GV263 Public Policy Analysis

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Lecture Notes

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Contents

1   Introduction to Public Policy and the Policy Cycle

1.1   Structure

Policy process and policy-making

- Agenda-setting

- Policy formulation and decision-making styles

- Implementation

- Policy evaluation

- Public opinion

- Interest groups

- Political parties

- Bureaucracies

Contested issues in public policy

- Science and Public Policy

- Policy fiascos

- Nudging

- Austerity

- ICTs and Public Policy

- Corruption

- Transparency

- Developing countries

- Cross-national learning

1.2   Public Policy

Some of the questions covered in the course:

- Why are we talking about developing policy for an issue now when it has been ignored for years?

- Who shapes the policy responses to problems?

- Why do we appear to make only small changes to existing policies?

- Why do many policies seem to achieve little?

- Do laws work better than persuasion? (Nudge)

- When do policy makers listen to evidence? (Thunberg)

There is a troubled relationship between academic study of policy and its practice. Enthusiasm for academic research has shaped policy practice from the 18th century Cameralism through Fabianism to Blairite "evidence based policy". However, results of academic impact has been modest, even where invited.

The What Works initiative aims to improve the way government and other organisations create, share and use high quality evidence for decision-making. Academic papers aim to inform public policy but the way in which they are written makes public policy implementation difficult. The evaluation aspect of academic papers can confuse the application of public policy. Hence we could ask: **what has the academic study of policy got to offer then?**

Is the academic idea useless? Pursuing sets of questions that have cultural impact and value, acquiring and developing insights, acquiring and developing skills and techniques that have practical pay-off, these are all aspects of the analysis idea.

The cultural importance has a few questions:

- Who sets the agenda in public policy?

- Does public opinion shape policy?

- Does bureaucracy constrain politics? (Brexit and lawmakers becoming Anti-Brexit constraining policy)

- Do parties make a difference? (Does it matter for a variety of public policy?)

There are practical payoffs: Lindblom and Cohen (2009): When one is making policy, you are attempting to solve a problem. You have two types of knowledge: 1. Ordinary Knowledge - the things we know about people e.g. people do not want to go to jail, people want to earn money i.e. things we do not need to research so heavily and 2. Professional Social Inquiry (PSI) - knowledge that requires more in depth analysis e.g. police presence and their impact on crime in a certain area.

From Lindblom and Cohen we can infer that a lot of Public Policy is created from Ordinary Knowledge and not Professional Social Inquiry. But we can see three methods of PSI impact public policy:

- Results of PSI can shape policy alongside Ordinary Knowledge: methods of combating corruption, the beneficiaries of "open government"

- Knowledge produced from PSI can become Ordinary Knowledge: incrementalism, bounded rationality e.g. cancer research, new public management and thermostat theory - public opinion reacts to public policy like a thermostate (up, down, up again style fluctuation)

- PSI can debunk Ordinary Knowledge: (possibly controversial) could lead to policy learning, checks on corruption and the role of the private sector

There are also practical contributions:

- Forensic skills: where problems/issues arise (e.g. analysis of stages of policy making)

- Techniques of assessing and evaluating policies (e.g. Weiss on Evaluation)

- Exploring alternative ways of assessing policies (e.g. debate on "success" of policy)

- Skepticism: bias in academic literature is that things do not work as expected

A lot of debate is centered around this.

1.3   What is Public Policy?

There is no one definition but there are several famous ones:

- Anything that government chooses to do or not to do - Dye

- Set of interrelated decisions - Jenkins

There are many meanings of public policy:

- It is a field of activity

- A form of Intention and desire

- A bundle of measures/Specific proposals/Decisions by government e.g. tobacco

- It is strategy e.g. blame avoidance

- Formal authorisation

- Output and Outcome

- Cause/Effect assumptions

1.4   Policy process and policy cycle

Analyst Perspective

- Problem formulation

- Selection of criteria

- Comparison of alternatives and selection

- Consideration of constraints

- Implementation and evaluation

Policy Process Perspective

- Agenda-setting

- Policy formulation

- Decision-making

- Policy implementation

- Policy evaluation

- Termination

Policy cycle and questions:

- Agenda Setting: problem recognition and issue selection

  - What issues receive political attention?
  - Why are issues framed in particular ways?
  - What processes lead to mobilisation?

- Policy formulation and decision making

  - Who was involved in making the decision?
  - What did they want
  - How powerful were they?
  - What resources and support could they mobilise?
  - How was conflict handled and resolved?

- Implementation

  - Why did things not work out as intended?
  - Were there unforeseen hitches and obstacles?
  - Were street-level bureaucrats selective in how they implemented instructions? (Policy and cattling)

- Evaluation

  - How clear were the objectives behind the policy?
  - How do you measure the impact of the policy?
  - Was there a hidden set of motives behind the policy?