Policy Typologies and Policy Process Literature Review

Chad Efaw

Department of Political Science, West Virginia University

POLS 530: Policy Analysis

2024-09-16

Introduction:

In November 2023, the Fairmont, West Virginia City Council facilitated public input regarding a dilapidated building (Shaver, 2023). This building, a former box factory, has, for some time now, sat vacant, and in complete disrepair; at least one person injured themselves on the property; and overall, has become a major blight upon the surrounding neighborhood. City leaders – the mayor, city council, and the director of planning – voted to use the power of eminent domain to seize the dilapidated factory from its owner and are currently in the process of demolishing the building, remediating the land, and developing the area for public recreation (Fernandez, 2024; Nolting, 2024). How did city leaders go from learning about the public problem to using the levers of governmental power and effectuating public policy? Did city leaders see the blight for themselves or were they lobbied about the issue by their constituents? Before voting to eminent domain the property, were other alternatives considered? Finally, in the future how will citizens know if this was a good decision by city leaders?

From learning about the issue to the evaluation of the final public policy is, broadly speaking, the policy process. Lasswell first systematized the policy process in a five step model: agenda-setting, policy formulation, decision-making, policy implementation, and policy evaluation (Howell and Geist, 2013). This model considers the idea that "policy development can be thought of as a series of steps" (p. 17). Local leaders in Fairmont became aware of the problem, considered alternatives, made a decision and will implement a policy which will then be evaluated. But this is only a model of the process, not the actual process of how public policy was developed and implemented. The actual process is not strictly sequential: considerations from one step bleed into other steps; policy formulation and consideration of policy alternatives cannot exist, as such, completely outside of policy implementation; namely the capacity and expertise of the implementing agencies constrains the consideration of certain policy alternatives.

Further, why did citizens and local government leaders consider this a public problem to begin with? Rather than eminent domain and redevelopment of the site, were there other public policy typologies that could have been considered? That might have reoriented the city's stance towards what's possible with the public problem?

This paper examines two connected aspects of policy development: policy typologies and how certain public problems necessitate specific public policies as well as the stages of the policy cycle and its chief criticisms. This paper is structured as follows: the first section provides an overview of the policy typologies. Following the steps in the policy process, the second section examines agenda-setting; in particular, the differentiation between the multiple types of agendas and how certain problems get identified and considered; the third section details policy and alternative formulation, the process of "transforming expressed public problems" into government programs (Jann & Wegrich, 2007, p. 48); the fourth section deals with decision-making in the public policy process; and finally, the next two sections analyze policy implementation and policy evaluation, respectively. The last section provides an overview of the critiques of the policy process.

An Overview of Policy Typologies:

How was the City of Fairmont's power felt by the owner of the Box Factory? And does that type of power necessitate specific policies? Eminent domain is, in particular, a coercive form of taking (for fair market value) property from the original owner for the public good. Lowi first categorized policy typologies into three arenas: distribution, regulation, and redistribution (1964, p. 689) and further refined these areas into likelihood (separated into immediate and remote) and applicability of coercion (separated into individual conduct vs environmental conduct) as well as added constituent policy (1972, p. 300). Each arena and level of coercion "suggests there is a

distinct set of morals and political-process consequences associated with this type of governmental commitment (Lowi, 1972, p. 299). In fact, Smith (2002) states that Lowi's typologies could be distilled to two basic ideas: 1. Policy *causes* politics and 2. The central characteristic of government is coercive power (p. 379).

In Lowi's typologies, each arena is associated with a different primary political unit, relationship among units, and power structure. For example, distributional policies are primarily associated with individuals, firms, and corporations (1962, p. 713). Further, distributional policies possess a remote likelihood of coercion. The next arena is regulation which affects groups and has an immediate likelihood of coercion from the government; the final arena is redistribution which affects associations and interest groups and also has an immediate likelihood of coercion. Smith (2002) sums up Lowi's two-dimension model as follows: distributive policy (likelihood of coercion remove and applied to individuals); regulatory policy (likelihood of coercion immediate and applied to individuals); redistributive policy (likelihood immediate and applied to the general environment); and constituent policy (likelihood remote and applied to the general environment (p. 380).

Smith (2002), however, presents numerous critiques with Lowi's typologies. These critiques pertained to the fact that it was "virtually impossible to objectively classify policy" (p. 380). These critics maintained that "scholars classify the same policies differently" and that some policies "overlapped categories" or "shifted categories over time" (p. 380). (For what it's worth, Lowi did concede that the policies often shifted or overlapped in classification (1964, pg. 690).) Turning back to Smith, his critique and extension of Lowi's typologies coalesced into a more empirical *taxonomy* (2002, p. 381). Rather than rely on "ideal type…not found in empirical reality," Smith created a robust, externally valid survey instrument which sought to classify

policies in terms of morality (p. 387). By fielding a representative survey asking which policies are considered moral, Smith found that certain policies could be appropriately taxonomized (p. 390).

Following the criticism levied on Lowi, it's difficult to ascribe a particular policy typology to the Box Factory decision. The City used the power of eminent domain (immediate, coercive) to take property from an individual owner (distributive) to redevelop for the general public (redistributive). These typologies – regardless of the specific type – create the policies moving forward; they constrain each choice decision-makers have. In fact, each stage of the following policy cycle is deeply imbued by the typologies Lowi defined. The next section details various stages of the policy cycle and how the City of Fairmont (may) have moved through each one.

Stages in the Policy Cycle: Agenda-Setting

The first step in the policy cycle is agenda-setting. More formally, this means that a "social problem has been defined as such and the necessity of state intervention has been expressed" (Jann & Wegrich, 2007, p. 45). The problem is put on the agenda for consideration, but whose agenda? Howlett and Geist (2013) provide the distinction between the systemic (or unofficial public agenda) and the institutional (or formal) agenda (p. 18). These two agendas are distinct in magnitude: the systemic agenda "consists of all issues that are commonly perceived by members of the political community as meriting public attention" while the institutional agenda consists of only "a limited number of issues or problems to which attention is devoted by policy elites" (p. 18). Benoit (2013) provides an additional useful dichotomy: the systemic agenda is the discussion agenda while the institutional agenda is the decision agenda (p. 1).

Refer back to the situation in Fairmont: how did the box factory problem transition from the systemic agenda to the institutional one? For years, citizens in the neighborhood complained about the factory's blight. The property was recognized as a problem and placed within the systemic – or the discussion – agenda within the general political community. Eventually, the pressure became so great that the City was forced to place the problem on the institutional agenda. In this case, the pressure came from outside the decision-making apparatus but can similar social problems arise from different directions? Howlett and Geist (2013) provide three general patterns of issue recognition: outside initiation, inside initiation, and mobilization. Outside initiation was discussed, but consider the alternative if City decision-makers chose to "expand the issue from the formal to the public agenda" (p. 18). While hard to believe, City decision-makers could have identified the problem without public input and placed the problem on the institutional agenda. Finally, consider if local real estate developers wished to acquire and develop the property without contesting the issue in public. This would be an example of inside initiation.

Stages in the Policy Cycle: Policy Formulation

After public problems are placed on the systemic and institutional agenda, policies are considered. More specifically, various actors – both within and outside the government – interact to influence and legitimate specific policy alternatives. Ripley (1985) details five substeps to the policy formulation process: formulation and legitimation of goals and programs; information collection, analysis, and dissemination; alternative development; advocacy and coalition building; and compromise, negotiation, and decision (p. 158). Howlett and Geist (2013) contrast agenda-setting – in that, the public is actively involved – with policy formulation – in which only relevant policy actors "can comment on the feasibility of the options" (p. 19). Government

analysts cannot consider all relevant facts and, thus, receive input from epistemic communities, policy subsystems, policy communities, and policy networks, respectively.

Epistemic communities are "loose groupings of experts or knowledge providers for the decision-making process" (Howlett & Geist, 2013, p. 19). While epistemic communities don't necessarily interact with government actors, policy subsystems do. Policy subsystems and policy communities are groups of interacting state-actors, NGOs, academics, and the general public interested in a particular policy issue. Finally, policy networks are an even further subset of actors who "interact within more formalized institutions and procedures of government" (p. 19). These networks are, as Jann and Wegrich (2007) put it, "characterized by nonhierarchical, horizontal relationships between actors inside the network" (p. 49).

The style of these policy subsystems, networks, and communities differ with time, place, and level of government. Jann and Wegrich (2007) state that governments themselves play a "crucial role in influencing the actor constellation within these [nominally self-governing] policy networks" (p. 49). In the case of City Council, many actors from local nongovernmental organizations advocated *for* the use eminent domain; namely, bicycle and youth soccer groups who will benefit from the redevelopment of property.

Stages in the Policy Cycle: Decision-Making

Once policies are formulated, legitimated, and coalitions are crystallized, a decision must be made. Both Jann and Wegrich (2007) and Howlett and Geist (2013) stress the importance of the appearance of rationality in the decision-making stage of the policy process. Whereas rationality in policy decision making looks like establishment of a goal, exploration of alternative policies, prediction of consequences and cost-benefit analysis, the reality is more nuanced. Political negotiation and bargaining between the "constellation and power resources" of actors

involved is so powerful such that rational selection of alternatives does not occur (Jann & Wegrich, 2007, p. 49). Herbert Simon's and Charles Lindblom's critique of pure rationality in the decision-making process are as follows: For Simon, decision-maker's cognitive ability "limits the ability to consider all possible alternatives" and that decision makers only "satisfice" between whatever criteria they set for themselves. For Lindblom, decision-makers only "marginally differ from the status quo"; policy means and policy ends are intertwined; and cognitive limitations, again, limit the decision-maker from assessing all possibilities, consequences, and alternatives (Howlett & Geist, 2013).

When the City of Fairmont decision-makers decided to employ eminent domain on the Box Factory, did they examine all possible outcomes? Did they calculate the precise cost-benefits analysis for the decision? Probably not. We know, however, that they facilitated public input, assessed fair market values for the property, and concluded that "it was a necessary project" (Shaver, 2023). In short, they satisficed; they muddled through.

Stages in the Policy Cycle: Policy Implementation

Whereas this case is still making its way through the court system, policy implementation is a chief concern for the City of Fairmont. Ripley (1985) states that the first steps to implementation are resource acquisition and interpretation of regulations (p. 160). These resources and interpretations are transformed into policy instruments which take various shape: Jann and Wegrich (2007) categorize policy instruments into regulatory, financial, information, and organizational (p. 52) while Howlett and Geist (2013) categorize them into substantive and procedural (p. 22). Refer back to Lowi's policy typologies which were categorized as distributive, redistributive, and regulative each with differing likelihoods and applicability of government coercion. Jann and Wegrich (2007) implicitly use Lowi's typologies when they

suggest that "different policy instruments are vulnerable to specific types of implementation problems" (p. 52).[1]

Stages in the Policy Cycle: Policy Evaluation

The last stage in the policy cycle is evaluation – how well did the policy align with the goals set forth at the beginning of the cycle? How happy are constituents that the social problem is sufficiently solved? In the future, when the property the Box Factory currently sits on is redeveloped, how will the citizens of Fairmont ascertain that eminent domain was the correct choice? This, too, suggests that there is a rational, objective evaluative process but the reality is that policy evaluation always "takes place as a regular and embedded part of the political process and debate" (Jann & Wegrich, 2007, p. 54). Some people will be happy with the decision and take it off the agenda (Ripley, 1985, p. 161) while others will agitate still. In the case of the Box Factory, there can be no policy reversal to bring back the building, however, if the implementation of the redevelopment fails, future politicians and administrators may caution against using that coercive power again.

Criticisms of the Policy Cycle

The policy cycle described above is an ideal type, a model, a framework. The lesser criticism of the cycle is that it "highlights some aspects and while disregarding others"; the greater criticism that it "does not offer a causal model of the policy process" (Jann & Wegrich, 2007, p. 57). Further, that this "ordered sequence does not reflect reality" (Benoit, 2013, p. 5).

Conclusion

Policy typologies and the policy cycle are extremely powerful tools for understanding specific stages of policy development and how certain policies affect politics. In particular, the policy cycle has "enhanced our understanding of the complex preconditions, central factors

[1] Jann and Wegrich (2007) cite Mayntz (1975) who cites Lowi (1964)

influencing, and diverse outcomes of the policy process" (Jann & Wegrich, 2007, p. 57). We can't know the exact sequence in which leaders of the City of Fairmont learned of the Box Factory, considered alternatives, and chose to take the building from its owner. What we do know is that decision-makers within the city used each of these policy stages; meeting minutes, interviews, and reporting tells us as much. When this issue is complete and the Box Factory is no longer on either the institutional or systemic agendas, the only thing left to do is evaluate the City's decision. Did it work? Was the decision to use eminent domain the correct one? These evaluative questions, too, are political ones and are bargained and argued in the political process.

References:

Benoit, F. (2013). Public Policy Models and Their Usefulness in Public Health: The Stages Model.

Fernandez, E. (2023, November 15). Fairmont Box Factor's end of life marred by dispute over value. Times West Virginian https://www.timeswv.com/news/local_news/fairmont-box-factorys-end-of-life-marred-by-dispute-over-value/article_182d4f86-8344-11ee-84ed-3f32174c6dfa.html

Fernandez, E. (2024, July 13). Judge's ruling grants City of Fairmont right-of-entry to Box Factory property within demolition plans to follow. Times West Virginian. https://www.timeswv.com/news/local_news/judges-ruling-grants-city-of-fairmont-right-of-entry-to-box-factory-property-with-demolition/article_ec5ed4ba-29c9-11ef-bd0c-0fa3bdc0b1d6.html

Howlett, M., Geist, S. (2013). The Policy-Making Process. In: The Routledge Handbook of Public Policy. (2013).

Jann, W., Wegrich, K. (2007). Theories of the Policy Cycle. In: Handbook of Public Policy Analysis. (2007).

Lowi, T. (1964). American Business and Public Policy. World Politics. 16(July): 677-715

Lowi, T. (1972). Four Systems of Policy, Politics, and Choice. Public Administration Review. 32(4): 298-310.

Nolting, M. (2024, June 16). Fairmont redevelopment efforts gain traction with judge's order. WV Metro News https://wvmetronews.com/2024/06/16/fairmont-redevelopment-efforts-gain-traction-with-judges-order/

Ripley, R. (1985). Stages of the policy process. In McCool, D. (1995). Public Policy Theories, Models, and Concepts: An Anthology. Prentice Hall

Shaver, J. (2023, October 20). City of Fairmont, West Virginia, motions to purchase former 12th Street box factory through eminent domain. The Fairmont News https://www.wvnews.com/fairmontnews/news/city-of-fairmont-west-virginia-motions-to-purchase-former-12th-street-box-factory-through-eminent/article_968cccda-6f53-11ee-a3f5-dbd5a22ad460.html

Smith, K. (2002). Typologies, Taxonomies, and the Benefits of Policy Classification. Policy Studies Journal. 30-3: 379-395.