

## CHAPTER ONE

### Approaches to Public Policy in Central and Eastern Europe

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#### 1.1 Introduction and Overview

As a relatively new field of inquiry, studies of public policy are multidisciplinary with less clearly defined boundaries than other disciplines. Policy analysis around the world is still searching for a clear identity around the world and that remains true in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Agreement does not exist on a precise definition of public policy or policy studies. Peters defines public policy as, “the sum of government activities, directly or indirectly affecting citizens,” operating at three levels: policy choices, policy outputs, and policy impacts (1993: 4). Dunn suggests that policy analysis is, “an applied social science discipline which uses multi-disciplinary methods of inquiry and argument to produce and transform policy-relevant information that may be used in political settings to resolve public policy problems (1981: 35). In the introduction to the Encyclopedia of Policy Studies, Nagel defines policy studies as, “the study of the nature, causes, and effects of alternate public policies” (1994: xi).

Some cast a wider net than actions by the government to remedy problems. In his influential works, Charles Lindblom suggests that government actors are largely “functionaries”: “Public policies are made via a complex political system and cannot be understood primarily by looking at the actions of ... top government officials” (1993: 3). Public policy, he argues, is better seen as the product of broader social forces, particularly the dominant position of business in capitalist democracies and is restricted by limits in human capacities. He also emphasizes the conflict between reasoned judgement and political power. In addition, Lindblom criticizes the tendency of many of the studies of the policy process to characterize policymaking as a sequential process, proceeding from agenda-setting to formulation to enactment to implementation to impact and evaluation.

While few will deny the importance of business and other societal forces, and the limits of human capacities and policy analysis, Lindblom’s definitions are so broad that it is difficult to make conceptual choices, particularly when trying to develop policy studies in a new context, such as CEE. Similarly, other overly-broad conceptualizations, such as John

Kingdon's (1984) characterization of the policy process as a "primeval soup" with no beginning and no end, make it difficult to make progress as a field of study.

Public policy emerged in the 1960s, encompassing political science, sociology, economics and other disciplines. The Policy Studies Organization was formed in 1971 in the U.S. and was open to scholars of other nations. Policy studies emerged out of a greater concern for specific policy problems, the causal determinants of particular policies, and the relationship between policies and societal effects. Policy studies seek to understand what nations do, not just how they do it. They link process to results and put more emphasis on impacts, systematic evaluation of results, and unintended consequences.

Despite the disputes over definitions and defining the parameters of the field, some characteristics can be agreed upon. In particular, these are its interdisciplinary nature and the importance of its applied dimensions. Policy studies take elements from many disciplines:

- Political science: emphasis on the process by which policy decisions are made
- Public administration: emphasis on the role of bureaucracy in shaping policy and implementing decisions
- Economics: emphasis on concepts such as instrumental rationality, cost/benefits, maximization, and specific economic policies
- Sociology: emphasis on class, status, and social problems
- Philosophy: emphasis on logic, values, and ethics

The list could be extended to include broader perspectives of history and the policy lessons of the past, anthropology and the importance of culture, mathematics and the tools of measurement and analysis, and the natural science in terms of specific policies in health, energy, and ecology. The interdisciplinary nature of policy studies can be both an asset and a liability. While it transcends the often overly narrow restrictions of a single discipline and invites a range of perspectives and knowledge, the lack of boundaries and parameters can be a source of confusion and lack of clarity in developing research and a curriculum in the field.

The second key characteristic of public policy is its applied dimensions and relevance, direct or indirect, to real policy problems facing society. This desire for relevance, to provide information that ultimately would help better solve public problems, was a crucial factor in the emergence of the field. Yet this dimension, too, can serve as both a strength and weakness. Its relevance adds immediacy and significance to research findings and appeal to scholars and students with positive goals for improving society. Conversely, its applied nature can contribute to weaknesses in underlying theory and its perception by other fields that

research often lacks scientific merit. This perception is enhanced by the misuse and politicization of policy analysis and its use as an advocacy tool. This has been fostered by research from so-called “think tanks” with a highly ideological bias.

All of this is relevant for the question of the development of public policy as a field in CEE after the political and economic transition. In this chapter, we will look more closely at the disciplinary bases of public policy studies. In the conclusion, we consider the question of applied research versus theorizing at a higher level of abstraction that may seem of less relevance to everyday policy problems.

Attempting to characterize a sphere of scientific activity is never too popular among the experts within that particular field. The reasons for this are understandable. Because of the enormous accumulation of knowledge, of paradigmatic and methodological innovations, and the strengthening of the problem-solving and thematic orientation of science, the traditional boundary between disciplines is becoming yet more imprecise. Many, though not all would add that it is also becoming ever less functional. We will thus attempt to define public policy as a scientific discipline by referring to those concepts, terms and disciplines which like the fates, presided over its birth. We will also consider the specific cognitive problems that public policy resolves.

Within its conceptual terminology, public policy contains a number of expressions whose common descriptive element is the word "public". Included in this are terms such as public interest, public sector, public finance, public property and public law. The concept of public interest is used particularly in the fields of sociology and political science, the terms public sector, public finance and public property belong to the realm of economics, while the term public law is used in legal science.

### **Sociology, Political Science and Public Policy**

#### *The Public Interest*

The very first concept, that of the public interest, is controversial. One must add that it is not generally accepted. We will therefore start with a classic description given by the Nestor of American political science, Lippman (1955:42):

"It is given to be believed that adults share common public interests. However, they often confuse the public interest, and it sometimes conflicts with their private and particular interests. If this is so, it can be said that the public interest is

obviously that which people would choose if they saw clearly, rationally, acted benevolently and without bias."

The term public interest undoubtedly has a descriptive power, but it is also value loaded. As Lane (1993) observed, there still exists a tension between the individualistic connotation of the term "public" and the overall relative connotation of the term "public". The public interest can be that which the majority in a democratic society desires. But do we not by this infringe upon the rights of minorities? In any case, there is the community, civil society and the state, which, through these institutions, offer institutional mechanisms for the articulation, aggregation and coordination, and in some cases even the realization of sectional interests into a form whereby we can already begin to talk about 'public interests'. The complication provided by the institutional "mediation" of these public interests is of course also relevant. Authorities and officials also have their own interests which they insert into the political process aims to identify and satisfy that thing known as the 'public interest'.

A specific definition of what is (or what ought to be) a public interest is thus a living, never-ending social and political process which in a democratic society conforms to certain rules governing the discourse concerning what is a public interest and what not longer is, how to agree on such a definition and how to apply and protect the public interest in practical terms.

We are inclined to hold the opinion, that public interests find expression in a particular type of political orientation (and, should they be sufficiently informed, in the people themselves), which supports the development of the community and the resolving of its problems. In this sense, these are the interests of the individuals who belong to that community. Nevertheless these interests can also act against those individuals or groups who have opposing interests. Public interests thus often become the focus of negotiations and occasionally even conflict. At this point we step into the realm of public policy that deals with the identification, formulation, presentation, acceptance and implementation of public interests.

As a background to their comparison of eight countries, Wilensky and Turner (1987) empirically tested the hypothesis of whether corporatist democracies - i.e. societies where classical mechanisms of representative democracies both competently reflect somewhat superficially expressed public interests, and which also complement many other interconnecting linkages that behave as agents for negotiations between political partners (tripartite, professional and economic chambers, civil associations etc.) - are capable of more

effectively directing these classical mechanisms across articulated group interests so as to satisfy public interests. Public interests were defined as economic prosperity, employment and the maintenance of income levels. The result of the comparison confirmed the validity of the proposed hypothesis.

Understandably, there also exist conflicts between various "public interests", whether between those already connected with various communities or social groups, or with those competing value orientations, these groups visions of the world and their role within it. These conflicts create differences in basic values that underpin various public policies, and which even project themselves into theoretical models of public policies (see later chapters).

### *Political Science versus Public Policy*

Traditional political sciences tend to see the execution of a policy as a specialized activity, a division of the labor of professionalized human activity, directly connected with the representation and conflict of interests and the battle for power. At this level we can talk about policies that safeguard the existence and survival of relatively autonomous complete communities. Typically these include nation states, but also local communities and supranational associations. Public policy, on the other hand does not analyze to the same extent those general political conditions in which policies originate, nor the existence and survival of such social forms. Rather, it is interested in the social and political process leading towards the satisfying of those concrete, differentiated human needs held by communities and their members, whose needs cannot exclusively be satisfied by the private sphere.

In order that we can better illustrate these not immediately obvious differences between the terms of reference used by traditionally-orientated political sciences and public policy, the concepts laid out in the following table should give a true picture of these variances.<sup>1</sup>

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1. The method of semantic differential used has the advantage that it works with closely related definitions and associations that have a continuum defined by two polarized concepts. It is concerned more with a description of typical features, rather than the exact delineation of boundaries, corresponding to the relationship of both disciplines.

**Table 1-1: Semantic differential of variances between traditionally orientated political sciences and public policy**

<b>POLITICAL SCIENCE</b>	<b>PUBLIC POLICY</b>
Ideology	Technology
Conflict	Consensus
Misappropriation of power	Service
Rule	Co-operation
Representation Satisfying of needs	Satisfying of needs
Short-term horizon of decision-making	Long-term horizon of decision-making

The transmission of these various policy differentials, as defined by political science, to the analysis of policy in the public sector have interesting theoretical implications:

*Reactive versus Proactive Public Policy*

- Proactive public policy attempts to anticipate the possible threats to, as well as the development opportunities available to them for the satisfying of public interests, and also tries to adequately react in advance to anticipated developments. Thus it acquires here the significance of forecasting as a set of methods to be used in the investigation and shaping of possible futures.

- Reactive public policy reacts as and when the public interest is actually threatened.

*Liberal versus Paternalistic Public Policies*

- Liberal public policy intervenes where an individual interest threatens the accepted public interest.

- Paternalistic public policy enforces the recognized public interest (in the case of an authoritarian state's public policy, there is a greater risk that the policy being imposed is in fact something that is merely passed of as a public interest) often without regard to detrimental impact of such policy on individual interests or on the changed (changing or differentiating) character of human needs and expectations.

## **Economics and Public Policy**

A basic characteristic of public policy is that - in areas specified later - it concentrates on the analysis of how the public sector functions. The public sector is the antithesis of the private sector, where an individual (or company) decides for themselves on the nature of their private interests and on their execution. Decision-making occurs in the public sector that both involves and influences a number of individuals or institutions. It is here, that the public interest in, among other things, the production and distribution of public assets is formulated and asserted. Public economics is directed towards the economic aspect of its functioning while Public finance focuses on the principles and mechanisms of generation and the usage of public budgets.

What is the difference between the public and private sphere, between the public and private sector? This distinction manifests itself both in the differences between institutions and the interests which they follow, and in individual preferences. The basis of the private sector lies in the fact that an individual (or firm) decides for themselves on the nature and execution of their private interests. By contrast, it is in the public sector where decisions involving and influencing many individuals and / or institutions are made and where the public interest is predominantly formulated and realized. It is possible to compare the public sector to a household where resources produced by its members are accumulated. Inside the household, decision making also occurs on how these productive resources will be utilized.

Citizens, political institutions, the government and the bureaucracy occupy the public sector, while interacting individuals, producers and consumers, various non-profit and commercial institutions have come to occupy the private sector. Individuals, groups and elites often use the criterion of public interests for the resolution of problems in the public sector, while private interests prevail in the private sector.

It is commonly assumed that the system of public institutions contribute to the common good. Public institutions, as long as they function well, are without doubt just as important for the development of the state when viewed as an economic resource. The problem is, of course, that it isn't totally clear how these state institutions should look like and function in order for it to be possible to say that they function effectively from both an administrative or managerial viewpoint.

It is possible ask the question as to whether there exist criteria by which we could specify the differences between the public and private sectors. One possible answer is to define the public sector as a kind of sector financed from state budgets. However, this

criterion overlooks the regulatory role of the legislature. We can also associate the public sector with the political and legislative activities of the government (the state) and its consequences, and also with what the government provides to citizens (for example, various handouts and services, employment, state ownership). This delineation would, however, reduce the public sector to merely a branch of state administration. Local government and the activities of civic associations that are of benefit to the public would be excluded.

The following table gives an outline of the criteria that should be taken into account when looking to answer the aforementioned question.

**Table 1-2: Criteria differentiating the public and private sector**

Sector⇒ Criterion ↓	Public Sector (public interests)	Private Sector (private interests)
Execution of power	Government	Individuals (humans, institutions)
Consumption and investment	Public consumption and investment	Private consumption and investment
Nature of decision making	Political or administrative decision	Private (personal or institutional) decision
Provision of goods (in cash & kind)	Public goods	Private goods
Ownership	Public ownership	Private ownership
Employment	In the public sector	In the private sector

The proposed criteria do not, of course, mean that concepts used in each sector are mutually exclusive. A large public sector can, for example work with elements of free choice and competition, impose duties on the demand side, rent from the private sector in order to satisfy public interests. A whole range of other examples can be found:

- Non-profit organizations that orientate themselves towards meeting public interests, but which at the same time are part of the private sector and which in the market behave in a similar manner to rent/seeking actors. In order to reflect their importance, there will be an individual chapter devoted to these institutionalized forms in the following text.
- QUANGOs (quasi non-governmental organizations), formally non-governmental independent institutions, which in many respects, however, rely on governmental policy.
- Compulsory insurance combining the satisfaction of both public and private interests.



- State universities supported by private sources, and private universities jointly financed from public funds (a reflection of the current situation in the USA).
- The so-called "welfare mix" in numerous areas of social policy, where the provision of services mutually complement each other, and where institutions of the public and private sectors co-operate.

The boundary between the public and private sector changes both in time and between individual societies (cultures). For example, in the USA the private sector is much stronger than in Europe; Europeans are culturally and psychologically more prepared to expect, in a number of life-situations, assistance from various institutions of the public sector. The other side of the coin is a greater reserve held by Europeans towards privatization in areas "historically" considered as belonging to the public sector e.g. transport, telecommunications, prisons...

### **Law, Organizational Science, Public Administration and Public Policy**

Those efforts made at interpreting the complementary functioning of the market and government which do justice to the political dynamic of democratic societies with a functioning market economy are epistemologically very interesting. Government is perceived as non-market, political decision-making and its realization as taking advantage of the law, and democratic political institutions as acting as a conduit for the citizens' and public interests. As a consequence, government is perceived both as an instrument regulating the behavior of social actors and as an instrument fulfilling a regulatory function similar to that of the market, but by the use of alternative methods and with different objectives.<sup>2</sup> (As previously stated, an interesting new institutional form that, in order to achieve its objectives, ties in public interests with those conditions typical for the private sector are the non-profit organizations which constitute an independent civic sector.)

Already many decades before, authors such as Weber, Whyte, Drucker and others had begun to notice the growing significance of formal organizations in the lives of both people and global societies. These organizations - or, to use another term, bureaucracies - are a precondition and a consequence of the performance of the administrative function. Public policy must thus make use of the traditional terminologies used in organizational science, institutional sociology, public administration and other disciplines.

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<sup>2</sup> See future chapters of this book and publications by Lane(1993), Lindblom (1977) and Weimer-Vining (1992).

Public administration analyses the activities of those entities empowered in law (e.g. state offices, public bodies, local governments, judges), which, through their permitted activities and jurisdictions can be identified as the executors of public administration (Hendrych 1992: 10; modified). The difference between public policy (as a scientific discipline) and public administration is thus defined by the different subjects of their analyses, i.e. on the one hand, public policy as a practical activity, and on the other, public administration.

*"The life of any society can, at any moment, be split into two aspects: principally it is a series of communal events which in some fixed way always repeat themselves again and again; there are also those events, which are in a state of birth, where a decision that must take place in an individual case can still be realized in new forms."* (Schäffle 1897, quoted in Mannheim 1991).

Schaffle calls the first aspect of societal existence "everyday state life" (in our terminology, the administration - our remark), the second he calls policy. If everyday affairs thus organize themselves into everyday official life conforming to existing rules and regulations, it can be ranked under "the administration". In the case of it being the creation of something new, where it is not possible to use any known algorithms of decision-making and implementation, we can then put this into the category of policy.

The difference between public policy and public administration (as practical activities) can be analogously characterized thus: public administration contains well-established, routinely repeated activities within the framework of preordained regulators, whereas public policy is the creation of something new, that goes beyond established practices of implementing the public interests.<sup>3</sup> In the same token, it would even be possible to distinguish differences in the cognitive scope and concepts of public policy and public administration (as sciences). In the following chapters, intensive attention will be devoted to the theoretical as well as practical significance of understanding the role of the market, government and the civic sector as important regulators of societal life as well as their mutual relationships.

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<sup>3</sup> The state administration (as a practical activity) is that part of public administration protected by the state and its institutions. Apart from this, public administration also comprises self-governing public bodies (municipalities etc.).

### **Public Policy as a Scientific Discipline**

Public policy as a discipline can thus be defined as that which uses the terms of reference of sociology, political science, economics, law, organizational science, public administration and other disciplines for analyzing those processes of formulating and implementing differentiated public interests used to resolve specific problems connected with the life of human society. At the same time, it is devoted to the institutionalized management of these processes via the public, civic and to a certain degree the commercial sector in a form that can be used in political practice. Public policy is therefore a scientific discipline *sui generis* that cuts across many other scientific disciplines. It extends beyond the boundary of traditional social sciences in both its thematic structure and also in its cognitive scope and methods of investigation that it uses.

One of the key elements in characterizing public policy as a science concerns the tension between abstract development of theory and applied relevance. The more abstract theories are dismissed by some decision-makers as irrelevant to real world problems. Conversely, scholars dismiss some applied work for the opposite reason, that it does not contribute to the generalization and testing of theories. Prezyworski has written that the goal of comparative public policy analysis should be to substitute the names of variables for the names of countries (1971). That raises the issue of uniqueness concerning CEE. Is research from the west going to be relevant to the particular history and culture of the region? Higher level generalizations tend to minimize cultural and historical differences whereas more applied work more frequently takes those factors into account.

An example of public policy conceptualized at a high level of abstraction for theoretical purposes is Lowi's (1968) typology dividing policy into distributive, redistributive, and regulatory categories. With the dramatic changes taking place in CEE since the beginning of the 1990s in terms of developing legal frameworks and regulations, and the important distributive and redistributive consequences associated with economic policies and cutbacks in social policies, such a framework might satisfy the need for higher-level generalization and relevance.

Another framework designed specifically for CEE nations was suggested by Ivan Grdesic (1994). He suggested that the public policy agenda in the post-communist states is determined by the level (scope) and content of decisions. At the first level are questions of national identity and the nation's constitution. At this level, there occur also such agendas as the "choice of society" as embodied by the battle between Václav Havel and Václav Klaus

about the future orientation of the Czech Republic (Potucek 1999). At the second level are rules, procedures, and other frameworks of the political and economic system. The third level, he suggests, entails the arena of political action and interest groups in society. He believes that first level differences are particularly important in setting the policy agenda in CEE countries.

The main problem with such approaches, whether applied to CEE nations or western nations, is that the high level of generalization makes them more of interest to scholars seeking theoretical development than to policymakers seeking immediate information and solutions to problems. At the other extreme, narrow country- and program-specific studies of a particular policy, such as the evaluation of a welfare program in Poland is likely to have less application to scientific theory building. What would tend to be more generally transferable are policy analysis methods and techniques. The methodologies of cost-benefit analysis, different kinds of program assessments, survey research and focus group techniques, forecasting and statistical methods are extremely relevant for policy studies in CEE as elsewhere.

This includes research on the effects and impact of policies. Although the specific cases may be less important, lessons learned abroad in measuring impacts, both intended and spillovers, is useful.

Also relevant to the development of a scientific study of public policy in CEE is the data necessary to use established policy research methodology, such as budget data and demographic trends, survey research and citizen satisfaction measures. Even if the substance is different, comparative policy research can help clarify desired capabilities in both information sources and analytical capacity.

Comparative policy research is also relevant to developing policy options, although they must be carefully grounded in the institutions and historical and cultural context of each nation. This is not unusual in policy research, however. One of the important roles of the scientific study of public policy is to identify an array of options from the vast international menu that are within some reasonable boundaries of political feasibility. That is why we turn to substantive policy areas in our final section.

### **Substantive Domains of Public Policy**

To attempt to precisely define the themes and areas of interest belonging to any sort of discipline is always burdened with the risk of arbitrariness or a display of personal (and not

necessarily refined) taste. This is a risk we also run. Nevertheless, we should consider it expedient to undertake a comparison of the themes and areas of social policy. We will concurrently demarcate social policy as an investigation of the process that creates and realizes policies influencing the relationship between individuals and the social conditions they live in. (Compare the following table)

**Table 1-3: Fields of interests of public policy and social policy as scientific disciplines**

<b>Public Policy</b>	<b>Social Policy</b>
Human rights policy	
Environmental policy	
Security policy (internal and external)	
Migration policy	
Transport and telecommunications policy	
Media policy	
Economic policy (fiscal policy, monetary policy)	
Research and Development policy	
Innovation Policy	
	Population policy
	Employment policy
	Housing policy
	Policy of social security
	Education policy
	Health policy
	Family policy
	Policy of social inclusion and cohesion
	Policy relating to marginalised and endangered groups and individuals
<p>While It can be said that certain policies are easily associated with either public policy on the one hand or with social policy on the other, others can be found in both spheres.</p>	

According to Bulmer, Lewis and Piachaud (1989), social policy is not merely public policy, as it only brushes the edges of areas such as security, the armed forces and agricultural policy. On the other hand, social policy also extends into areas which are not the domain of public policy, for example social support and assistance within small communities. Here, among other things, we encounter the discrepancy between the terminology traditions of the European continent, the home of social policy (Socialpolitik), and the North American tradition that gives preference to the concept of public policy. No doubt, that Central and Eastern European scholars, politicians and the public should and could profit from both traditions.

In the field of public policy, as well as social policy, there are also found themes not mentioned in the table such as the formation and implementation of policy as a political process, the redistribution of resources and justice in their distribution, problems stemming from the functioning and linking of state administration and self-governing, and problems of the relationship between the center and the regions (the formation and realization of local policies). Another current problem is presented by the concept and method by which privatization policy is put into practice. The issues of the European integration and global governance vis-à-vis the operations of the nation states are of increasing relevance as well.

Relations between economic, public and social policy deserve special attention. For example, fiscal policy is directly linked to the underlying context of the majority of the policies mentioned in the table. Public policy also regulates economic life where the public interest could be threatened (in the realm of anti-monopoly legislation) or nurtured (such as the stipulation of economic activities in the deprived areas). This economic dimension can thus be conceptualized as an integral component of public and social policy.

### **Conclusion**

Approaches to public policy are wide-ranging indeed. As we have seen in this chapter, there are a host of issues to consider in thinking about public policy in general, and in CEE in particular. It is a multidisciplinary field enjoying the contributions of political science, sociology, economics and others, yet by the 2000s, it has emerged finally as a area of scientific of its own. Considerations such as reactive versus proactive policy and liberal versus paternalistic policies are important. Particularly important are the relationships between the public and private sectors, although with recent reforms, those distinctions may be reduced. Between them is the growingly important non-profit sector, including NGO, Quangos, and other hybrids. Legal and organization approaches encompass more traditional approaches with the more modern policy sciences. Finally, one of the dilemmas of public policy remains the tension between the desire for scientific knowledge and demands for relevance at solving today's problem. Approaches to public policy can be described as falling along a continuum from basic research (comparative, and at the highest level of generalization) to the most applied (more narrow, focused, and country-specific). In fact, each point along the continuum has its own function and usefulness depending on perspective. The subsequent chapters in this volume will show a range of issues, approaches and methodologies.

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