1. Introduction to the *Handbook on Policy, Process and Governing*

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It is as though there were a political gateway through which all issues pass. Disputed from the moment they are in sight of it – and more hotly as they approach – they pass (if they pass) through, and drop out of controversy for a time. Managing the procession are certain ‘gatekeepers’ – not just the Cabinet of the day, but bureaucrats, journalists, association heads and independent specialists camped permanently around each source of problems. To talk of a political process is to recognise some hint of pattern in the way in which in many different fields the controversial is transformed into the routine. (Davies 1964: 3)

POLICY, PROCESS AND THE ANALYSIS OF GOVERNING

A handbook on the policy process is called for because of the increasing importance of ‘policy’ in both the practice of governing and the analysis of this practice. We need to know what is being done to generate ‘policy’, and in what way this can be called a ‘process’.

So perhaps our first concern should be to clarify the way we explain governing, and how ‘policy’ forms part of this explanation. This may seem unnecessary: it seems obvious that governing is done by ‘the government’, and policy is ‘whatever government chooses to do or not to do’ (Dye 1972: 1). Certainly, this is a ‘common sense’ explanation: as there appear to be problems in our collective existence, governments should address these problems, choose courses of action to deal with them, and see that these are carried out. This is an ‘authoritative instrumental’ view of governing, which sees it as a form of ‘official problem-solving’, with policy seen as the choices of government, and the trajectory from problem through choice to execution as ‘the policy process’. This is an explanation of governing which ‘makes sense’ because it is consistent with our normative expectations, but this identifies it with a particular time and place: liberal democratic regimes of the late 20th/early 21st century.

There have been (and still are) many regimes where there is no expectation of benevolent problem-solving: for instance, regimes built on traditional authority, where the ruler attains the post through inheritance, old-style communist states, or other dictatorships. In these polities, neither practitioners nor outside analysts are likely to make much use of the term ‘policy’ in explaining governing. For Hobbes, governing was about exercising coercive control to prevent human self-interest destroying society.

Other accounts attribute less significance to the governors. Locke challenged Hobbes’ belief in the necessity of coercion, positing an original ‘social contract’, a continuing collective agreement on what should be governed and how this should be done, and this account has retained a particular significance in American political thought. In a different way, much economic thought has seen the role of government as more a matter of functional necessity than of choice, seeing government as being necessary for the supply

of 'public goods' like street lighting or territorial defence, which cannot be met by the operation of the free market. (European thinkers tend to go further and argue that state action is an integral part of the workings of the market.)

There has also been scepticism about the capacity of the governors to effect change, which is implied in the 'authoritative instrumental' account. As Considine notes, 'in the 1970s, policy makers in most industrialized countries . . . decided to require drivers to adopt a common set of safer behaviours by wearing seat belts, drinking less alcohol and slowing down', but

In the United Kingdom and Australia the wearing of seat belts was accepted but drink driving proved much harder to restrain. In Italy and France, the seatbelt laws were more widely flouted, but on the other hand drinking was more easily curbed. Policies and institutions thus make sense when we understand the history and social character of actors. (Considine 2005: 3)

The 'governmentality' school, drawing on the work of Foucault, goes further, arguing that governing is accomplished by shared norms and understandings, the 'mentalities' of order, and the governing of the self, and that the overt acts of governors have to be understood in relation to this fundamental normative order. The question shifts from 'how do We govern Them?' and 'how do They govern Us?' to 'how are we induced to see ourselves as governable, and in this way, to govern ourselves?' In this context, the analytical question becomes 'do we see "policy" as the official signals on the surface, or is it to be found in the deeper currents that make these surface signals significant?'

These questions tend not to be raised in the discussion of policy. Policy practitioners have no interest in publicly questioning their significance (though as we shall see, they may do this in private); and academic observers often find it difficult to avoid the broad framework of the authoritative instrumental account – governments making decisions to achieve beneficial goals – even when their research challenges its validity. In this book, we try to avoid being drawn into the practitioners' account and to be conscious of the way that accounts of governing are themselves part of the process of governing.

The growing significance of policy in the practice of governing can be seen in the emergence of a 'policy bureaucracy' – 'a cast of thousands' – in government (Page and Jenkins 2005), and increasingly in non-government bodies (Keen 2006), and in the increasing expectation that organizations of all sorts will have explicit statements setting out their operating principles and practices. The emergence of 'policy professionals' as a significant occupational group has been reflected in the growth of academic courses to train them and bodies such as the (US-based) Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management as a professional forum, with conferences and a journal, so that Radin could claim that by 2000, the 'policy analysis' profession had 'come of age' (Radin 2000).

This growth in practitioner attention to policy has had its counterpart in academic study, initially through a re-focusing of existing study (courses in 'American Government' being renamed 'Public Policy' – Hale 1988), but increasingly through more particular attention to 'policy' in governing, and the development of analytic frameworks for understanding it. Dutch professor of political science Gijs Kuypers defined politics in post-World War Two western society as 'telocracy' or simply 'the struggle about policy' (Kuypers 1980: 38). In the last few decades, there has been a steady growth in 'theories of policy', many of which have been brought together and catalogued in a number of ways, notably the successive editions of Paul Sabatier's

Theories of the Policy Process (Sabatier 1999, 2007; Sabatier and Weible 2014, 2017), the recent Peters and Zittoun volume (2016), and the periodic survey articles in the *Policy Studies Journal* (e.g. Nowlin 2011; Petridou 2014). The proliferation of theories is a testimony to the energy of political scientists (and, perhaps, to the incentive force of the appointment and promotion practices of universities), but there are questions about the epistemological status of these analytic formulations, and what exactly it is that they are seeking to do. Elinor Ostrom (2005: 27–9) distinguished between theories, frameworks and models, but Weible (2014: 3–4) adopts a ‘deliberate mix, for convenience, of frameworks and theories’, and refers to ‘approaches’ which provide a ‘shared vocabulary’ for members of a research team and ‘testable propositions’. Are they, then, systematic hypotheses about the dynamics of policy, or are they categories into which to sort empirical examples? ‘Theories’ can be seen as alternative research strategies, with the researcher being required to choose which theory to use. In this perspective, if an account of the empirical case can be given in the terms and categories of the theory, then the theory ‘works’: it is held to explain that case.

The identification, cataloguing and advocacy of these diverse ‘theories’ of policy has generated a significant amount of publications and no doubt a certain degree of entertainment at academic conferences, but it has had the effect of making each attempt at theory-building the rival of every other one; one US conference was described as a ‘policy shootout’ (Eller and Krutz 2009: 1). So rather than the cumulative development of a shared understanding, there has been a succession of new contenders for the limited number of places on the stage, and the cataloguing has tended to be more an indicator of what is currently in good standing among American academics than a record of intellectual development.

For this reason, we think it is more constructive to look for ‘theorizing’ rather than ‘theories’, just as Karl Weick does in *The Social Psychology of Organizing* (Weick 1979), which focuses on the activity (‘organizing’) rather than the phenomenon which results from it (‘the organization’). Rather than adding to the bibliography on ‘theories of the policy process’, we are concerned with how people draw the map – that is, with the ways in which the policy process has been theorized: what concepts, categories, practices and relationships have been the objects of attention, and how have they been seen as contributing to an outcome, if any. This will make it easier to see similarities and linkages, and to form an assessment of how the diverse analytic currents have contributed to the mapping of the place of ‘policy’ in generating collective action and, specifically, in the process of governing.

POLICY AS PART OF A PARTICULAR EXPLANATION OF GOVERNING

For a concept so widely used, it is perhaps surprising how little agreement there is on just what it is that the term denotes, and how scholarly attention can be focused in a way which is consistent with observations of practice and the experience of practitioners. Does the term refer to:

- an *artefact* – ‘the policy on x’, a clear, official, written statement, a document, which governs (or is seen as governing) practice (see Chapter 3).

- a practical and analytic *category*, distinguishing some aspects of the process of governing from others, such as ‘politics’, ‘administration’, ‘management’ and so on.
- a *mode of state action* – ‘policy making’ – carried out by authoritative figures, whose decisions are put into practice by subordinate officials and citizens (see Chapter 2).
- a way of solving salient public problems, including (but not limited to) state action, that seriously worry important stakeholders and large numbers of citizens, and therefore politicians (see Chapter 4).
- a *body of knowledge* about a field of governing, including the concern itself, why it is of concern, and the practices by which it is addressed, as in, for example, health policy, transport policy, immigration policy (see Chapter 6).
- a body of *stable practices*, recognized by the regular participants as ‘the way we do things here’, and validated by that recognition; for example, ‘the school’s policy is that pupils do not take their smart phones into the classroom’ (see Chapter 5).

All of these seem to form part of the discourse, and it is not clear how they relate to one another, or how a definition of policy can cover them all. So it is perhaps not surprising that, increasingly, texts about policy shy away from a clear definition, offering instead extended lists of what may be covered by the term – the observable phenomena which are the empirical manifestations of policy. Weible, for instance, begins the third edition of *Theories of the Policy Process* by explaining that ‘public policy’ (and it is not clear whether this differentiates ‘public policy’ from other sorts of policy) ‘involves the decisions (including both actions and nonactions) of a government or equivalent authority’, and examples ‘include, but are not limited to, statutes, laws, regulations, executive decisions and government programs’, and also ‘the commonly understood rules-in-use that structure behavioural situations involving public affairs’, and ‘can include both means and goals and can range in form from procedural to substantive and from symbolic to instrumental’ (Weible 2014: 4–5). A list like this does not really help an observer to identify what is, and what is not, ‘policy’ in any given case.

We find it more helpful to recognize ‘policy’ as a concept in use, being used both by practitioners and observers to distinguish some phenomena from others, and to categorize some sort of phenomena by their key attributes. Agamben suggests that it is more accurate to speak of a range of problematic phenomena or events as bearing the ‘signature’ of policy. All social inquiry, policy inquiry included, involves the identification of enigmatic, problematic situations and events and the choice of pertinent concepts, ‘which entail signatures, without which they remain inert and unproductive’ (Agamben 2009: 78). What we in scholarly parlance call ‘concepts’, start their scientific trajectories as ‘signatures’, which act like clues or keys to ‘unlock’ those enigmatic situations and make them ‘legible’. Only much later, as the links between observation and models are established in scholarly discourse and writing, do the signatures acquire, justifiably or not, the character of scientific ‘concepts’.

The first part of this book addresses to some of the attributes of activity that attract the label ‘policy’: that it is the work of government, that it is a response to problems, that it is (or should be) expressed in clear documents, that it is a particular form of practice, and that it constitutes a body of accrued knowledge. This part explores some of the questions that arise from this framing. Is ‘government’ an actor? To what extent does policy emerge from decisions? What other practices could generate policy? Do documents simply record

policies, or do they shape policy activity and policy content? Should we think of policy in terms of problems and solutions, or are these convenient fictions to be critically analysed? Should the focus of attention be more on the sorts of practice from which policy emerges than on the problem and the possible solutions? Is the policy process becoming more concerned with the mobilization of relevant knowledge as governments become more interested in relevant evidence – ‘what works’?

Here, we have to recognize that ‘policy’ is a term which occurs in the English language, where it is used to distinguish some forms of action from others, notably ‘politics’ (the struggle for power) and ‘administration’ (the day-to-day managing of the business of governing), and the way it is used reflects its origins in the Anglosphere. It seems to have no direct equivalent in the other major European languages (except for the Dutch *beleid* – Kuypers 1980), which tend not to distinguish ‘policy’ from ‘politics’. If we ask what are the characteristics of practice which most make it ‘policy-like’ in Anglophone usage, they seem to be (a) order: practice is not random or discretionary but prescribed and predictable; (b) authority: it is made by an appropriate official; and (c) purpose: it seeks to achieve some outcome or express some value. We will show later in this chapter how these core characteristics are used to inform the discourse about policy, but it needs to be borne in mind that this perspective on policy does not necessarily define the practice of governing, but rather a particular way of talking about it (which is, of course, part of the practice).

PROCESS: THE ATTRIBUTION OF REGULARITY, ORDER AND AGENCY

In academic and practical parlance we have come to speak of the ‘policy process’, implying that policy comes not from random or contingent events, but from a patterned unfolding of events with a certain demonstrable cogency and sequence. Parsons (1996: 77–81) notes that by the 1970s and 1980s, academic writing tended to see policy in terms of a succession of stages, from problem recognition through options, choice and implementation to evaluation, and that even though this was widely criticized, it remained the dominant paradigm. Recent handbooks (Fischer, Miller and Sidney 2007; Moran, Rein and Goodin 2006; Peters 2015; Peters and Zittoun 2016) take ‘policy process’ or ‘policy making’ as self-evident concepts not in need of definition or problematization.

This embodies, in the categorization, an assumption about agency: that policy exists because it has been ‘made’ by someone; if there is a policy, there must be a policy maker, and while it is rare for these figures to be specifically identified, it is generally implied that they are senior office-holders in government. This meshes with the behavioural assumption that the central activity is making a ‘decision’. Parsons (1996: 82) sees policy making as ‘focusing on the relationship between the “pre-decisional” dimensions . . . and its decisional or post-decisional contexts’. Or the focus can be on the document expressing a problem-solving design, with the gaze tracked backward in time, seeing the policy process as a selection of events, and of (individual or collective) actors and actions over time, defined by reference to a particular document which expresses and articulates the policy, by describing the major events that jointly make up the becoming, adoption and destiny or outcome of that policy (van de Graaf and Hoppe 1996: 95). This

acknowledges that policy may be seen as both *ex ante* intention, *ex durante* becoming, and *ex post* outcome.

Here, we are encountering the overlap between practitioner and researcher framings. While authoritative decision plays an important part in the construction of policy, in practice, there are other significant factors, such as shared expectations, structured practices, skill bases, public expectations and available resources. But it is important for practitioners that practice is validated by attribution to an authoritative source: that it is the implementation of a decision, an example of the smooth working of 'democratic accountability' and 'the policy process'. Academic researchers are not subject to these constraints, but are prone to identifying patterning in practice and labelling it as 'system', and as Parsons says, 'If we put aside the stagist model the choice is either a bewildering array of ideas, frameworks and theories, or the acceptance of another alternative model' (Parsons 1996: 80).

So the academic consensus has been that a model of process is needed, and the model of a succession of stages around a decision is better than nothing. This, of course, shows us that 'process', like 'policy', is a concept in use, employed by both practitioners in and observers of the process of governing to give meaning, significance and validity to activity. *The 'policy process', then, can be seen as the way that the shared concept of public authority is mobilized in the governing of the problematic aspects of our collective life.* This means that the distinct points of focus that we have just identified may well be part of this activity, but the task is to identify the way in which this is accomplished. Documents may be important, but they will be significant because (and to the extent that) they impact on, and shape the behaviour of, the relevant or intended participants and audiences. Bodies of knowledge can be significant, but we need to know how knowledge is institutionalized, and in what way participants seek to invoke it, or to respond to one sort of knowledge with another, competing source. In other words, we are seeking to identify the patterning of action, the operational logic behind the patterning, and the extent to which it involves the mobilization of public authority and can be seen as 'policy'.

This means that we need to shift the focus from *'the policy process'* to *'policy-as-process'* – that is, the patterning of activity as part of the accomplishment of governing. We can see that activity is being patterned in more than one way, that the different patterns may operate against one another, and that policy participants and policy observers have to deal with these differences. For participants, this may mean institutionalizing contact, seeking grounds for consensus, and developing a 'tolerance for ambiguity'. For observers (particularly academic ones), this is more likely to generate attention to distinctions and categories, the development of alternative analytic approaches, and the application of these as ways of explaining policy action in systematic ways.

One particular problem in giving an account of policy-as-process is the tension between process and outcome. There is a normative account of policy which focuses on outcome, and sees process in terms of its contribution to the achievement of specific outcomes, the 'policy objectives' chosen by the 'policy makers'. Empirical accounts of policy activity give more attention to process itself, recognizing multiple participants, overlapping framings of the problem, and the continuing management of differently recognized fields of concern, in which specific outcomes are experienced more as convenient reference points in continuing activity rather than as final destinations. This can be a problem both for analysis and for the practical implications of analysis.

Here, as elsewhere, both practitioners and observers are ‘making sense’ of policy activity, but in distinct ways, which are compatible with their own skills and expectations. A handbook is likely to draw predominantly on the accounts of observers. But it has to recognize that these emerge from a particular perspective. Practitioners are, on the one hand, most likely to employ practice-oriented accounts of their activity, but on the other, to draw on the terms of the observer accounts in ways which make sense to them in particular contexts (Hoppe and Colebatch 2016) – but in ways which may be quite different from the original formulations of the observers. A handbook on the policy process has to recognize that we are dealing with ‘concepts in use’, but we need to do better than to offer a rambling list of practices which may ‘involve’ policy (e.g. Weible 2014: 7). We find it helpful to focus on what we see as the three underlying norms of policy – authority, order and purpose – and explore the way in which they generate distinctive accounts of what policy-as-process is about. One account is about authoritative choice; one is about the ordering of practice through attempts to structure interaction between policy-relevant actors; and one is about the recognition of, and response to, problems. In a way, this is ‘making sense’ of the academic sense-makers. It is not the only way in which this can be done, but we find it helpful because it shows the similarities and the differences among related analytic approaches.

WHAT MAKES FOR POLICY: CORE ACCOUNTS OF POLICY IN GOVERNING

Policy as Authoritative Choice

The first, and perhaps most obvious, account of policy sees it as a process of authoritative choice: that it is generated by people in authority (the ‘policy makers’) choosing to mobilize their authority in a particular way. This is the ‘common sense’ view of policy – ‘what They (unspecified because unknown) must have decided’, or as Dye put it, public policy is ‘whatever governments choose to do or not to do’ (Dye 1972: 1). This raises two points. The first is that government is anthropomorphized: that is, it is seen not as a complex of specialized entities, but as an individual which has preferences, attends to problems, chooses courses of action, and directs people to carry them out. The second is that this perspective is consistent with our Cartesian self-image in which thought precedes (and explains) action, and this is then projected onto the world of governing to depict it as the work of a collective mind. This makes official actions legitimate and appropriate: official acts of governing are seen as the execution of choices made by those appropriately empowered to make them. How this relates to the experience of governing is another question (and one that we will return to), but here, it is sufficient to note this propensity. ‘In our political and social thought’, said Foucault, ‘we have not yet cut off the king’s head’ (Foucault 1980: 121).

This perspective frames the activity of governing in a particular way. There are authoritative people (‘policy makers’) making choices – identifying concerns worthy of action, and selecting courses of action in response. The other participants in the process are seen either as applicants (seeking a particular choice) or as subordinate officials, giving effect to these choices. And the activity of these ‘policy makers’ is to be understood as a skilful

response to problems that emerge, an exercise in ‘policy design’ involving the selection of appropriate ‘policy instruments’. This constitutes the subordinate roles of ‘policy analysts’ and ‘policy advisers’, who are feeding information to the ‘policy makers’ to help them make their ‘policy choice’. The rest of the process of governing is then to be seen as the ‘implementation’ of these decisions of the policy makers which should (and may) be followed by ‘evaluation’, which will test and confirm both the acuity of the design and the effectiveness of the implementation.

So the second part of the book examines the ‘authoritative choice’ account in its own terms, beginning with an exploration of the case for seeing policy activity as a progression of linked stages (Chapter 7). Identifying different stages also raises questions about the extent to which policy can be seen as having been ‘designed’ by a single mind (Chapter 8), choosing ‘instruments’ (Chapter 9) to achieve a desired goal, and the activity as the ‘implementation’ of the choices of the ‘policy makers’ (Chapter 10). It also raises questions about the place of ‘evaluation’ in policy (Chapter 11), and the relationship between outcome and intention: if the outcome is different from the intention, is that necessarily a bad thing? Or does it reflect learning from experience? And does this raise questions about how policy is ‘made’? If it is being shaped by different hands in the course of its development, are they all ‘policy makers’?

Policy as Structured Interaction

To mention the different hands involved in the shaping of policy points to one of the ambiguities in the theorizing of policy: to speak about it as a choice implies an individual act of choosing, but it is clear that the development of policy (over time and space) is likely to involve a large and diverse array of people and institutions. So the analysis of policy has to deal with the involvement of multiple participants, raising questions about who is involved (and who is not), how they become involved, what they do, and how they relate to one another, both inside and outside governments. In this way, policy is recognized as a collective activity, and attention is focused on how claims to participation are advanced, contested or recognized, the significance of ‘non-official’ participants in ‘official’ processes, and the nature of practice (‘policy work’).

This involvement may have become more noticeable in recent times as the gaze of policy widened, but it has rarely been possible to confine any policy issue within the confines of a single agency. As Gulick noted (1937), not only are there distinct units of government for different functions (e.g. health, education), there are also units based on process (e.g. auditing, information technology), on people served (e.g. old people, ex-soldiers), or on place (e.g. regional or local government), and a single policy issue is likely to involve multiple agencies but for different reasons. This will be even more pronounced in federal systems, where questions of constitutional authority and finance are likely to be raised. And beyond this diverse range of officials, there is a vast array of non-officials, more organized or less, who become part of the action because of their expertise or their insistence, or simply because policy would not be effective without their cooperation.

So there are potentially many participants in any policy issue, and which ones to recognize, and in what way, becomes an issue for both policy practitioners and policy observers. The question for practitioners is to what extent these linkages should be recognized and institutionalized. Academic attention given to the significance of structured interaction

in policy has been mostly concerned with identifying and labelling the forms of linkage that can be seen in policy practice, noting that policy participants tend to ‘cluster’, and seeking to explain this (see Chapter 12).

In this ‘structured interaction’ account, more attention has been given to continuity and practice, and to the development, over time, of understandings and practices (unique or shared) about policy concerns and how to address them, which contrasts with the implicitly ‘episodic’ nature of the ‘authoritative choice’ perspective. There has been recognition of ‘policy domains’ and ‘policy regimes’, reflecting the way that ‘policy’ is part of a broad structuring of practice, involving multiple participants, with diverse concerns, capacities and levels of interest, who engage in ‘making sense together’ (Hoppe 1999), and through the interplay of structure and action (Giddens 1984), constitute and sustain a mutually acceptable way of managing matters of collective concern.

One remaining question for this account is how practitioners can generate clear policy in the face of significant differences among the participants about the understanding of the problem and what can be done about it. There is, of course, continuing conflict over policy questions. As the former premier of an Australian state said: ‘The word “solution” doesn’t exist in the dictionary of politics. What you do is get a settlement of an issue that lasts for some time. Then the battles reopen’ (Turnbull 2006). But at the same time, participants need to find ways of managing this tension. Participant accounts tend to reveal an acceptance of difference, and of the validity of the participation of conflicting parties. There is a recognition of established claims (‘turf’), and the need of all participants to satisfy an outside audience (Painter 1981). From this position, participants can then focus on constructing an agreed outcome, a course of action which ‘makes sense’ to all of the interests involved, even if for different reasons (‘equifinal agreement’). Words are deployed strategically: ‘These words are so neutral. It’s not about consultation. It’s really about stakeholder engagement’ (Howard 2005: 10). And this points to a difference between academic and practitioner accounts: practitioners recognize the significance of accounts in policy practice, and develop a tolerance for ambiguity which academics find harder to accommodate.

The Policy Process as Managing the Problematic

We can see, then, that policy participants seek to constitute and sustain a mutually acceptable way of managing matters of collective concern. Our third account focuses on the two key questions that follow: what these matters of concern *are* (‘problematization’), and in what way the action to be taken is an appropriate response, whether in terms of instrumental rationality or value rationality.

Problematization is a label for the way that policy activity is concerned with articulating and creating *meaning* and *problematizing*. As Heclo (1974) observed, in many respects policy is a process of ‘collective puzzling’ – about what is normal, what is problematic, what demands collective attention, what is the problem, what is the source of the problem, what forms of response are appropriate, and who should be involved in accomplishing the response. This involves much more than ‘the policy makers’: claimants, advocates, experts, rival claimants, would-be norm-setters, and others may be involved in the ‘puzzling’. There can be alternative, perhaps competing views of what is of concern, and why it is of concern (see Chapter 16 on multiple framings).

There was an early recognition that not all potential matters of concern became policy issues, and hence a concern with how the 'policy agenda' was formed, and with 'non-decisions' as well as decisions (see Chapter 17 on agenda formation and change). More recently, this has broadened into attention to the way that shared meaning is carried in 'narratives', which express the nature of the concern and make the course of action to be taken in response 'sensible' (see Chapter 18 on narrative approaches).

This instrumental perception of policy is consistent with the Cartesian assumption that prior thought explains (and justifies) action, and with our self-image as rational, utility-maximizing individuals. Often, this assumption is then projected onto the world of governing to depict it as a pattern of continuing improvement; policy action is chosen because it can be expected to have the beneficial effects intended by the policy makers (which then places the subsequent measurement of impact as the ultimate test of the merits of a policy). This has not always been the case, but it was characteristic of the 'high modernism' in which the study of 'public policy' emerged (Goodin et al. 2006: 4). Certainly, an important part of policy activity is the discovery of a broadly acceptable reason for acting, and (generally) an acceptance of the instrumental efficacy of the policy response. This is clearly variable, as the example of seat belts and drink driving (p.2) shows, and in the 21st century, the discourse of political leaders is more likely to be characterized by imagery and framing ('getting the story right') than science-based predictions of efficacy.

The definition of the matters that are agreed to be in need of governing varies over time, between countries, and even between rural and urban areas. And there is great scope for argument about why some field of practice needs to be governed: in what sense is it a problem, what should be done about it, and who should take action.

For instance, in many countries, the care of young children has become a policy concern, particularly when their parents are (or want to be) in the paid workforce. But is this a problem of labour market participation (enabling both parents to participate), of child development (facilitating socialization), of education (early learning, and preparation for school), of welfare (subsidising costs for low-paid workers), of market pricing and externalities (who bears the cost of the care?), of the responsibility of employers to pay wages which reflect the true cost of labour, or of the role of government (in relation to the family and the workplace). The concern can be framed in different ways, each of which points to a different sort of answer. So ambiguity about the problem is not an obstacle to the development of a policy concern; indeed, it may lead to a broadening of the policy response as distinct institutionalized framings of the problem exert their influence on practice. As Heclo says, the policy process is a continuing puzzling about the problematic, and the policy outcomes reflect the ambiguity visible in the process.

Some social scientists see this puzzling as a question in the sociology of knowledge, noting how similar policy ideas can be found in different jurisdictions, raising questions about the 'diffusion' of ideas, and 'learning' among policy workers (see Chapter 19). This raises questions about the relationship between problematization and institutions (e.g. the way in which international organizations promote particular understandings and policy responses), and the way that shared understandings among the professionals relate to the 'public drama' reported by the media.

Social scientists in liberal democratic regimes have tended to see the mass media and the electoral process as the vehicle for this continuing puzzling: they report what is of interest

to the public, and political leaders seek to have their perceptions of the problem carried by the media in the hope that this will result in electoral support. But as Tiffen points out, the media have their own logic of action, which may have little to do with sustaining a conversation about the nature of the problem (see Chapter 20), and political leaders are concerned with generating support for their problematization, which is likely to facilitate polarization rather than convergence. The growth of social media (see Chapter 21) may enable the public to contest between established problematizations, but it may also facilitate the development of ‘separate realities’ of alternative problematizations.

So it is important to recognize that policy is also a process of problematization, in which participants have to deal with multiple and overlapping frames of meaning (see Chapter 22). Attention has to be given to the ways in which participants come to understand their shared concerns, and the relationship between meaning and organizational location, and to the place of ‘meta-narratives’ in the managing of contested policy issues.

THE LIMITS OF POLICY

We have identified three ‘core’ accounts of policy-as-process, focusing on authority, on interaction and on problem management, but there remain questions about how much the concept of policy explains the activity of governing. The literature gives a lot of attention to how policy is ‘made’, but it give sufficient attention to what it is that has been ‘made’? It tends to focus on choice (‘policy making’), whereas much of the activity of governing is not so much about choice as about continuity, and the small adjustments that are necessary to maintain it – a perspective initiated by Lindblom and labelled ‘incrementalism’ (see Chapter 23). This questioning is complemented by the discussion in Chapter 24 on ‘stasis *and* change’, which focuses on the tension between the value given to stability – policy as ordered, understood practice – and the need for profound changes in practice to cope with problems and great challenges, for example climate change – changes which are needed now to avoid long-term and possibly irremediable damage.

A rather different challenge comes from researchers who question the relative significance of policy activity in determining the pattern of governing. To talk of ‘framings’ of the situation for policy attention seems to imply the agency of policy participants, who might therefore be seen as ‘policy makers’, but some analytical approaches are prepared to diverge from this. Dye and others contested the assumption that policy differences between the American states reflected political programmes, or party competition, or the specific constitutional rules, suggesting instead that they reflected the socio-economic characteristics of or constraints on these states (see Chapter 25). Another challenge was Lowi’s argument that the type of policy outcome being sought determined the way that it would be pursued (see Chapter 26). So the task is not simply to describe a clear and unambiguous activity called ‘the policy process’ but to explore the way in which we can make sense of the way in which the idea of policy is used in both the activity of governing and the analysis of this activity.

We have set out here the perspective from which we have constructed this handbook. It reflects our experience in researching and teaching about policy, and our desire that the handbook should not be seen as a menu of competing options, but should cover the different ways in which practitioners and researchers have tried to theorize policy-as-process,

so that the reader can see what each approach could contribute to a clearer understanding of the place of policy in governing. This is the way in which we explained the project to our contributors, but they have all responded to it in their own terms, and we would not want to attribute to them the particular perspective which we have taken. In the chapters that follow they make their own case.

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