

Policy, Governing and Politicality

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This Forum contribution takes a critical look at “policy”, “policymaking” and “governing” as key concepts in policy studies. I briefly peruse the historical etymology of “policy” to unearth root meanings that, jointly, make up the “signature” of policy in the language used by observers, practitioners and citizens. Next, I discuss the relation between “policy” and “governing”. In a normative conclusion I reflect on the possibility of problematisation as source for a less depoliticised, more democratic post policy centered way of governing.

KEY WORDS: policy, governing, politicality, depoliticisation, European Union

We do not live in a governed world so much as a world traversed by the ‘will to govern’, fuelled by the constant registration of ‘failure’, the discrepancy between ambition and outcome, and the constant injunction to do better next time. (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 191)

Introduction

This Forum contribution intends something quite unusual in policy studies. I will not take the meanings of “policy” and “governing” as self-evident and beyond the pale of critical inquiry. Both concepts slip easily off the tongue and, apparently, fit smoothly into the analysis of the contemporary world of mobilizing and organizing for collective action, especially by the state or public organizations. The concepts are widely used not only by academic and non-academic observers (e.g., professors of political science, public administration, or policy studies, but also political journalists and commentators in the social media), by practitioners (e.g., civil servants, politicians, ministers, mayors, consultants, etc.)

but also by “the governed” or “recipients of policies” (i.e., citizens in general, or “target groups” like pensionados, the middle class, etc.).

Yet, it is not at all self-evident that concepts like “policy,” “policy process,” “policy-oriented learning,” “policy diffusion,” and many others in the same theoretical idiom give “good accounts” of what is going on in the world. After all, concepts are not politically innocent; they function as “containers” to make the world legible, one way, or another (Agamben, 2009; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Also, depending on historically shifting contexts, concepts with positive connotations one day may acquire negative meanings later. For example, after bad referendum results, the Dutch government quickly reframed the EU from a project of “integration (of states)” into one of mere “cooperation (between states).” Using a specific concept may even come to mask or hide what is actually going on: “The meaning of old terms change behind the façades of continuing locutions” (Braybrooke & Lindblom, 1963, p. 27). A superficial perusal of uses of the concept “policy” in history and in different countries shows that this positive-negative, revealing-hiding switch may indeed be observed with “policy.”

Policy these days no longer has mainly positive connotations but is criticized by presidents who rather “make deals” than “shape policies,” and by journalists and citizens who see “policies” as intractable, unintelligible, incommunicable compromises, very different from the campaign slogans of politicians; policies as signs of meaningless talk and stagnation, instead of decisive political courses of action with empowering consequences for their daily lives. All in all, “policy” has lost its innocence and lure as an innovative political concept. Like “the government,” “bureaucracy,” “representation,” (Müller, 2016) and “politics” itself (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002), it has acquired negative connotations in the public mind, with grave repercussions for the practice of governing. Repercussions that in the scholarly community of policy studies have not yet been fully reflected in the theorizing of public policy and policymaking. This essay is an attempt to demonstrate these developments. It may also be read as an *ex post* account of why Hal Colebatch and I, at least in my view, chose to title our recent handbook as dealing with “policy, process, and *governing*” (Colebatch & Hoppe, 2018) and not, for example, “and intelligence in collective action,” or “problems,” or “political order,” to mention just a few alternatives.

The structure of this essay goes as follows. In the second section, I tap into the wisdom (or stupidity) of the crowds on “policy” by brief excursions into the historical etymology of this concept for several countries. In the third section, I derive from these ordinary usages five root meanings of “policy” as, jointly, constituting the signature of policy in the language of academic observers and practitioners. In the fourth section, I explain what I mean when I discuss “governing” in relation to “policy” through contrasting Orren and Skowronek’s (2017) thesis of the “policy state” to Van Middelaar’s reflections on the different degrees of politicity of governing in the European Union (2017). This is followed by a fifth section that reflects on the (im)possibilities of a no longer policy-centered style of governing.

Meanings of "Policy" in the Historical Etymology of Some Different Countries

If policy scholars take the trouble of reflecting on the meanings of "policy," they usually immediately cite definitions by renowned scientific peers. They disregard that the word "policy" has been used in the past and is also used in everyday, contemporary nonacademic discourse. In doing so, they miss out on two important aspects of discourse. First, most abstract concepts like "policy" are metaphorical, in the sense that the function of metaphor is to project inference patterns from a source domain to a target domain: "Conceptual metaphor is what makes most abstract thought possible. ... Conceptual metaphor is one of the greatest of our intellectual gifts" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). For example, speaking of "the ship of state" or "the body politic" allows one to reason about statecraft in terms of "navigation" and politics in terms of the "head" as enabling the working of the economy and society as the "limbs." Immediately jumping to definitions of "policy" by peers also fails to take advantage of the wisdom of the crowds. Choice of words frequently used in ordinary language is usually for a good reason. Therefore, tracing key metaphors in concepts in ordinary language use is a good first step in scientific concept formation. And tracing the dominant metaphors in scientific concept formation over time allows one to map the history of an entire discipline (Ziman, 2000). As students of public policy we should realize that we are like generals commanding a standing army of metaphors.

Turning to meanings documented in historical etymology through analysis of dictionaries, in the Anglophone world, the concept of "policy" means "plan of action" or "way of management" or, more precisely, "line of argument rationalizing the course or action of a government." This meaning dates back to c. 1400–1600. Its etymological lineage clearly shows politics, the state or government as its domain of application: "Polis" (city, state, in Greek), "polites" (citizen, in Greek), "politeia" (state, administration, government, citizenship, in Greek), "politia" (the state, civil administration, in late Latin), "policie" (political organization, civil administration, in old French), "policie" (way of management, study or practice of government, good governance, in Middle English, fourteenth century). It has a secondary meaning, "written insurance agreement" or "written evidence of transaction," going back to the Italian "polizza," which itself derives from the Greek "apodexis," meaning "proof" or "(solemn, explicit) declaration" (Wiktionary, accessed 8 August, 2019).

Compounding the principal meanings, you get something like "policy is a principle of behavior, conduct, thought to be desirable or necessary, especially as formally announced in writing by a government or other authoritative body." The desirability of the "policy" is expressed in a separate but derived meaning of "policy" as "wise" or "advantageous conduct," "prudence" (from the Latin "prudencia" and the Greek "phronésis"), or "political shrewdness, cunning" or "statecraft." In the Anglophone sphere, "policy" is always directly connected to the state, government, or politics. In its ordinary use it is a thoroughly political concept. Its other properties of explicit formal recording and well delineatedness are perhaps traceable to the dominance of social contract political thought in the

English isles. In the United States especially, the qualification of state power by well-deliberated “policy” appears to be explicitly rooted in Enlightenment thinking from its very birth. Not for nothing Jill Lapore opens her magnificent recent history of the United States with this statement: “(The Constitution) was meant to mark the start of a new era, in which the course of history might be made predictable and a government established that would be ruled not by accident and force but by reason and choice. The origins of that idea, and its fate, are the story of American history” (Lapore, 2018, p. ix). The idea of “policy” fits such a state project hand-in-glove.

The historical etymology of its only one-to-one equivalent, the Dutch concept of “beleid,” is less directly linked to the state or government or politics, but more to “management” as generalized leadership or being “in charge” (Etymologiebank.nl, accessed 8 August 2019). In the thirteenth century, “beleid” is used in its meaning of ordinary “management” (“beheer”) or “way of conduct” (“wijze van handelen”). Other uses of “beleid” mean “direction, command, rule, being in charge of,” “in the lead.” Ca. 1440, one finds uses of a verb “be-leiden” (from the root “leiden” = “to lead towards,” “to command”) as “to administer” or “to rule, regulate.” Interestingly, in the late-Medieval and early-Renaissance Low Countries, the government(s), hardly a “state,” was governed by an oligarchy of aristocrats or of wealthy merchants as city governors (“regenten”), which was constructed as hierarchically “above” the citizen. This definitely authoritarian and non-contractarian idea still lives on in more egalitarian modern times, where the “state” or “state apparatus” is called, curiously, “de overheid” (literally, “a body placed over you”). So hierarchically conceived leadership in general was the dominant meaning of “policy” as “beleid.” Only in later centuries an additional meaning would emerge: deliberation, cautiousness, circumspection (as in “met beleid” = “with policy”).

The link to politics, state and government has a curious etymological history in the Netherlands. At the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth century, Dutch etymologists declared the word “policy” in its old meaning as “general management” or “leadership by the state,” obsolete. But Kuypers (1980), a political scientist turned policy scholar, has shown that in everyday Dutch political discourse, briefly after the Second World War, the word “policy,” due to its positive connotations of deliberation and circumspection, came to be preferred over, and competed with, “politics.” The latter concept had acquired negative connotations of “partisanship,” “politicking,” “dishonesty,” and mere “shrewdness.” For example, the same set of financial guidelines promulgated by the government would be referred to as “(good) financial policy” by parties in power, but as “(bad) financial politics” by opposition parties. Thus, in the second half of the twentieth century the entire spectrum of meanings mentioned above, and its links to the state, government and politics, was restored. In his most prominent book, “Beginselen van Beleidsontwikkeling,” or “Principles of Policy Design,” Kuypers could build on ordinary word use and phenomenologically define “politics” as “struggle over policies” (Kuypers, 1980).

It is telling that in other Indo-European languages there is no one-to-one equivalent for “policy” or “beleid.” In the Anglosphere and The Netherlands, the crowds in their wisdom somehow started to distinguish between “raw” political power and authoritative state action, and “policy” as near-synonym, but with a pinch or a lot of deliberation and rational calculation. In other European languages the link to politics, state and government remains more straightforward; at least, the need to qualify governmental action as “policy” did not lead to new concept formation. Instead, it leads to “adjectival” politics.

In German, if one distinguishes politics (“die Politik”) from policy, one speaks of “politische Planung” (literally “political planning,” Böhret, 1975; Luhmann, 1971; Waterkamp, 1978) or “politische Steuerung” (literally “political steering,” Mayntz & Scharpf, 1975); “policy analysis” becomes “Politikfeldanalyse” (literally: political domain analysis; Schubert & Bandelow, 2008). For example, “die Finanzpolitik” stands for politically defined “finanzielle Richtlinien” or “Leitung” (= “guidelines,” “directions,” “instructions”). But, as adjective, “politisch” also has both mild connotations of prudence (“Klugheit”), tact, and circumspection (“Vor-/Umsicht”), and as bigotry and self-servingness (e.g., Meier, 1980:29). Maybe that is the reason this connotation did not compete with, let alone replace, “politics,” as it did in Dutch.

In French (Larousse, consulted 9 August 2019), one distinguishes between “le politique” or “politics” (that which concerns the organization and exercise of power in and through the state, or what politicians do) and “policy” as “la politique” (the set of options chosen collectively or individually), prefixed by an adjective (“économique, étrangère,” etc.). Zittoun circumnavigated the “la/le politique” problem by consistently speaking of the plural, “les politiques publiques,” literally “public politics” but in the sense of “public politics” (Zittoun, 2013). Similarly in Italian and Spanish, for example, the Colombian, Spanish-speaking policy and STS-scholar Ordóñez-Metamaros (2013) speaks of “políticas públicas.” Interestingly, in these concepts, “rationality” or “prudence” is absent; instead, “policy” is squarely placed in “the political” as dealing with power, especially the power of the state. The same appears to be true for Arabic. The notion of “policy” in the Anglophone/Dutch sense of the word is expressed as “assiyassah al amma,” which in its literal translation reads “public politics.” “(A)siyassah,” the nearest equivalent in Arabic to “politics,” literally means “taking charge of a matter (in making it better)” (Hoppe, 2019, pp. 150–151). The affinity with notions of hierarchically conceived leadership, initiative, and rule by the state are clear.¹

Recapitulating this cursory and superficial perusal of historical etymology of several languages in search for the meanings of “policy,” we arrive at three conclusions:

1. Only in English and in Dutch, the concept of “policy” has been invented, in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, as meaningful sub-category of actions by leaders or other initiating actors using political, state and/or governmental powers to initiate and organize collective action.

2. Most other languages (but see footnote 1) do not make this distinction; they do without the conceptual innovation of “policy,” but have found other, more cumbersome or wordy means to articulate more or less the same idea.
3. What distinguishes “policy” from “ordinary” uses of the power to initiate and enact collective action through political, state or a governmental power is its (relatively more) articulated, documented character, implying that it is also assumed to be (relatively more) rational, prudent or well-deliberated.

Take notice of the fact that, in the spirit of Renaissance and Enlightenment thinking, “policy” was judged in a positive light. It reflected the typical Cartesian dualist mind-set: thought precedes speech precedes action; thus, action is instrumental, and is hierarchically subjected to direction by thinkers. Like very explicitly in Dutch where the concept of “beleid” achieved a triumphant twentieth-century comeback, “policy” had positive connotations compared to “politics” or “rule” or “political control.” All the more curious that recently cracks show up in the formerly shining blazon. Read this verdict on “policy” by a renowned Dutch political commentator of EU and international politics:

Politicians frequently say there are no simple solutions. They point towards the complexity of a globalized world. ‘Policy’, it is usually a series of difficult to trace compromises that strongly deviate from politicians’ campaign slogans. Citizens primarily see stalemate. But if they raise the issue, they hear the words... ‘There is no alternative’. (De Gruyter, NRC-Handelsblad, 17 august, 2019).

Here vices formerly ascribed to “politics” (intransparency, compromise, imposed solution) are attributed to “policy” as well. Or read what Martha Nussbaum recently had to say about how presidential candidate Dukakis lost his race for the US presidency (<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/05/martha-nussbaum-anger/481464/> – accessed August 20, 2019)

I suppose you’re too young to remember Michael Dukakis’s failed campaign for president. He had furloughed certain prisoners, and one of them raped someone while on parole. He was asked, “What if this Willie Horton raped your wife?” And he thought about it, and he gave a very rational reply, about how he thought the policy was, on the whole, well thought-out, and that this was an unfortunate consequence. That was not what the American public wanted. They wanted him to get really, really angry, and to display the rage of a man defending his wife. That was one of the major reasons he lost the election.

Here a former virtue of “policy,” its quality of being well-thought out or rational, was seen by the public as a vice. Unintended consequences as inevitable collateral damage of policy were not tolerated. And the same public nowadays sees emotions like fear and anger as a legitimate source of “policy.” Listen to

what former model Sara Ziff has to say on #MeToo in modeling: “We need more than a hashtag. We have to turn our anger into policy to have lasting impact on the sector.” Or the Waco Herald Tribune editorial (20 July 2017): “Republicans can’t turn anger (over Obamacare) into viable health care policy.” It looks like policy has to be an expression of the passion of the moment to be accepted as legitimate by the public.

And finally listen to German philosopher Jürgen Habermas’ praise of French President Emmanuel Macron:

...it is not these individual proposals, some of which have been around for years, that distinguish this politician’s demeanor, initiative and speech from that which we have become used to. Three characteristics stand out: the courage to shape policy; the commitment to restructuring the European elite project to subject it to the democratic control of its citizens; and the convincing manner of a person who believes in the power of words to articulate thoughts. (Spiegel Online, October 26, 2017)

What is remarkable here is that Habermas sets Macron apart as special and praiseworthy by mentioning qualities that once belonged to the common sense properties of “policymaking”: shape policies (which nowadays obviously needs an unusual degree political courage), commitment to a project (as if politics and governing are not anymore about creating and announcing public commitments), and believing in the power of words to articulate thoughts (a standard view of European Enlightenment thinking). What was self-evident about policy and policymaking, obviously no longer is. It is this observation to which I will return as the core message of this essay.

Metaphors and the “Signature of Policy” in Academic Discourse

In converting “policy” from a term in everyday political discourse into a scientific concept, policy scholars have followed different strategies, one of which is to point to some of the many common sense usages but leave the concept undefined (Sabatier & Weible, 2014, pp. 4-5). This is less than satisfactory because, as Cairney (2012,5) points out, the ways public policies are studied by academic observers has changed significantly since its emergence in the United States in the 1950s. To make sense of the indeed bewildering range of uses of “policy” the key is that all scholars start off from, surprisingly, the folk theory of essences: “Every thing has an essence that inheres in it and that makes it the kind of thing it is. The essence of each thing is the cause of that thing’s natural behavior” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 215). “Things,” in the sensori-motor experiences to which all human beings are subjected in growing up, as origin of even their most abstract and complex thinking, are bounded regions in space (“containers”), with an internal and external structure that identifies its boundary. So “policy” too, metaphorically, is considered an “object” with inherent properties that distinguish it from what it is not. From this socio-cognitive framing perspective, definitions of

“policy” build from root metaphors selected as particularly apt in listing key properties of this “object.” And because we think about “objects” as things we can “make” by endowing them with their typical properties, scholars and practitioners easily speak of “policymaking” as the process through which we fabricate the object “policy.” Zittoun (2013), more explicit than most, aptly titled his book “the political factory of public policies” (“La fabrique politique des politiques publiques”). I will return to this metaphor’s aptness later when discussing distinctions between “politics” as action and “policy” as making.

From the policy studies literature, we cull five such key or root metaphors for “policy”—the standing “army of metaphors” at the disposal of policy scientists (Colebatch & Hoppe, 2018):

1. policy as governmental *choice or decision*;
2. policy as ordering through *documentation*;
3. policy as *problem solving*;
4. policy as *practice(s)*;
5. policy as body of *expertise*.

The trouble with these properties is that because, in their analytic and research use over time, they become so normal, if not hackneyed, that policy scholars no longer notice that they are still metaphors that originate in source domains different from their application in their target domains (of policy and policy-making). They become conceptual blends (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 111) in which a or some selected properties are mistaken for “policy” as a pre-existent phenomenon. To diminish the risk of committing this reification error, Agamben (2009) suggests it is helpful to see these “properties” (a metaphor itself, deriving from seeing attributes of an object as its “possessions” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 196) as constituting no more than a “signature” of “policy,” enabling an observer to allocate some situation, discourse, or practice to “policy” as a category. How much each property will be “seen” by the observer in any particular case is variable, but these “properties” are the sources that allow an identification of a phenomenon or set of phenomena as “policy.”

How this works is easily illustrated by taking one definition of “policy,” by Orren and Skowronek (2017, 27): “policy is (1) a commitment to a (2) designated goal or course of action, (3) made authoritatively on behalf of a given entity or collectivity, and (4) accompanied by guidelines for its accomplishment.”

By designating policy as “commitment,” it is viewed as a choice (stopping the creation of new options) or a decision (which in Latin literally means: “cutting off,” in this case stopping deliberation and puzzling). “Commitment” also implies that the choice or decision is meant to endure or persevere, as it follows, not from caprice, but from a formed, deliberated will. In this meaning it makes sense to convert a fleeting emotion like fear or anger into enduring policy. Adding that the choice or decision is “made authoritatively on behalf of a given entity or collectivity” places the choosing and deciding in the sphere of politics, the state or

government. So here we have our first “definition” of policy as “governmental choice or decision”—Dye’s (1972) more than 40-year-old definition as “whatever governments decide to do or not to do.”

But why are such choices and decisions “documented,” or publicly recorded? Well, if “policy” is an object to be pointed out to another observer, governments do produce a lot of documents (as objects) that contain officially promulgated or announced policy to nongovernmental actors like citizens, and lots of other recorded statements that are “not yet policy” used by governmental insiders and outsiders. Once authoritatively and formally promulgated as official, usually through some dramatized, politically staged event (like adoption of a new law, the broadcasting of a prime minister’s annual speech and dissemination of its text) that publicizes or makes visible a government’s commitment to a sustained course of action, the policy’s text or document starts on its journey through society and all governmental institutions as an effort to order society and internal governmental relations. Dramatizing the political commitment by creating official texts or recordings is part of making policy authoritative and on behalf of a larger community, and ordering society through controlled discourse.

The third property of policy stressed in the literature is that it is about “problem solving”: policy supposedly means having a “designated goal” or “a course of action” leading toward that goal. Seeing policy and policymaking as about problem processing—that is, correcting, solving or resolving and dissolving problems—is perhaps the dominant conception of policy in the entire modernist literature (Turnbull, 2018). It immediately invokes many other, generic metaphors on which lots of human thinking, speaking, and acting necessarily rely. The basic level, primary metaphor mobilized by the “policy is a solution” metaphor is the source-path-goal schema (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, pp. 31–32). In this schema, there is a trajector (in this case, a policymaker, problem solver) that moves (as self-propelled action); a source location or starting point (in this case, a situation judged to be problematic); a goal or intended destination for the trajector (in this case, a desirable and projected consequence of action resulting in a situation or event of public value); a route from source to goal; the actual trajectory or motion followed; the position of the trajector at any given time (in this case, monitoring and evaluation of progress toward the goal); the direction of the trajector at any given time (also for monitoring and evaluation); the actual final location of the trajector, which may or may not be the intended destination (allowing for adjustment according to performance).

The final part of Orren and Skowronek’s definition of policy refers specifically to its being “accompanied by guidelines for its accomplishment.” Stating a goal and course of action alone is not enough, guidelines are also required. This property of a policy mobilizes both remaining metaphors, policy as practice(s) and as (body of) expertise. “Practices” because a lot of policy as sustained effort in goal achievement, as a journey or longer term process, requires “the ordinary and situated and embodied activities which policy actors routinely enact in the course of participating in the policy process” (Bartels, 2018, p. 68). It is well recognized that sustained policy efforts require organization and new routinization, or the

mobilization of already routinized activities. Curiously, such activities are conceptualized, umbrella-like, as implementation and instrument use (both interesting metaphors by themselves). But what these instruments and functional and routine activities that policy workers perform really are not well researched (Barzelay, 2019; Capano & Galanti, 2018; Hoppe & Colebatch, 2016). “Expertise” is needed simply because in a complex and technology-suffused world no problem can be attacked without expert knowledge in the many senses of domain-specific but generalized causal-technical knowledge (knowledge how and why), and situation- or location-specific, contingent action-process knowledge (knowledge who and when).

Now remember that in explaining the folk theory of essences Lakoff and Johnson also claim that “(t)he essence of each thing is the cause of that thing’s natural behavior.” If one conceives “natural behavior” of a thing as the implied destination of a trajectory governed by the metaphorical logic of a property, then for “policy” the following five “natural behaviors” may be listed:

A preoccupation with authoritative choice and decision by the state leads naturally to autocracy, authoritarianism, centralization, power maintenance and expansion (de Jouvenel, 1948): “*L’état c’est moi.*” If policy is conceived as nothing but (ordering through) documentation, legalism, bureaucratization, going by the book, and red tape inexorably follow. If policy were nothing but problem solving, as implied in Lasswell’s intelligence function as pivotal for all other functions, intellectual hubris, faith in comprehensive rationality, joint-up governance, and narrow, merely instrumental solution thinking (Turnbull, 2018) and policy goal achievement thinking in policy evaluation (Furubo, 2018) would follow: “*Faith* in the power of intelligence to imagine a future which is the projection of the desirable in the present, and to invent the instrumentalities of its realisation, is our *salvation.*” (italicized by RH) (Dewey, quoted by Max Horkheimer, 1974, p. 32 and 37). If policy is seen to emerge and accumulate from practices, we would get bureaucratization, policy capture by organizational routines (Allison, 1971 [1999]), and street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1983) or inertia. If policy relies on expertise too heavily it also leads to intellectual hubris, and its calls for more technocracy (Fischer, 1990), evidence-based policy (Strassheim, 2018), and epistocracy (Estlund, 2003).

In stressing the metaphorical nature of human thinking and speech, Lakoff & Johnson wisely stress metaphorical pluralism, that is, there is never one single “right” metaphor. Thus, for a rich and important domain as policy and policy-making, a single conceptual mapping will never do the job of reasoning about the subject as a whole. Looking for the one “omnibus” model for the policy process (e.g., Howlett, McConnell & Perl, 2016) will always be in vain—and moreover, it will impoverish analysis and critical thinking. This allows us to say something more about Agamben’s hint to forget about the single “properties”/metaphors of policy, but to consider them jointly as a “signature.” The meaning of “signature” here is something like a reflexive equilibrium. Looking for the one-and-only “omnibus” model for policy and policy processes will always be in vain—and moreover, improving analysis and critical thinking. As illustrated above, becoming

captive to a single or just a few metaphors drives one to the logical extremes of their application—both theoretically and practically. We will always need more than one conceptual mapping to understand policy and policymaking; and should attempt to understand their mutual relations and causal connections in our theorizing. As Hal Colebatch and I have argued, the task for policy studies is not to construct the “best” theory of policy and policy processes. It is rather to comprehend and explain the way in which different theoretizations are constructed and mobilized by academics, practitioners, and citizens in the process of governing others and ourselves.

As will become clear in the next sections, mainstream policy studies have stressed the problem processing and expertise metaphors, paid too little systematic attention to practices, and due to these foci under-researched and theorized important political changes of authority and documentation, that is, those parts of the signature of policy that are crucial in communicating with and getting feedback from the citizens. Citizen participation in policymaking has to some extent been studied by policy scientists interested in deliberative democracy (Dryzek, 2012; Hoppe, 2011). But deliberation, of course, has strong affinities with an intellectualized policy science.

Modes of Governing and Their Degrees of Politicality

Modern politics in the Western world usually manifests itself as contestation about governmental policies. This has not always been the case; how governments conduct governing has changed over time (Dean, 2010; de Jouvenel, 1963; Orren & Skowronek, 2017; Zittoun, 2013). Practices of governing are all about the conduct of conduct, that is, “any more or less calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seeks to shape conduct by working through the desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs of various actors. . . .” (Dean, 2010, p. 18, following Foucault). Governing, after all, is the quintessential political activity of institutionalized instigation or “sparking off” contributory actions by fellow men: “Government could not come into existence, as its very existence depends upon habitual compliance to its biddings. . . . (N)othing is more inherent in human nature than the give and take of bidding and compliance” (de Jouvenel, 1963, 71).

For a very long time governing was organized as territorial, legal, and administrative sovereignty by feudal kings and their vassalage relations with lower aristocracy, combined with mental discipline instilled in these ruling élites through military, religious, and educational practices (de Jouvenel, 1948, p. 107ff). Only since, roughly, the eighteenth century, governing focused on the population and its economy as a whole, concerned with health, welfare, prosperity and happiness of “each and all.” Since then there has been a shift in the major forms of governing. At first, during the formation of republics with representative government and rule-of-law, politics and governing were about “nomomachy,” that is, parliamentary contestation about laws, meant to order and stabilize society for longer

periods of time. During America's New Deal and Great Society years, and the formation of European welfare states, the primacy of legislation and laws gradually receded to be supplanted by policy and policymaking, much better trimmed to continuous short-term adjustments, openness to alternatives, and issue flexibility required of government in light of ever changing situations and future perspectives (de Jouvenel, 1963, pp. 90–91; Braybrooke & Lindblom, 1963, pp. 150–167). "Nomocracy," governing through legislation and rule-setting and enforcement turned into "telocracy," political competition about policy, and the right to policymaking. To the state was attributed a policy motive comparable to the profit motive of private enterprise:

Good government no longer consists of an executive faithfully applying 'sensible rules' drawn up by an elected legislature. Instead, every government is now obliged to formulate policies that attempt to shape the direction of society and to promote socially desirable goals. . . . The modern prince is less an executor of laws than a 'field commander' who relies on his civil service to conduct 'operations with a given goal, taking the initiatives and decisions which seem necessary, adjusting measures to circumstances'. (Mahoney, 2005, p. 48—referring to De Jouvenel)

Laws and decrees lost their status as "trumps" overriding policy considerations in the day-to-day job of controlling and steering society. Henceforth, they were merely "chips" in the maelstrom of pragmatic policy considerations of social and economic control for the near future (Orren & Skowronek, 2017, pp. 41–43).

Thus, "policy" and "policy process" or "policymaking" are concepts that, since the 1950–60s, reflect the way academic observers and practitioners of policymaking in the West have understood "governing." This brought along an "epistemization" of governing. Originally, this became visible already in the cameral sciences serving the mercantilist interests of absolute monarchs. Later, in the United States, it developed in public administration as an academic discipline (Wilson, 1887); and, in the immediate follow-up of the Second World War, as the policy sciences (Lasswell, 1951). The policy sciences are perhaps the high point of modernist ideas about governing as the political use of intelligence to bring about "Progress." In Lasswell's definition of the policy science's paradigmatic core, the circuitry of seven required policymaking functions for good government, "intelligence" is the rock without which all other functions become useless (Dunn, 2018)

This intellectualization of the governing process triggered a permanent concern among practitioners and academicians about the extent to which these novel policymaking practices were deviating from older practices of exercising state power. This question was mainly framed as: to what extent is governing-new-style more about "puzzling" ("how to think out policy?"), and skills and capacities for "knowledge use" in "policy design"; than about old-style "powering" ("how to fight about policy?"), that is, agonistic activities and skills and capacities to do with political will formation, now projected upon "policy agenda setting" and "policy adoption" and the authority of "mandates" and statutes in enabling

novel practices during “policy implementation” (Lindblom & Woodhouse, 1968; Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1979; Wildavsky, 1980). Even Lindblom, who always was skeptical about the possibilities of a professional policy analysis, and argued for a more generous space for randomness and power (Lindblom, 1979), did not escape this intellectualization of governing when he was writing about “*evaluation* as social process” (Braybrooke & Lindblom, 1963) and “the *intelligence* of democracy” (1965). Quite recently, Howlett and Mukherjee (2014) have strongly reiterated the intellectualization and depoliticization of governing. Typical for contemporary “epistemized” policy science, they systematize the different contexts for policy-making and basically dichotomize them in environments favorable for “policy design” as pure puzzling and “non-design” as pure powering, which they define as traditionally political activities like bargaining, log-rolling, electoral opportunism, or clientelist practices (Howlett and Mukherjee, 2014, p. 65). For them, as for many policy scientists, traditional politics, as non-design, is an obstacle and a risk to high-quality policymaking.

But this point of view strips “policy” and “policymaking” of all politics. And thereby from its own “*raison d’être*”! In his magisterial book, “The Pure Theory of Politics,” de Jouvenel (1963) argues that “(t)he smallest identifiable component of any political event, large or small, is the moving of man by man. That is the elementary political action” (10). And what he calls the technology of politics and the occupational trait of the politician is “*designing*”: “He seeks to bring about a certain eventus requiring actions from other persons, and therefore he seeks to elicit the adequate contributory actions, and for this purpose makes the moves likely to elicit these actions: all of this constitutes the design of the politician. . .” (8). In the small and informal, like a “dirty” *quid-pro-quo* proposal made in passing between two politicians during a phone conversation; or in the large and formal, like a year-long special project for a large team of civil servants and stakeholder advisers to design and write a fundamental policy document on how a government is to deal with climate change during the next 5 years²—they are both designs—and they are both deeply political. They both intend to spark off contributory actions by instigating compliance from others. The still overbearing influence on governmental decisions of politics or powering or “non-design” compared to evidence-based design or puzzling, is illustrated by the experience of Dutch MP (Labour Party), Mei Li Vos (2011, p. 104), who was trained as a policy scientist and wrote a PhD in policy science:

If you break down a decision by politicians into the ingredients like in a recipe for baking a cake, those ingredients are as follows: one part ideals, a pinch of ideology, five parts of emotions, a half part of financial considerations and a half to a full part of scientific insights, thickened with a quart liter of power thinking and another quart liter of polls and electoral considerations. (translation by RH)

The depoliticization ingrained in policy science misses out on another important practitioner’s experience. Van Middelaar (2017), a long-time speech writer for

a chairperson of the European Commission before moving to a professorship on the principles and practices of the EU, demonstrates that a governing system based on well-institutionalized and sophisticated, but depoliticized, policymaking may stand in the way of necessary high politics. Analyzing EU politics and policymaking, he constructs the following typology of modes of EU governing (see Figure 1).

Using “EUspeak” by practitioners as baseline, Van Middelaar makes two basic distinctions: The first one, decisions arise from rule application in a given policy framework, or from unique and contingent, unpredictable but politically upsetting events. Asked by a journalist what did push governments off course and off policy, former Prime Minister Harold MacMillan supposedly answered: “Events, boy, events.” Political sovereignty and authority manifest themselves most conspicuously in the judgment that events warrant a state of exception or emergency (Schmitt, 2007³); and can no longer be handled from previously established policy and administrative frameworks. The second distinction is between politicized and depoliticized processes. The latter form of decision making is a rule-factory run by specialist civil servants and other experts, and in EU practice tellingly designated by terms like “policy” and “governance”; and the former is constituted through swift, intuition-like but decisive action by political leaders through “politics” and “governing.” In making this distinction, Van Middelaar explicitly relies on the way Hannah Arendt (1958) separated “making” (craftwork, “poiésis,” and thus: policymaking) from “politics” as *acting and speaking* together (rhetorics, “phronésis,” and Machiavellian “virtú,” or in contemporary politico-speak, “Chefsache”) on how to respond to the concerns of a political community

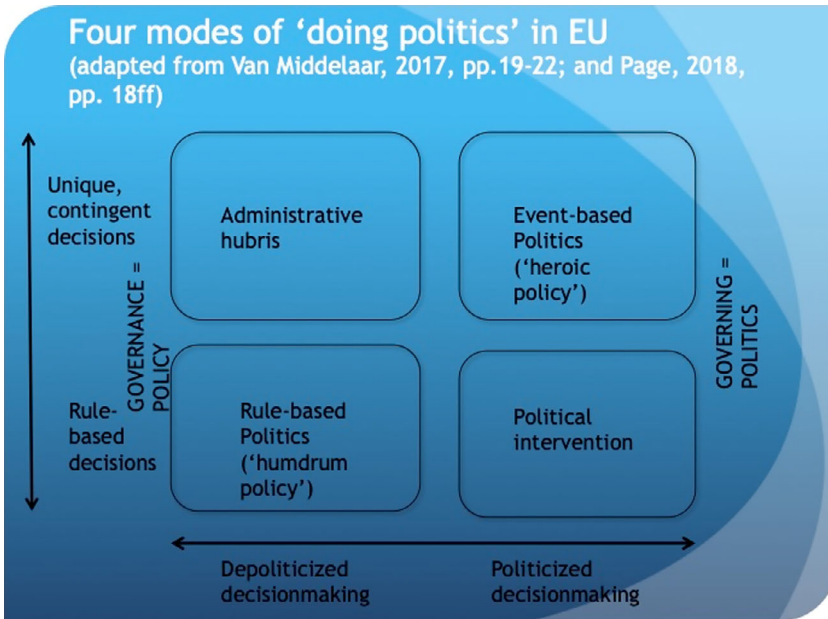


Figure 1. Four Modes of Governing.

("polis"). Depoliticization occurs in many ways (Van Middelaar, 2017, 285-297): as technical, when the politics hides in the details of policy design and implementation technicalities; as legal/constitutional, when policy content or the salvation message is set in stone by the law or a constitution (like free trade and a level playing field is written into the European treaties from day one); as procedural, when decision making becomes untransparent and illegible to ordinary citizens and even dedicated observers because rules have developed in an inextricably twisted knot; and as executive, when political leaders find no other reason for decisive action than "there is no alternative" (TINA).

What the EU modes of governing teach policy scholars is that expansion of routine policy, even if tending to the nonincremental, is not a persuasive and credible substitute for decisive political action. Page has addressed this by distinguishing between "hum-drum" and "heroic policy." Rule-based politics as "hum-drum" policy (Page, 2018; 18ff) works well when problems have goals that are at least moderately clear and consensual, and the solution space is well-delineated, but needs some fine-tuning and puzzling. Applied to "wicked" or unstructured problems, this style of policymaking or governing entails that top bureaucrats overreach, and roam into "*terra incognita*" where all kinds of unintended consequences quickly erode whatever legitimacy rule-based decisions by bureaucracy appeared to have. *Vice versa*, asks Page, do political leaders or politicians "have the skill and the capacity to identify key political issues in humdrum processes...and effectively manage and intervene in them..." (Page, 2018, 29; cf. Roe, 2013). Page does acknowledge that from time to time, and recently more and more frequently, politicians are called upon to decide on issues of "heroic policy"—or what Dror (1968, 163-196) probably would label as "mega-" or "meta-policymaking." Here one should think of, for example, how to respond to the financial and the refugee crises. Van Middelaar shows how in these cases the European Council of Ministers, the elected heads of states of the EU member countries, indeed banded together as executive function of the EU, and managed to find beginnings of a solution. It is questionable though if this is indeed "heroic policy." Seen in the light of the signature of policy, event-driven political decisions do cutoff possible endless debates with authority. But whether or not this exercise of short-term authority gels into durable problem processing, changes the practices of policy workers and is able to withstand the scrutiny of expertise remains to be seen.

The Limits of Policy: Toward Post-Policy-Centered Governing?

In the previous sections, we have begun to depict the fall from grace of "policy" as an innovative concept in understanding governing. "Policy" was postulated as "real" in order to understand what we mean by "governing." And "governing," even if understood as "the will to govern" (Rose & Miller, 1992:191) or "(la) prétention du politique à gouverner" (Zittoun, 2013, loc. 64 in Kindle edition), ought to be postulated as "real" in order to understand attempts at directing collective action in mass societies. Successfully introduced after the Second

World War in the practice and observation and theorizing of governing, it has lost its lure and attraction since the 1980-90s. As of 2019, it is still the key concept of a scientific subdiscipline called “policy sciences” or “policy studies.” But it is telling that a Canadian practitioner, discussing the most recent handbooks by Sabatier and Weible, Cairney, and Colebatch and Hoppe during a special session of the ICPP4 conference in Montreal, candidly admitted that in reading these scholarly works he wrestled with a completely new vocabulary that he had hardly come across in his decade-long career as a civil servant! How could this possibly be?

It is well beyond the possibilities of this Forum contribution to come up with an exhaustive explanation. It is clear that policy and policymaking are running into their own limits (Spink, 2019). Van Middelaar’s lucid analysis of governing practices and their depoliticizations shows that incremental policymaking has exhausted itself; but is effectively slowing down the punctuations of decades-long policy equilibria (True, Jones & Baumgartner, 1999) and the political turning-point decisions demanded by this age of “interregnum” (Gramsci, 1999). The “Great Regression” (Geisselberger, 2017) toward illiberal forms of governing in large parts of the world points in the same direction: important segments of the citizens of many nations, paradoxically instigated by politicians strongly suggesting that the state and its apparatus were not the solution but the problem, appear to have lost a belief in the agency of the state as initiator and conductor of change for the better (Gibson, 2019). What appeared as citizen apathy and indifference first, has clearly developed into distrust and hostility. There are many possible explanations, but the one we like to stress is what in the literature has been embraced as the “governance turn”; that is, the view that “ ‘government’ by authoritative direction had been replaced by negotiation by self-organizing networks” (Colebatch, 2018, p. 211); and that this was a desirable development. It is to be feared that the realities on the ground of this governance turn are an important reason for the present aversion towards politics and policy among citizens. Following Peter Mair’s (2013) prescient analysis, the abdication by politicians and civil servants of representative democracy and party politics, gradually ushered in the labyrinthine complexities of multi-level, multi-actor and multidimensional governance. This allowed only “an expert public (and corporate lobbyists—RH) (to) trace who participates as player and where the ball is; (but) supporters... have no clue where to raise their voice” (Van Middelaar, 2017, 320). In other words, the political game became illegible to the public, and irrelevant to the experts playing their own game. Expertocracy and populism both detest pluralist politics, albeit for different reasons.

If the policy sciences desire to regain their political relevance, they will have to figure out how reason can somehow “tame” raw political power and its tendency to autocracy and despotism, without depoliticizing politics itself, and thereby feed the pernicious depoliticization tendencies of autocratic and populist governing, often in tandem. In an apt metaphor, Bruno Latour (2003) pictures political activity as an endless circle where politicians and political activists, by their seemingly repetitive and boring speeches, continuously assemble and

reassemble a phantom public (Lippmann, 2017) around ever changing public concerns and issues. Only by turning the multitude of individuals in hyperpluralist modern societies into the repetitive temporary unity of political coalitions around concrete political issues, as communities of the affected, citizens are mobilized as active agents, enabled to participate in policymaking processes. Without such a political action as mobilizing publics around issues citizens simply lack “the capacities and/or means required for effective awareness of or action upon the issues in which (they) are implicated” (Marres, 2013, p. 41; also see Harman, 2016, p. 61ff).

This makes modes of problematization and meaning giving—more than the imagined instrumental rationality of expert-informed authoritative decision making, or the imagined networks of managed and structured interaction in multilevel governance structures—the key to a democratic and truly “political” politics: Out of the disorder, conflicts and struggles of an irreducible diversity in society it creates order as necessary for peacefully living together, without suppressing the reemergence of diversity and its disorder that is a precondition for continued freedom and democracy (Arendt, referred to by Zittoun, 2013; locus 192 Kindle edition). David Dery (2018, 391-392) addresses the problem of combining the analytics of problematization (as puzzling) and its politics (as powering) as a challenge that can nevertheless be solved:

“Understood as the conversion of moral dilemmas and controversies that cannot be solved into problems that can be resolved (over and over again, RH), the politics of problem definition appears as the dominant force in learning to live together. . . . issue selection and problem definition taken together may account for the ways in which society lives and gradually renews its values and its visions of the good life.”

The question about democracy thus changes from “What do ‘we-the-people’ want our government to do?” to “How is the polity’s problematic identified and brought to public attention? And is authority—whatever its source in the state apparatus, political parties, or civil society associations, corporate business, the media or individual citizens—democratically and legitimately invoked?” By persistently and systematically recording answers to this question, policy studies may help urgently needed new forms of political and democratic legitimacy to be born. In this way policy studies will avoid becoming an instrument of depoliticization; but remain politically self-aware and self-critical of its role in politics and society.

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Notes

1. Policy studies badly need similar historical etymological analyses of the Slavic languages, including of course Russian with its rich history of Communist state rule and ‘planning’; but also of Asian languages like Hindi, Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Bahasa Indonesia. African languages too need such scientific analysis; see e.g. Bayart, 1989/2009, who posits the root metaphor of “politics is eating” or “the politics of the belly” as constitutive for African notions of government and political leadership. Lakoff and Johnson (1999, p. 197) mention that, metaphorically, achieving a purpose (a desired object) is “getting something to eat.” In 1960, Elias Canetti, in his anthropological and social-psychological study on “Mass and Power,” devotes a section to the “psychology of eating” in a chapter on “the biological organs of power.”
2. The example is taken from Dutch political practice in the 2017–2019 period.
3. One does not necessarily subscribe to Schmitt’s contestable definition of the political as coterminous with the friend/foe distinction, the see the merit of his argument that the judgment of exception or emergency is the hallmark of political authority and decision making.

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