

Foreword

How well do governments govern? And why do some policy makers appear to be much better at it than others? These simple questions have formed the starting point for this research project. They have captured our attention for years, and the idea for this volume builds upon some of our prior work. In contrast to those earlier efforts, which were focused very much on the darker sides of government and public policy and which were mostly conceptual,¹ the present study adopts an even-handed, empirical, comparative perspective. We have selected four critical challenges to the governance capacities of national governments, and have invited no fewer than 24 experts to evaluate and explain governance performance in six European states. For each sector, a common analytical framework was adopted to facilitate cross-national comparison. In addition, comparisons across the four sectors are made possible by the fact that each of these four analytical frameworks was focused squarely on the same issues of policy evaluation and explanation.

The seeds for this mammoth effort were sown in Luton, England in 1996, when two of the general editors were both invited to a seminar about policy disasters in Britain. An old acquaintance was renewed, and a mutual fascination discovered. This led to a series of brainstorming sessions in Leiden, Utrecht and Oxford, and eventually to the key questions and design of the study. Meanwhile, we managed to recruit four leading experts in the policy sectors we had identified as prototypes of the four critical challenges we wanted to study. They agreed to act as ‘sector editors’, bearing responsibility for the acquisition of six national case studies each. Case authors were found and the bulk of the now voluminous group of participating researchers met at the March 1999 ECPR workshop sessions in Mannheim to discuss first drafts. Two of the four sectoral groups convened later that year at Nuffield College, Oxford for another session. The final months of the project involved the usual frantic exchanges between general editors, section editors and case authors, negotiating about the format, substance and – most of all – the length of the manuscripts.

In the course of this process we have incurred several debts. First of all, we want to thank our colleagues Erik Albæk, Andreas Busch, Geoffrey Dudley, Michael Moran and Jeremy Richardson for their dedication to this project in their role as ‘middle managers’. They have been squeezed at times between the rigid demands of us general editors and the pleas of case authors for maximum

flexibility. We have enjoyed this collaboration very much, and the project would not have been where it is now had it not been for their expertise and perseverance. Moreover, Jeremy Richardson's Centre for European Politics, Economics and Society at Nuffield College sponsored a crucial meeting of authors. The support of the Centre is gratefully acknowledged. In addition, financial or administrative support for the project was kindly provided by the Netherlands Science Foundation, the Department of Public Administration at Leiden University, and the Department of Legal Theory at Utrecht University. Our research assistant for this project, Martijn van der Meulen at Leiden University deserves special mention. In the hectic months towards the completion of the manuscript, he was fast, reliable, cheerful and extremely well organized where we at times were none of the above.

The single most important person in this project has been the late Vincent Wright. He has been a source of inspiration and succinct analytical advice during the design stages. Drawing on his seemingly limitless networks of colleagues around Europe he has selflessly helped us find the talented individuals to fill the slots in our 4×6 chapter matrix. On top of that he also provided financial support and hospitality for an early editorial meeting at Nuffield College. He has been 'around' in not just ours but many of our colleagues' professional lives for so many years, and always in such an unfailingly helpful way. For this reason we respectfully dedicate this volume to his memory.

A final work on the annotation and bibliographies. Each section of the book has its own master bibliography at the end of the section. This is done mainly because the references for parts II to V are highly sector-specific. Collapsing these very divergent types of sources in one central bibliography would, we feel, complicate rather than facilitate active use by the readers.

Mark Bovens, Paul 't Hart, B. Guy Peters

NOTE

1. Hogwood, B.D. and G.G. Peters (1985), *The Pathology of Public Policy*, Oxford: Clarendon; Bovens, M. and P. 't Hart (1996), *Understanding Policy Fiascoes*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers; Gray, P.D. and P. 't Hart (eds) (1998), *Public Policy Disasters in Europe*, London: Routledge.