SPECIAL SECTION ON KNOWLEDGE IN POLICY: NEW PERSPECTIVES, NEW CONFLICTS

FROM KNOWLEDGE UTILIZATION TO BUILDING KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS

Michal Sedlačko and Katarina Staroňová

This special section is devoted to the topic of knowledge in policy making. Knowledge – data, arguments, scientific findings, ideas about policy instruments and their effects, even values and ideologies – guides judgements of decision makers about what to do or not to do. Expert or scientific knowledge and policy advice still dominate in policy analysis debates (particularly in the evidence-based policy making movement), although in recent years the role of other types of "usable" knowledge such as lay knowledge or tacit knowledge is acquiring increased recognition. In addition, processes of social learning and the building of advocacy coalitions around specific forms of knowledge are capturing scholars' attention. As can be seen, the (often conflicted and contested) role of knowledge in public policy can be understood from a range of theoretical and empirical perspectives – and this richness of perspectives, as well as conflicts around specific forms of knowledge, became the starting point for our call for papers, published in February 2014. From the number of contributions that we received, three are being published in this special section, accompanied by a literature review written by us, the Guest Editors.

More than 35 years ago, in her seminal work on research utilisation Carol H. Weiss (1979) raised a number of questions on the use of knowledge in public policy – what knowledge gets used, with what purpose and through what processes. Since then scholars of various disciplines as well as policy advisors and other practitioners, international organisations and national governments have dedicated their research efforts to these questions. Discussions around the applicable criteria for knowledge (be they legitimacy, credibility, usability or other) and conflicts about the status of various categories of knowl-

edge holders and the types and forms of knowledge permitted in or excluded from policy processes therefore shifted into the centre of administrative reforms and attempts to reorganise public policy making. The critique of technocratic and managerial understandings of knowledge and its utilisation that privilege particular forms of knowledge (produced with particular ontologies and methodologies and expressed and disseminated in particular ways) as well as knowledge producers and other types of knowledge workers (specific disciplines, think tanks or consultants) comes from various directions, even eroding the problem-solving narrative of public policy. At the same time, there are attempts to elevate the status of 'local', 'citizen' or 'ordinary' knowledge; attempts to redefine scientific criteria of quality by including public participation and scrutiny into scientific knowledge production; calls for increased consideration of the 'practical', 'tacit' or 'experiential' knowledge of policy makers or their imagination and intuition; a growing debate on the boundary organisations between science and policy as well as the roles of boundary workers and knowledge brokers; and new conceptualisations of knowledge originating in organisational sciences and sociology that stress and problematise the organisational, technological, distributed, material and processual aspects of knowledge. Thus, three decades later the focus on the forms of knowledge and its link to policy making remains at the heart of debates among scholars and practitioners; nevertheless, the contexts within which the debates occur have changed dramatically.

The first paper of this special section serves as a literature review framing various scholarly approaches towards studying the relationships between (scientific) knowledge and policy. This survey of academic literature by Michal Sedlačko and Katarína Staroňová identifies six discourses: evidence-based policy making, knowledge utilisation, policy learning, knowledge transfer, social construction of knowledge and boundaries, and knowing in practice. The authors attempt an analytical comparison of these discourses across a range of categories, including perceived problem and proposed solution, understanding of policy making, or favoured epistemology and ontology. Thus the differing logics of the discourses were brought more starkly to the foreground, drawing attention to the political and power dimensions of the procedural and institutional arrangement of policy processes with respect to knowledge, a dimension that is not entirely in the focus of dominant debates.

Moving straight to the heart of the knowledge utilisation debates, Antje Witting's study develops a methodology for tracing knowledge use in policy development. She focuses on knowledge materialised in written documents (i.e. 'inscribed' knowledge, cf. Freeman and Sturdy 2014) and that is thus not only made mobile and fit for transfer (Dolowitz & Marsh 1996), but also made

empirically traceable. She proposes a method based on citation analysis, admitting in the process some of the difficulties in understanding the strategic functions of citation practices in policy processes as compared to academic practices. The proposed coding scheme foregrounds several variables, including type of authorship (personal or organisational), the citing actor, and type of information (research or commentary). Data obtained from text sources and thus coded can then be translated into a social network analysis for a powerful representation of the relationships connecting pairs of individual actors and expressing the degree of centrality of individual actors within a network, as Witting shows on UK's 2010 *Major Road Network* committee report. And although her theoretical assumptions are agent-oriented and highlight policy makers and their individual experience, values or motives for knowledge utilisation, we find the method more flexible in terms of the underlying ontology. Especially after including the argumentative context of citation (e.g., agreement or critique), the method helps uncover argumentative structures and thus also points in the theoretical direction of discourse coalitions or interpretation communities and of such ontologies that favour intersubjective structures and processes in policy explanation.

Andrej Findor's contribution is specifically tied to welfare policy, studying how citizens and other policy actors subscribe to "competing versions of fairness and distributive justice". The paper summarises various categorical variables suggested by literature that explain differences in welfare attitudes (i.e. "inequality, religiosity, traditional ethical values, political ideology, and cleavages between religious and secular worldviews") before turning to the moral foundation theory (MFT) that explores these differences through the lens of five moral foundations. Identification of significant differences in 'deservingness' judgements between respondents from the 'general public' and respondents from NGOs helps Findor to uncover some deep cleavages in the Slovak society (i.e. an 'ethnicisation of laziness' in narratives about the Roma populations). The important conclusion of his story lies in recommendations for a careful reframing of welfare arguments with sensitivity for the underlying moral foundations when the goal is to shift the direction and reduce the polarisation of welfare attitudes. This stresses the (alternative) understanding of policies as discursive constructs and opens roads of inquiry on the social and psychological processes through which a 'capacity for moral reasoning and deliberation', as well as specific attitudes, develop in individuals and groups.

The discussion on actors providing policy advice would be incomplete without policy workers employed by bodies outside of the government (Colebatch et al. 2010). Think tanks, a "new invention in government" (Dror 1979), are becoming important sources of policy advice and influence also in Europe as "national policy ... increasingly finds policy formulation to occur outside of government offices – that is, in think tanks and within the loose networks of advocacy and interest groups that together with government officials make up policy communities" (Sidney 2007: 86). As such, think tanks act not only as expert sources of knowledge, but also as interpreters and editors of available knowledge (Stone 2001) by developing knowledge networks. In her comparative contribution, Anna Longhini studies the correspondences and differences between foreign policy think tanks in the UK and Italy. She develops a theoretical and methodological framework that emphasises the role of historical-political contexts for institutionalisation of foreign policy think tanks by illuminating "the incentives or disincentives associated with cooperation between think tanks and national policymakers" as well as the different strategies offered to think tanks by these contexts. Depending on whether a think tank engages its audiences passively or actively, and whether the audience is broad or restricted, Longhini identifies in a value-neutral manner three strategies ('the generalist', 'the advocate', and 'the lobbyist'). Her survey and interview data suggest that UK's think tanks tend to be better financed, with private and corporate donors constituting the bulk of contributions, whereas in Italy think tanks are mostly publicly funded. UK's think tanks also show a much higher level of participation in legislative hearings, with 'access to policy makers' (behind closed doors) being a more frequently stated goal and advocacy a more common strategy as compared to Italy, where the goal of 'reputation' and the generalist strategy seem to be given currency. Although specific features of UK's and Italy's historical and political context in respect to think tanks (or foreign policy) are not handled explicitly, this contribution nevertheless attempts to shed light on some of the interactions between policy makers and non-governmental actors as sources of policy-relevant knowledge that can lead to institutionalisation of think tanks as well-connected members of policy communities.

There is a connecting story to these contributions, one that charts a shift from knowledge utilisation towards the study of the development of networks centred on knowledge. Whereas the first paper maps the puzzle of relationships between knowledge and policy, the three following papers use this contextualising canvas to paint innovative and stimulating pieces with focus on methodological advancement. If we accept that knowledge is not "neutral" (in terms of both epistemology and ontology) – but rather embedded in frames and values – then the intersubjective processes of interpretation, translation, selectivity and alignment rise to the foreground. From studies of transfer and use of individual research findings we enter the territory of shifting coalitions of actors built around particular forms of knowledge, problem understandings,

frames, and narratives. Even outside of interpretive approaches to policy analysis, the study of knowledge networks and their historical institutionalisation and dynamics as well as learning is acquiring momentum, reaching beyond the theoretical concepts of epistemic communities, advocacy coalitions, or discourse coalitions. We hope that this diversity of approaches continues to grow.

REFERENCES

Colebatch, H. K., Hoppe, R. and Noordegraaf, M. (2010). Understanding policy work. In: H. K. Colebatch, R. Hoppe and M. Noordegraaf (eds.): *Working for Policy.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 11–25.

Dolowitz, D. and Marsh, D. (1996). Who learns what from whom: a review of the policy transfer literature. *Political Studies* 21:343–351.

Dror, Y. (1979) Think tanks: a new invention in government. In: Weiss, C. H. and Barton, A.H. (eds.): *Making Bureaucracies Work*. pp. 139–152. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Freeman, R. and Sturdy, S. (eds.) (2014) *Knowledge in policy: embodied, inscribed, enacted.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Sidney, M.S. (2007) Policy formulation: design and tools. In: F. Fischer, G. J. Miller and M.S. Sidney (eds.): *Handbook of Public Policy Analysis: Theory, Politics, and Methods.* Boca Raton: CRC Press, 79–87.

Stone, D. (2001). Think tanks, global lesson-drawing and networking social policy ideas. *Global Social Policy*, *1*(3), 338–360.

Weiss, C. H. (1979). The many meanings of knowledge utilization. *Public Administration Review* 39 (September/October): 426–431.