increased, to give another example, it was argued that many countries placed an increasing emphasis on public information and other similar types of campaigns, replacing or supplementing other forms of government activity (Hawkins and Thomas 1989; Woodside 1986; Howlett and Ramesh 1993; Hood 1991; Doern and Wilks 1998; Weiss and Tschirhart 1994).

These arguments and orientations had an effect on policy design research. If accurate, such changes in governance modes entail 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 of policy instruments used to implement public policy (March and Olson, 1996; Offe, 2006; Weaver and Rockman, 1993; Scharpf, 1991). Although ‘networkization’ could simply have been seen as a new design challenge (Agranoff and McGuire 1999), for many authors the 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.

Part of the view that has taken over in the governance literature is a distinction drawn between policy as an instrument of government and the institutional framework in which policies arise, and a perspectival shift toward the latter (Kooiman 2000, pg. 126). Some describe this as a turn away from the managerialist state to a deliberative model (Durant and Legge, 2006). And at least part of the demise of policy design research can be traced to the call for more participatory and less ‘command-and-control’ tools proposed by adherents of the ‘government to governance’ thesis (Schout, Jordan and Twena 2010; Koppenjan and Klijn 2004; Barnett et al. 2009; Edelenbos et al 2010; Hardiman and Scott 2010; Esmark 2009; Hysing 2009). As Bevir and Rhodes write: “A decentred theory undercuts this idea of a set of tools we can use to manage networks. If networks are constructed differently, contingently, and continuously, we cannot have a tool kit for (constructing or) managing them…” (2007 at 85).
But while many early proponents of the idea of increased ‘networkization’ simply expected governance arrangements to shift evenly away from sets of formal institutions, coercive power relations and substantive regulatory tools found in hierarchical systems towards more informal institutions, non-coercive relationships of power and a marked preference for procedural instruments and soft law in more plurilateral systems (Kooiman, 1993; Dunsire, 1993) in many realms and countries this did not happen (Howlett et al. 2009). Rather than presage a decline in attention to policy design, we would argue, the new institutional complexities revealed by the literature on governance call for a closer focus upon it.

The same can be argued of a second, related, movement in the policy literature of the late 1990s and first decade of this century, that on globalization and its effects. This literature also promoted a similar view of the ‘hollowing out’ of the state and a decline in the need to pay close attention to state options and actions, this time due not so much to the increased power and influence of non-state domestic actors as to the effects of international agreements and the mobility of industry, capital and technology in the contemporary era (Held et al. 1990; Cutler et al. 1999). Like the governance literature this literature has problematized the notion of the state and its ability to control events and therefore correctly anticipate policy problems and outcomes (Moran, 2002). Consistent with this view is the sentiment that, inasmuch as the policy design literature emphasized modalities and instruments available to a more powerful state, then this literature is perhaps now outdated. However, there are reasons to think otherwise.

Contrary to what is commonly believed and often advocated, for example, in our global era the domestic state remains far from overwhelmed or bereft of autonomous decision-making capacity (Weiss 1999; 2003; Braithwaite 2008). Even with globalization, the source of many of the changes in the patterns of policy-making and instrument choice most often still lies in the domestic rather than the international arena. Domestic states, be they national or sub-national, do not just react to changes in their international environments but also are very much still involved in the formulation and implementation of policies expected to achieve their ends (Lynn 1980; Vogel 2005). While there is no doubt that the evolution of international treaties and arrangements is an important development in certain spheres like trade and finance, in many sectors and
areas of government activity they impose only very minimal or no constraints on the choice of policy tools utilized by governments; nowhere near those alleged by both proponents and opponents of globalization-led pro-market reforms (Weiss, 1999).  

Thus, contrary to much prevailing opinion, rumors of the demise of the state (and its capacity for policy design) are greatly exaggerated. And, to the extent that changes in state capacity have occurred as a result of shifts in governance and globalization-related activities, rather than limit the role for policy design, it is argued, the more complex and networked character of public policy today has, in fact, increased the need to deepen our understanding of mechanisms and instruments that characterize policy design, rather than obviated our need to examine it.

Re-Invigorating the Study of Policy Design: Moving Beyond Globalization and Governance Claims to the Systematic Study of Multi-Level Policy Design Effects

As studies of globalization and governance correctly noted, policy-making and especially policy tool selection is a highly constrained process. The development of programme level- objectives and means choices, for example, does take place within a larger governance context in which sets of institutions, actors and practices are ‘defined’ which make up the ‘environment’ within which policy design takes place and designs emerge. Some of the key elements which comprise a policy, notably, abstract policy aims and general implementation processes, are defined at this ‘meta’ level of policy-making. Hence, a legal mode of governance contains a preference for the use of laws while a market mode involves a preference for market-based tools and so on. And choices of programme-level tools and targets, or policy means, are similarly constrained (Skodvin, Gulberg and Aakre 2010), with meso-level programme objectives and policy instruments such as the choice of a subsidy over a tax expenditure in turn constraining micro-level choices, such as the extent of the subsidy to be provided. This multi-level, nested, nature of policy tool choices, therefore, must be taken into account in any effort to design or plan policy outcomes (Howlett 2009) and this is the real lesson of the governance and globalization literatures of the past two decades for policy design studies.

In this regard it is important for policy designers to incorporate into their thinking the knowledge that the exact processes by which policy decisions are taken vary greatly
by jurisdiction and sector and reflect 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). In some circumstances, policy decisions will be more highly contingent and ‘irrational’, that is, driven by situational logics and opportunism rather than careful deliberation and assessment, than others (Cohen et al. 1979; Dryzek 1983; Kingdon 1984; Eijlander 2005; Franchino and Hoyland 2009). Better designs are more effective at doing this, generating policy processes and outcomes which are more consistent with their environments.

This high level of contingency in decision-making 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). However this assertion fundamentally fails to distinguish between policy design as a verb and as a noun. That is, between policy design as a process and as an outcome (May 2003). Rather than treating design as simply a technocratic activity of finding the best output in some abstract context, it can also be seen to involve channeling the energies of disparate actors towards agreement in working towards similar goals in specific contexts. In this sense, policy design contains both a substantive component - a set of alternative arrangements 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 upon, and administering that alternative. It thus overlaps and straddles both policy formulation and policy implementation and involves actors, ideas and interests present at both these stages of the policy process (Howlett, Ramesh and Perl 2009). But these two dimensions of design must be separated if design studies are to advance.
Improving upon the Study of Policy Design as a Noun: Distinguishing Between (Meta)Design as Conceptual Exercise versus Real-World Policy Formulation.

What policy designers create are policy alternatives. That is, alternative possible courses of action for decision-makers to follow. This can be done in an abstract way and Stephen H. Linder and B. Guy Peters, for example, argued in a series of articles in the late 1980s and early 1990s that the actual public decision-making process can, and should, be divorced from the abstract concept of policy design, in the same way that an architectural design can be divorced conceptually, if not in practice, from its engineering.

Policy designs in this sense, can be thought of as ‘ideal types’, that is, as ideal configurations of sets of policy elements which can reasonably be expected to deliver a specific outcome in a given governance context and ‘meta-policy designing’ can be thought of as the process by which these ideal types are identified and refined. Whether or not all of the aspects of such configurations are actually adopted in practice is more or less incidental to the design, except in so far as such variations suggest the expected outcome may be less stable or reliable than the original design would augur. As Linder and Peters argued:

*Design then, is not synonymous with instrumental reasoning but certainly relies greatly on that form of reasoning. Moreover, the invention or fashioning of policy options is not designing itself and may not even call on any design. While somewhat at odds with conventional (mis)usage, our treatment focuses attention on the conceptual underpinnings of policy rather than its content, on the antecedent intellectual scheme rather than the manifest arrangement of elements. As a result, the study of design is properly ‘meta-oriented’ and, therefore, one step removed from the study of policy and policy-making* (Linder and Peters 1988 p. 744).

Options for how government action can be brought to bear on some identified problem. These alternatives are composed of different sets or combinations of the policy elements described above: policy goals, objectives and aims, as well as policy means, tools and their calibrations or “settings”. And, as Linder and Peters noted, while all of these policy elements are present in a well-thought out design, policy instruments are
especially significant in this process as they are the techniques through which a state’s goal attainment occurs:

A design orientation to analysis can illuminate the variety of means implicit in policy alternatives, questioning the choice of instruments and their aptness in particular contexts. The central role it assigns means in policy performance may also be a normative vantage point for appraising design implications of other analytical approaches. More important, such an orientation can be a counterweight to the design biases implicit in other approaches and potentially redefine the fashioning of policy proposals (Linder and Peters 1990 p. 304).

Policy design studies in this “meta” conceptual sense, therefore, can benefit from advances in the study of policy instruments, notably those used in policy implementation. As Salamon and others argued, these abstract tools have a special place in the consideration and study of policy design because, taken together, they comprise the contents of the toolbox from which governments must choose in building or creating actual public policies. Policy design elevates the analysis of these tools to a central focus of study, making their understanding and analysis a key design concern (Salamon 1981; Linder and Peters 1990). As Linder and Peters (1984) noted, it is critical for policy scientists and policy designers alike to understand this basic vocabulary of design:

Whether the problem is an architectural, mechanical or administrative one, the logic of design is fundamentally similar. The idea is to fashion an instrument that will work in a desired manner. In the context of policy problems, design involves both a systematic process for generating basic strategies and a framework for comparing them. Examining problems from a design perspective offers a more productive way of organizing our thinking and analytical efforts. (253)

Understanding and analyzing potential instrument choices involved in implementation activity is what policy design is all about. As Charles Anderson (1975)
argued (p. 122) ‘constructing an inventory of potential public capabilities and resources that might be pertinent in any problem-solving situation’ is thus a key activity in policy design studies and one which has not received as much attention from design scholars over the past several decades as it deserves.

Improving on Policy Design as a Verb: Adding the Role of Policy Advisory Systems and Policy Ideas into the Analysis of Policy Design Processes

While understanding the abstract characteristics of instruments in potential policy designs is at the core of policy design studies, understanding the nature of design processes is no less significant. As Charles Anderson (1971) noted, policy design is virtually synonymous with ‘statecraft’ or the practice of government as ‘the art of the possible’. It is always a matter of making choices from the possibilities offered by a given historical situation and cultural context. From this vantage point, policy designers use the tools of the trade of statecraft and, as Anderson (1971) also noted, ‘the skillful policy maker, then, is [one] who can find appropriate possibilities in the institutional equipment of . . . society’ to best obtain their goals’.

As Thomas’ (2001) notes, defining and weighing the merits and risks of various options forms the substance of policy formulation stage of the policy process and is the locus of policy design activity (Gormley 2007; Sidney 2007; Dunn 2008). Given the range of players and sub-stages involved in it, policy formulation is a highly diffuse and often disjointed process whose workings and results are often very difficult to discern and whose nuances in particular instances can be fully understood only through careful empirical case study. Nevertheless, most policy formulation processes do share certain characteristics which are relevant to considerations of policy design. First, and most obviously, formulation is not usually limited to one set of actors (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993). Second, formulation may also proceed without a clear definition of the problem to be addressed (Weber and Khademian 2008) and may occur over a long period of time in ‘rounds’ of formulation and reformulation of policy problems and solutions (Teisman, 2000). And third, while formulators often search for ‘win-win’ solutions, it is often the case that the costs and benefits of different options fall disproportionately on different actors (Wilson 1974). This implies, as Linder and Peters, among others, noted
the capability of policy designs to be realized in practice remains subject to many political as well as technical variables. However, this does not imply that policy design is impossible or an unworthwhile task, simply that it must be recognized that some designs may prove impossible to adopt in practice in given contexts and that the adoption of any design will be a fraught and contingent process as options and various types of policy actors attempt to construct and assess policy alternative designs (Dryzek 1983).

Studies of policy design, thus can also benefit from findings and advances in the study of policy formulation, such as those recent studies focusing on the nature of policy advice systems and the role policy ideas and policy actors play in the formulation process. Politicians situated in authoritative decision-making positions ultimately ‘make’ public policy. However, they do so most often by following the advice provided to them by civil servants and others whom they trust or rely upon to consolidate policy alternatives into more or less coherent designs provide them with expert opinion on the merits and demerits of the proposals put before them (MacRae and Whittington 1997; Heinrichs 2005). As such it is useful to think of policy advisors as being arranged in an overall ‘policy advisory system’ which will differ slightly in every particular issue area but which generally assumes a hierarchical shape (Halligan 1995). The manner in which the policy advice system is structured in a particular sector, for example, says a great deal about the nature of influential actors involved in design decisions, and understanding the nature of policy formulation and design activities in different analytical contexts, involves discerning how the policy advice system is structured and operated in the specific sector of policy activity under examination (Brint 1990; Page 2010).

Different types of ‘policy advice systems’ exist depending on the nature of the knowledge supply and demand in specific policy formulation contexts, which varies not only by national context and institutional design but also by sector (Halffman and Hoppe 2005). In general, however, four distinct sets or ‘communities’ of policy advisors can be identified who perform these functions within any policy advice system depending on their location inside or outside of government, and by how closely they operate to decision-makers: core actors, public sector insiders, private sector insiders, and outsiders (see Figure 2).
Along with the less knowledgeable public, these sets of actors can also be thought of as existing on a spectrum moving from the abstract to the more practical, and therefore can also be linked to influence and impact on specific policy elements as set out in Figure 3 (Page 2010).

Figure 3 Advisory system actors by policy level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy goals (normative)</th>
<th>Policy means (cognitive)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High-level abstraction</strong></td>
<td><strong>Programme-level operationalization</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General abstract policy aims</td>
<td>Operationalizable policy objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public, outsiders and insiders</td>
<td>Insiders and core actors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General policy implementation preferences</td>
<td>Policy instruments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public, outsiders and insiders</td>
<td>Insiders and core actors</td>
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What actors do in policy formulation, how they do it, and with what effect, depends in large part on the type of advisory system present in a specific government or area of interest (Brint 1990). However core actors typically, albeit in a constrained fashion, are those most able to influence the construction and selection of policy designs given their ability to influence all aspects of a policy, including the specification of policy targets on the ground, as well as the calibration of policy tools (Page 2010).

A key aspect of policy design, as a process, therefore, lies in the kinds of ideas held by key actors in policy advice systems about the feasibility and optimality of alternative possible arrangements of policy tools. Different kinds of actors hold different kinds of ideas and have different levels of influence or impact on policy formulation activities. Not everyone’s ideas about policy options and instrument choices are as influential as others when it comes to policy appraisal and design (Lindvall 2009) and one has to be very specific about what level of policy and which particular element one is referring to when assessing the influence of specific kinds of actors and ideas on the articulation of policy alternatives. Ideas held by central policy actors play a key role in guiding their efforts to construct policy options and assess design alternatives (Ingraham 1987; George 1969; Mayntz 1983; Jacobsen 1995; Chadwick 2000; Gormley 2007).

Ideas such as symbolic frames and public sentiments tend to affect the perception of the legitimacy or ‘correctness’ or ‘appropriateness’ of certain courses of action, while policy paradigms represent a ‘set of cognitive background assumptions that constrain action by limiting the range of alternatives that policy-making elites are likely to perceive as useful and worth considering’ (Campbell 1998; 2002: 385; also Surel 2000). The term programme ideas represents the selection of specific solutions from among the set designated as acceptable within a particular paradigm. Thus symbolic frames and public sentiments can be expected to largely influence policy goals (Stimson 1991; Suzuki 1992; Durr 1993; Stimson et al. 1995) while more cognitive aspects such as policy paradigms and programme ideas, on the other hand, can be expected to more heavily influence choices of policy means (Stone 1989; Hall 1993) (see Figure 4).
This helps to capture the manner in which established beliefs, values, and attitudes lie behind understandings of public problems and emphasizes how paradigm-inspired notions of the feasibility of the proposed solutions are significant determinants of policy choices and alternative designs (Hall 1990: 59; also Huitt 1968; Majone 1975; Schneider 1985; Webber 1986; Edelman 1988; Hilgartner and Bosk 1988).  

**Conclusion: A Call for Renewal of Policy Design Studies**

Policy design is “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” (Bobrow and Dryzek, 1987; Bobrow 2006).

It has been argued in many circles that in response to the increased complexity of society and the international environment, governments in many countries (particularly in Western Europe) have turned away from the use of a relatively limited number of traditional, often command-and-control oriented, policy tools such as public enterprises, regulatory agencies, subsidies and exhortation, and begun to increasingly use their organizational resources to support a different set of substantive and procedural tools.
And some policy designs invoking new tools such as government re-organizations, reviews and inquiries, government-NGO partnerships and stakeholder consultations which act to guide or steer policy processes in the direction government wishes through the manipulation of policy actors and their interrelationships are indeed more frequent and common (Bingham et al 2005). However other trends exist in other sectors featuring other kinds of governance activities and preferences and continue to challenge public administrators, managers and scholars (Peters and Pierre 1998; Peters 1996; Knill 1999).

The recognition of the continued vitality of the state in a globalized environment of multiple sectoral modes of governance at the domestic level suggests a more subtle and nuanced account of policy design trends and influences is required than is found in the discussions which have flowed from the studies of globalization and network governance which have burgeoned since 1990.

The real challenge for a new generation of design studies is to develop greater conceptual clarity and the methodological sophistication needed in order to sift through the complexity of new policy regimes, policy mixes, alternative instruments for governance, and changing governance networks and link these to a deeper theory of design (Eliadis, Hill, Howlett 2004; Howlett and Rayner 2007; Howlett 2011; Hamelin 2010). The design process is complex, often internally orchestrated between bureaucrats and target groups, and usually much less accessible to public scrutiny than many other kinds of policy deliberations (Donovan 2001; Kiviniemi 1986). Rather than reinvent the wheel, however, students of the design and implementation of calibrated policy measures, have an invaluable resource in the templates developed by Ingram, Bobrow, May, Doern, Hood, Linder and Peters, Schneider and Ingram, Salamon and others in the mid-1980s and early 1990s. Coupled with more recent studies into policy formulation, these can help them to better organize thinking and focus discussion on the key design parameters already identified within this literature which remain as central now in the post-governance/post-globalization era as they did in that earlier one.
Endnotes

1 Although the scope of what is encompassed by the term, ‘policy design’, is an open question, most of its characteristics are clear. Like planning, policy design has its roots in the ‘rational’ tradition of policy studies, one aimed at improving policy outcomes through the application of policy-relevant knowledge to the crafting of alternative possible courses of action intended to address specific policy problems (Cahill and Overman 1990) but it extends beyond this to the consideration of the practices, frames of understanding, and lesson-drawing abilities of policy formulators or “designers” (Bobrow 2006; Schneider and Ingram 1988). Within the policy sciences it has been linked to studies of policy instruments and implementation (May 2003) and to those of policy ideas and policy formulation (Linder and Peters 1990). It shares a large number of features in common with ‘planning’ but without the strategic or directive nature often associated with the latter (Tinbergen 1958 and 1967). Policy design is much less technocratic in nature than these other efforts at ‘scientific’ government and administration (Forester 1989; Schon 1988 and 1992), however, it too is oriented towards avoiding many of the inefficiencies and inadequacies apparent in other, less knowledge-informed ways of formulating policy, such as pure political bargaining, ad hocism, or trial-and-error (Bobrow 2006). In general, though, it is less specific than planning in developing general sets of alternatives rather than detailed directive ‘plans’ (Fischer and Forester 1987; May 1991).

2 Conceived of as both a process and outcome, policy design is very much situated in the ‘contextual’ orientation which is characteristic of modern policy science (Torgerson 1985; May 2003). That is, it is an activity or set of activities which takes place within a specific historical and institutional context that largely determines its content (Clemens and Cook 1999). Which alternatives can be imagined, and prove feasible or acceptable at any given point in time, change as conditions evolve and different sets of actors and ideas alter their calculations of both the consequences and appropriateness of particular policy options or implemented designs (March and Olsen 2004; Goldmann 2005).

3 In their 1990 study of policy targets and their behaviour, for example, Schneider and Ingram employed both constructionist and behavioral lenses in understanding the adoption of policy designs. Noting that policy-making "almost always attempts to get people to do things that they might not otherwise do" they argued that: If people are not taking actions needed to ameliorate social, economic or political problems, there are five reasons that can be addressed by policy: they may believe that law does not direct them or authorize them to take action; they may lack incentives or capacity to take the actions needed; they may disagree with the values implicit in the means or ends; or the situation may involve such high levels of uncertainty that the nature of the problem is not known, and it is unclear what people should do or how they might be motivated. (Schneider and Ingram 1990 at 513-514). Subsequent work by these authors and others on the nature of target group behaviour advanced discussion and understanding of the subject well beyond its early formulation in Laswell and Lowi’s pioneering works (Ingram and Schneider 1990; Schneider and Ingram 1990a, 1990b, 1994, 1997).

4 Salamon (1981) argued that this perspective had revealed that not only did, as traditional studies had maintained, “politics determine policy”, but also the reverse (Landry, Varone and Goggin, 1998). That is, via the feedback mechanism in the policy cycle (Pierson 1992 and 1993), tool choices led to the establishment of a “political economy” of a policy regime: a tool choice such as, for example, a decision to use tax incentives to accomplish some end, created a constituency for continuation of that incentive (and sometimes one opposed to it), affecting future policy deliberations and decisions including those related to instrument choices (Bobrow and Dryzek 1987; Dryzek and Ripley 1988; Linder and Peters 1984). Most of these studies, however, focused exclusively upon ‘substantive instruments’; that is, those which directly affect the production and delivery of goods and services in society. These early studies failed to adequately address procedural tools and consequently until around the year 2000 had developed only a partial description of policy tools and an understanding of how instrument choices related to policy design.

5 For these studies, the key question was no longer “why do policy-makers utilize a certain instrument?, but rather “why is a particular combination of procedural and substantive instruments utilized in a specific sector” (Salamon 2002; Howlett, 2000; Bode 2006; Braathen 2007; Braathen and Croci 2005; Dunsire 1993; Clark and Russell 2009; Cubbage, Harou and Sills 2007; Gleirscher 2008; Gipperth 2008; Taylor 2008; McGoldrick and Boonn 2010)? Hence, for example, Robert Kagan identified the typical implementation style found in many U.S. policy sectors, which he dubbed "adversarial legalism":

6 Governance' in an ambiguous term, but refers generally to the broadening of the notion of 'government' away from a state-centered concept towards more diffuse, often boundary-spanning, networks of governmental and nongovernmental actors. Governing involves the establishment of a basic set of relationships between governments and their citizens which can vary from highly structured and controlled to arrangements that are monitored only loosely and informally, if at all. In its broadest sense, "governance" is a term used to describe the mode of coordination exercised by state actors in their interactions with societal actors and organizations (Rhodes, 1996; de Bruijn and ten Heuvelhof, 1995; Kooiman, 1993 and 2000; Klijn and Koppenjan, 2000). ‘Governance’ is thus about establishing, promoting and supporting a specific type of relationship between governmental and non-governmental actors in the governing process.

7 Admittedly, international political agreements, whether formal or informal, can also have a constraining direct effect on the choice of policies and policy tools. The European Union is an extreme case of the formal transfer of decision-making authority to a supra-national centre, for example, which often severely limits what national governments can do and the instruments they can employ to effect their decisions (Kassim and Le Gales 2010). However even here the restrictions on national governments’ abilities to employ regulatory and fiscal tools on their own are often less significant than often assumed (Halpern 2010). And, even when they are, national governments are often able to craft their own specific solutions to ongoing policy problems with little regard to EU policy through mechanisms such as ‘subsidiarity’ or the ‘Open Method of Co-ordination’ which allow local states to determine and design their own policy responses to EU-level initiatives (Lierse 2010; Tholoniat 2010; Meuleman 2009b; Heidbreder 2011).

8 And, to the extent that global factors have had an impact on domestic policy choices and governance practices, it is often through what can be termed more “indirect” and “opportunity” effects spilling over from trade and other activities, rather than from the “direct” effects advocates of regime changes typically cite in arguing that state behaviour must change (Howlett and Ramesh 2006).

9 It is important to note, however, that policy instruments exist at all stages of the policy process – with specific tools such as stakeholder consultations and government reviews intricately linked to agenda-setting activities, ones like legislative rules and norms linked to decision-making behaviour and outcomes, and others linked to policy evaluation, such as the use of ex-post, or after-the- fact, cost–benefit analyses. Although policy instruments appear in all stages of the policy process, those affecting the agenda-setting, decision-making and evaluation stages of the policy process, while very significant and important in public management (Wu et al. 2010), are less so with respect to policy design activities. This is because policy design largely takes place at the formulation stage of the policy cycle and deals with plans for the implementation stage. Thus the key sets of policy instruments of concern to policy designers are those linked to policy implementation, in the first instance, and to policy formulation, in the second. In the first category we would find examples of many well-known governing tools such as public enterprises and regulatory agencies which are expected to alter or affect the delivery of goods and services to the public and government (Salamon 2002), while in the second we would find instruments such as regulatory impact or environmental impact appraisals which are designed to alter and affect some aspect of the nature of policy deliberations and the consideration and assessment of alternatives (Turnpenny et al. 2009).

10 At their most basic, policy advice systems can be thought of as part of the knowledge utilization system of government, itself a kind of marketplace for policy ideas and information, comprising three separate components: a supply of policy advice, its demand on the part of decision-makers, and a set of brokers whose role it is to match supply and demand in any given conjuncture (Brint 1990; Lindquist 1998). That is, these systems can be thought of as arrayed into three general ‘sets’ of analytical activities and participants linked to the positions actors hold in the ‘market’ for policy advice. The first set of actors at the top of the hierarchy is composed of the ‘proximate decision-makers’ themselves who act as consumers of policy analysis and advice – that is, those with actual authority to make policy decisions, including cabinets and executives as well as parliaments, legislatures and congresses, and senior administrators and officials delegated decision-making powers by those other bodies. The second set, at the bottom, is composed of those ‘knowledge producers’ located in academia, statistical agencies and research institutes who provide the basic scientific, economic and social scientific data upon which analyses are
often based and decisions made. The third set in between the first two is composed of those ‘knowledge brokers’ who serve as intermediaries between the knowledge generators and proximate decision-makers, repack- aging data and information into usable form (Lindvall 2009; Page 2010). These include, among others, permanent specialized research staff inside government as well as their temporary equivalents in commissions and task forces, and a large group of non-governmental specialists associated with think tanks and interest groups. Although often thought of as ‘knowledge suppliers’, key policy advisors almost by definition exist in the brokerage subsystem, and this is where most professional policy analysts can be found (Lindvall 2009; Verschueren 2009; Howlett and Newman 2010). Recent studies of advice systems in countries such as New Zealand, Israel, Canada and Australia have developed this idea; that government decision- makers sit at the centre of a complex web of policy advisors which include both ‘traditional’ political advisors in government as well as non-governmental actors in NGOs, think tanks and other similar organizations, and less formal or professional forms of advice from colleagues, friends and relatives and members of the public and political parties, among others (Maley 2000; Peled 2002; Dobuzinski et al. 2007; Eichbaum and Shaw 2007).

Similarly, in their work on the influence of ideas in foreign policy-making situations, Goldstein and Keohane (1993) and their colleagues noted at least three types of ideas that combined normative and cognitive elements but at different levels of generality: world views, principled beliefs, and causal ideas (see also Campbell 1998; Braun 1999). World views or ideologies have long been recognized as helping people make sense of complex realities by identifying general policy problems and the motivations of actors involved in politics and policy. These sets of ideas, however, tend to be very diffuse and do not easily translate into specific views on particular policy problems. Principled beliefs and causal stories, on the other hand, can exercise a much more direct influence on the recognition of policy problems and on policy content. These ideas can influence policy-making by serving as ‘road maps’ for action, defining problems, affecting the strategic interactions between policy actors, and con- straining the range of policy options that are proposed (Carstensen 2010; Stone 1988; 1989). At the micro-level, ’causal stories’ and beliefs about the behaviour patterns of target groups heavily influence choices of policy settings or calibrations (Stone 1989; Schneider and Ingram 1993 and 1994).

References


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