

Book reviews

Rodgers, James M., *The Impact of Policy Analysis*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988. 202 pp.

The use of knowledge in the policy process has been an important research field in the social sciences since the mid-1970s, although interest appears to have declined during the past few years. Social scientists' research during the past 15 years to determine the extent of policymakers' use of policy information and to identify a variety of obstacles to greater use of such information has produced a multidisciplinary knowledge utilization literature. However, efforts by social scientists to document specific instances of policymakers' use of policy analysis and to explain the conditions under which policymakers look for and use policy analysis have yielded disappointing conclusions.

To a large extent, the knowledge utilization literature has focused on the identifying attitudinal and demographic characteristics of decision makers and contrasting their characteristics with those of knowledge producers. This research approach is suggested by the 'two communities theory,' which asserts that policymakers are likely to make little direct use of research because their world views and belief systems differ from and compete with those of the producers of policy research. Because this research has been carried out largely by researchers from disciplines other than political science, it has devoted limited attention to a question that would be of greater interest to political scientists: in what ways does the political process create constraints to and opportunities for the use of analysis?

In a recent addition to the knowledge utilization literature, James Rogers develops a broad sociological theory intended to explain the impact of policy analysis on decision making. Roger's book has the potential to fill a void in the existing knowledge utilization literature by raising the unit of analysis and examining broader social and institutional factors that affect the use of policy analysis. Rogers, a political scientist, attempts this and more: not only does he focus more on these macro-factors than did previous knowledge-utilization research, but he also tries to explain the *impact* – not just use – of such analysis.

After reviewing the development of federally funded policy analysis efforts intended to bring more science and scientific reasoning into governmental policymaking, Rogers reviews the knowledge utilization literature's struggle to conceptualize 'impact' and 'utilization' of policy analysis and tries to better conceptualize 'impact.' Admittedly, this is a tall challenge, but it is difficult to conclude that the author has added anything new. The clearest statement of the meaning of impact is this sentence: 'The application of analysis to immediate policy decisions describes what might be called the ideal of direct impacts on decision' (p. 23). It is entirely unclear in the rest of the chapter

whether the author is satisfied with this notion of impact or whether he feels he has amended it as his review of related research proceeds.

One oversight of the book is the author's neglect of the work of Knott and Wildavsky ('If Dissemination Is the Solution, What Is the Problem?' *Knowledge: Creation, Diffusion, Utilization*, 1980) who present one of the few studies that views knowledge use from a broader process perspective rather than focusing exclusively on an individual's consideration of information. Their seven stages of knowledge use (reception, cognition, reference, effort, adoption, implementation, and impact) are meant not only to capture the extent to which information is processed cognitively by the policymakers, but also its consequence in the policy process.

The heart of this work is Chapter 4, 'An Explanation of the Impact of Policy Analysis,' that presents a temporally ordered diagram of the posited explanation of the impact of policy analysis. This diagram consists of 12 components (e.g., interests, value conflict, belief systems, social structure, decision processes, and institutions) and 27 hypotheses clustered in six groups (i.e., 'specifying conditions,' 'production and dissemination,' 'decision processes,' 'belief systems,' 'direct impact on decisions and legitimation,' and 'allocation of value'). These hypotheses generally are quite cosmic (e.g. 'The cultural values of scientific discovery and professional skill are positively related to the impact of policy analysis') and are not easily submitted to empirical investigation. The central components of Roger's explanation of the impact of policy analysis are his mediating variables (i.e. value conflict and belief systems).

While such a grand theory deserves a grander test, the best chapter in this volume is a case study presented as a test of the author's explanation of the impact of policy analysis. While it falls far short of that goal, Chapter 6, 'Income Maintenance Experimentation and Policy Decisions,' is a competent, and often insightful, review of the impact of policy analysis on welfare reform events during the Carter Administration. Rogers finds that the Seattle and Denver income maintenance experiments affected several relatively minor aspects of the Carter reform proposal such as the income accounting period and tax reimbursement requirements (pp. 110–111). Rogers concludes that the high value conflicts regarding welfare reform prevented additional policy analysis from being produced, disseminated, and used.

While Rogers limits his notion of policy analysis to rather technical program and cost analysis, his central argument, in fact, correctly anticipated the extent of policy analysis used during the welfare reform debates of the second Reagan term. By 1986, the consensus in values was great enough that the voluminous welfare reform literature began to have an impact on welfare reform discussion and debates in the popular media and in Washington. Because of the reduced value conflict and the emerging consensus about the nature of welfare and poverty, policy analysis became useful to policy-makers.

Despite the insightfulness of Rogers' income maintenance case study, it must be noted that it is not an adequate test of the postulated explanation of

the impact of policy analysis. Most of Rogers' hypotheses focus on systemic influences or are too grandiose to be tested with one case study as specific and limited as a welfare reform proposal. For example, the following statement, while plausible, cannot be tested with the presented case study:

Unlike the cultural, institutional, and structural conditions that I examined above, which also influence this process, mediating conditions are subject to considerable variation across time, policy contexts, issues and individuals. This variation is the key determinant of the impact of analysis (p. 68).

Sound scholarship cannot test this sort of assertion with a snapshot case study no matter how insightful it might be. Evidence of variation across time, policy contexts, issues, and individuals must be found to explain the postulated theory of the impact of policy analysis.

The author is rather uneven in his test of hypotheses. Not all of them receive critical examination, and no priority ranking tells us which are the more important factors affecting the impact of policy analysis.

Another weakness of this volume is the lack of discussion of the implications of his theory for policy-makers or for producers of policy analysis. Rogers observes, 'The most significant lesson to be learned from the explanation is that analysis should not be funded for short-term policy-making purposes in high value-conflict issue areas where belief systems of policy participants are highly developed' (p. 149). While this is a prescriptive implication for funders of policy analysis, similar guidance for producers and users of such analysis would be welcomed.

The volume appears to have been in production a long time (e.g., the interviews took place between August and October 1980, the postscript in this 1988 publication discusses events in 1978, and much of the literature cited is, by now, well known). Further, the analysis is not as carefully crafted and clearly presented as it should be. This reader found himself re-reading much of the book to seek clarification of terms and asserted causal relationships (the sets of hypotheses invite the reader to find circuitous reasoning). This book addresses an important topic (the value of policy analysis) in a much needed way (higher level of analysis) and presents an insightful case study, but in the final analysis this is a disappointing book, in part because it seeks to accomplish too much and in part because it is not well-organized nor well-developed. After reading this volume, the reader is left feeling unfulfilled – one is teased with the complexity of understanding the impact of policy analysis, but left pretty much where he/she started.

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