

Rafał Matyja
Cracow University of Economics
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7170-4692>

Decision making in public policies

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: The article presents the main theoretical and research approaches used in the analysis of public policies today and outlines the main challenges that are faced by researchers in this field.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: The article begins with an outline of the various theories regarding the decision-making process and its application in the analysis of public policies. The starting point is the classification of the basic theoretical approaches that are based on attitudes to power as a key aspect of decision-making. These approaches include the classical elitist approach, the pluralist approach, network analysis, neo-Marxist concepts, the institutionalist approach, and approaches that are related to rational choice theory and psychology.

SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: The second part discusses the challenges faced by research into decision-making processes in public policies caused by changes in the activities undertaken by central governments and the populist tendencies that can be observed in many Western countries today.

Keywords: decision-making, elitism, pluralism, institutionalism, rational choice theory, populism

Researching the decision-making process in a time of rapid changes in politics

Research into the process of public policy making (i.e. investigating the way decisions are made rather than assessing their content) has been carried out for far longer than research into public policies themselves. The term 'public policy' denotes something different to politics, which is usually defined as a struggle for power. The emergence of public policies is intrinsically linked to the political process, in the sense of a struggle for power to make binding public decisions and to decide how these decisions are made. These two issues have been the essence of political reflection since antiquity.

Some elements of the decision-making process remain relatively constant, as evidenced by the unflagging popularity of Niccolò Machiavelli's classic texts, but most change rapidly (the expansion of the functions of the state, changes in the form of policymaking, and technological revolutions). Many older approaches (which are nowadays considered classical) enabled the analysis of decision-making processes in public policies. These were strongly linked to the times and circumstances in which they were created and corresponded to successive phases of the development of the modern order.

The situation is more complicated now. First, the ways in which the political process is carried out are constantly changing. Social expectations of the public sector are also changing, and the spread of the internet, social media, and algorithms, which not only support the traditionally understood decision-making process but increasingly often act as substitutes for it, have led us to a point where we can expect new approaches that take these transformations into account. Second, an increase in the number of various schools of thought, variant analyses, and proposals that combine differing approaches is a fact. Paradoxically, this accumulation of theoretical approaches – like the avalanche of available data – does not increase our ability to understand or even systematise the situation.

This review of the theoretical approaches is complemented by reflection on the changing challenges that political science faces, in particular the new face of populism, which is understood not only as a strategy of political rivalry but also as a concept of governance and the way in which

public policies are shaped. It is worth searching for better perspectives on the changing political reality which take into account the tools developed in recent decades whilst being fully aware of their potential weaknesses. Thanks to such tools, which are employed in gaining knowledge of and conducting research into the decision-making process in public policies, we have been provided with theories and approaches whose great ambition of explaining all or at least a significant part of the social processes has remained unfulfilled. For example, Wayne Parsons (1995, pp. 247–248) lists four main approaches to decision analysis that focus on power, rationality in relation to public choice theory, institutions, and information and psychology.

Power as a key aspect of decision making

The oldest approach to decision-making analysis treats power as a factor to explain both how decisions are made in public policies and the content of these decisions. The question of *who rules*, i.e. who makes these decisions and how this determines their shape, seems so basic a question that it is asked by all levels of society – from the upper echelons to the man in the street. Most people believe in the domination of a closed elite and the struggle for public policies that are most beneficial for all the interest groups involved, and which take place within the state structures. This belief has become part of our common thinking and has entered the language of the media and election campaigns. The way in which this belief is reflected in the social sciences is politically motivated and strongly embedded in the social context, which is easy for the public to understand. The statements formulated by outstanding theoreticians are frequently repeated in public discourse and are labelled as ‘facts’, ‘assertions’, or ‘scientific explanations’.

Several options can be found within the approaches that focus on power analysis. The first are elitist models that are based on the classical theories of political scientists such as Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto, and Robert Michels. They treat the idea of democracy, or more broadly, the rule of the people, as unrealistic and idealistic (Parsons, 1995, p. 249). Hence, decisions are made within a narrow circle of privileged individuals and frequently lack democratic legitimacy.

The phase of democratic development that was characterised by the existence of strong and relatively integrated economic elites was important for the development of elitism. It was in the interest of the elites to limit governments' powers and control their economic and international policy agenda. The development of this theory was closely related to the experiences of the home countries of its main creators (Italy, Germany, and the USA). Italian researchers attached great importance to the role of the unwritten and informal rules that were used to select the elites, while political scientists from the USA, Great Britain, and France attached importance to the role that was played by the most important universities (Dogan, 2003, pp. 4–7). Today, many of these factors are less pertinent or even obsolete.

At the height of the popularity of these theories, membership in the elites was inherited, and with this membership, family wealth, public activity, and personal ties (social and family) reinforced its effectiveness. That is why C. Wright Mills could put forward his thesis of an elite whose core is made up of old, wealthy families, surrounded by those who have recently become rich (Mills, 1961, p. 61). Not all the observations made by the proponents of this approach have become obsolete, and, according to Joseph Schumpeter, the existence of a social elite which stays outside of the world of politics as a necessity for the proper functioning of democracy still holds value (Schumpeter, 1995, p. 363). The continuation of this approach can be seen in the approaches referred to by Parson as "professionalism" and "technocratism", which cover participation in power and policymaking by elites that have no democratic legitimacy.

The concept of professionalism assumes and at times advocates for an important role of the professional and clerical elites in shaping policies that require knowledge and experience. If we assume that the roots of scientific reflection, which is devoted to public policies, lie in late nineteenth-century studies on administration, then this whole period is based on the separation of politics from the administration introduced by Woodrow Wilson. Its aim was to protect the sphere of administration, which requires expertise in implementing legislative decisions, against political partisanship, corruption, and abuse.

Although this politics-administration dichotomy had been rejected by the 1940s, recurrent attempts have been made to treat the process

of policymaking as a game played by the professional elites. Until the end of the 1970s, American politics was commonly looked at through the prism of 'iron triangles', i.e. close cooperation, independent of party preferences, between the presidential bureaucracy, congressional committees that formally supervised this cooperation, and interest groups. Finally, the era of "Washington cronyism" ended and was replaced by "complicated relationships within a huge group of the population that were politically active" (Heclo 1978, pp. 94 and 97). In the 1980s, it became fashionable to analyse policy communities, which were relatively stable, loosely connected networks of bureaucrats, experts, and interest groups who all cooperated with one another. Despite their differences, they shared basic beliefs about a given policy, which had a decisive influence on determining the cognitive framework within which decisions were made.

Technocratism shifts the emphasis to the field of technical progress, technological changes, research, and implementation. These are all conducive to the rationalisation of public administration activities and to treating this administration (following a Weberian approach) as a depersonalized mechanism to be used for the implementation of 'obvious' (rationally justified) objectives. Activities undertaken by the RAND corporation (the American think tank), which was created in the mid-20th century, are an example of a technocratic approach to the issues of governance and policymaking. "RAND has brought together mathematicians, political scientists, system analysts, engineers, sociologists, and others, in developing models that analysed the possible course of the Cold War" (Parsons, 1995, p. 268). However, the Cuban crisis revealed the limitations of the logical and rational analyses of international relations.

Technocratic theories are rarely discussed in Polish scientific and journalistic discourse. The broadly understood elitist perspective played an important role in discussions that were devoted to the replacement of the elites after the fall of communism in Poland (Szelenyi, Treiman, and Wnuk-Lipiński, 1995), and hypotheses on the survival strategy of the former nomenklatura were of particular interest at that time (Łoś and Zybertowicz, 2000; Staniszkis, 2001). Two positions were taken into account in research on the process of replacing the elite. The first, called the "elite reproduction theory", states that "a change in the system

does not involve a replacement of elites; the same people who were privileged in the past remain privileged today". The second and more competitive approach, which is known as the "elite circulation theory", assumes that the revolutionary change that took place with the fall of communism led to a situation in which "new persons, chosen according to new rules, found themselves in power and at the top of the social hierarchies" (Shelhenyi and Shelhenyi, 1995, p. 7).

This version of the elitist approach draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and concerns the process of the transformation of political, social, and economic capital. Some researchers mention the prognostic texts written by Elemer Hankiss and Jadwiga Staniszkis, in which they discuss the prospect of the old nomenklatura becoming the new great bourgeoisie (Hankiss, 1989), and the emergence of political capitalism (Staniszkis, 1991). The post-communist context of creating new elites often provoked statements that questioned the true character of these changes and whether they really changed anything or were merely a façade; moreover, democracy itself was also perceived in the same way. Subject literature mentioned the division between the façade and backstage, in which "the front stage (façade) provides democratic legitimacy and, at the same time, a veil for the game of resources that is played behind the scenes (the back stage)" (Mokrzycki, Rychard, and Zybortowicz, 2002, p. 15).

The pluralistic approach, which stands in contrast to the elitist approach, assumes that conflicts of interest, values, and attitudes play a fundamental role in shaping the decisions that are made in the public sphere. According to Robert A. Dahl, who is the classic representative of this trend, Gaetano Mosca's concept means that "democracy is impossible" and can only function as a myth "masking real domination", so it will always remain merely a façade behind which minority governments hide. Dahl points to two ways of verifying this form of elitism: the first is the ability to identify a concrete ruling group; the second is the ability to verify the criterion of its power, i.e. the ability to make decisions on controversial matters (Dahl, 2012, p. 376; Sartori, 1994, pp. 186–187).

"The ruling class model" is also contested by Giovanni Sartori, who determined the following questions to be asked in order to identify this model: First, does the ruling group constitute unity or multiplicity? Second, does it have a common awareness and coherence, and does it defend

the *status quo* with conspiratorial methods? Third, is it always possible to identify the minorities in power? As the answers to these questions are negative in contemporary Western societies, their “democracies are characterized by such a level of the dispersion of power that the «ruling class model» does not describe their reality” (Sartori, 1994, pp. 187–188).

Pluralism, which for many years dominated the mainstream of Western political science, continues to inspire researchers of decision-making processes in public policies. The main asset of pluralism is the rejection of reductionism, a trend that is of interest to many researchers within the social sciences. Policymaking is a complex process with many actors present at all levels of governance. Without grasping this multifaceted world, any analysis of public policies is doomed to fail.

Pluralist belief in the relative openness of public policy-making processes is a common feature of network analysis in public policies, and the most popular theory within this approach is probably the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF). Its key term, ‘advocacy coalition’, includes people in various positions (officials, politicians, journalists, experts, leaders of interest groups) who share common beliefs and engage in coordinated activity directed at a political issue (as a subsystem of public policy). The unique aspect of the ACF lies in its drawing attention to the role of beliefs that are treated as a binder of particular coalitions, to learning the mechanism of (long-term) policy change, and also to the existence of different roles within coalitions and the system itself. From the point of view of the policy-making process, the key roles are played by both a policy broker, whose aim is to make a decision that will be widely accepted (by mediating between different coalitions), and by a “sovereign”, who makes a decision in an authoritative manner. However, the decision remains within the framework created by the coalitions (Sabatier, 1988; Cairney, 2012).

In Polish subject literature, the pluralist approach (especially those perspectives within it that were inspired by analysis of the political networks) can be found in studies devoted to the political tactics of interest groups in particular sectors of the economy (Ruszkowski and Wójtowicz, 2009; Gadowska, 2002) and also in important reform projects of the 1990s (Emilewicz and Wołek, 2002).

Those engaged in researching the approaches that focus on power (of both the pluralist and elitist perspectives) have questioned the key

role that is played by the various entities. This role is considered negligible because the structural constraints created by the capitalist economy or dominant culture invalidate the actions undertaken by individuals and (often) groups. This approach has enriched the study of decision-making processes in public policies with the observation that the absence of a decision is also an important decision (a *non-decision*) as it maintains the *status quo*. From the point of view of those who do not want a decision to be made, this can be effectively achieved by simply preventing a given problem from appearing on the agenda (*agenda-setting*). This can be done by controlling citizens' perceptions of the essence of the problem. This ability to control the circulation of information, the process of socialization, and the language is the third dimension of power that has been identified by political scientists who are inspired by neo-Marxism (Bachrach and Baratz, 1963; Lukes, 1974). Some proponents of this approach express doubts regarding the important role played by the social sciences in the creation of "rational" public policies that are dominated by state-dependent technocrats and experts (Focault, 1980; Bourdieu, 2009).

Rational decision-making

The school of rational choice is another option in thinking about political decision-making. In analyses of the political process, this school of thought uses models based on a simplified concept of the interests of particular actors and agents. Describing the essence of the rational choice approach, Klaus von Beyme points to the intention of making political science a discipline that is so exact that "it can methodologically equate itself with economics. The new political economy of the non-Marxist provenance has long sought to restore the former unity of economics and politics, which has been gradually disappearing since the 18th century" (Beyme, 2005, p. 120) The essence of this concept lies in modelling the rational interests and behaviours of individual actors that are based on economics, while the measure of its success is the ability to predict the results of political actions.

Both early and later research on the rationality of actions taken by administrations reveal numerous inconsistencies in public interventions,

mostly resulting from self-interested groups or individuals, the expectations of recipients and beneficiaries of a given policy, pressure from professional circles, etc. It can be said that the rational approach has become more useful for fundamental criticism of the existing system of policymaking rather than in investigating and searching for improvement strategies. This leads to a broader question about the limits of rational decision analysis in terms of both the economic sciences and the Weberian model of rational and personalized bureaucracy. Quoting the works of Douglas North (1990), von Beyme states that public actors “rarely make a clear and unambiguous list of their preferences”. This also applies to the sphere of more complex economic choices (Beyme, 2005, p. 120). The limitations in applying the idea of *homo oeconomicus* in planning public policies is determined not only by the difference between the sphere of commercial profit-oriented activities and the sphere of state activities, but also by arguments offered by the economic sciences, for example, by behavioural economics (Thaler, 2018), which accuses rational choice “of working with data describing not »real« behaviour but stylised facts that have been derived from actors’ arbitrary preferences” (Beyme, 2005, pp. 120-121).

The limitations of rationality, which include the possibilities of incomplete knowledge, distortions of perception due to prejudices, emotions, or problems with concentration, memory limitations, habits, or rationalization of previous behaviours, can all lead to differences between political and administrative practices and rationalized decision models. Making people aware of the limitations of rationality is the greatest contribution of rational choice theory to research on decision making in public policies. In real life, people are not able to maximise benefits, so they make decisions (that are not optimal but satisfactory) by means of reducing the number of available options, simplifying choice by rejecting parts of the available data, or dividing complicated problems into solvable ones. They also base their decisions on routine, tried-and-tested cognitive shortcuts (including superstition), and decision-making formulas. As a result, they make suboptimal decisions, some of which turn out to be wrong (Clemons and McBeth, 2001).

Knowledge of decision makers’ limitations allows researchers to analyse the decisions they make more effectively and supports them in the process of making these decisions. Incrementalism is a theory that

has been popular since the end of the 1950s. This theory is based on the concept of limited rationality and argues that to be effective, changes in public policy should be non-radical and introduced step by step. Incrementalism recommends actors' mutual adjustments as a strategy for building understanding in the sphere of public policies.

Numerous researchers of public policy are vitally interested in how to move away from the *status quo*, i.e. when, how, and why a long-term equilibrium (based on the *status quo* or incremental changes) is interrupted and a change occurs. In this regard, the theory of three streams gained particular popularity. This theory argues that only the combination of these three streams – the problem, the politics, and the policy – can trigger change (Kingdon, 1995). John W. Kingdon rejects the rationalist scheme that assumes that politicians notice a problem, enlist officials to develop solutions to fix it, and then choose the best of these solutions to implement. According to Kingdon, these three processes run relatively independently of each other. Solutions to public problems arise regardless of whether or not the problem has appeared on the agenda, because ideas are constantly born, questioned, modified, and adapted to problems as needed. There are no objective measures that indicate which problem deserves attention and needs to be resolved quickly. When policy makers have a motive and an opportunity to address a problem and a solution is within their reach, a window of opportunity for political change opens.

In Polish subject literature, interesting and convincing attempts to apply the theory of rational choice appear in the areas in which modelling reality is the least controversial, namely in analysis of the coalition games played in parliament and in other representative bodies (Golański and Kasprzyk, 1999) and in analysis of the electoral system (Kot, 2002; Flis, 2008; Raciborski and Ochremiak, 2008). Various models proposed by mathematicians were used in considerations devoted to the Polish foreign policy that was related to rejecting the voting system of the European Council, which had been agreed on at the Nice summit (Słomczyński and Życzkowski, 2004). Other interesting analyses based on mathematical modelling include a study on the validity of the strategy that was undertaken by the opposition and the authorities at the Round Table in 1989 (Kaminski, 1997).

Public choice theory, which analyses the circumstances under which policies are created (e.g. voting methods, aggregation of preferences,

interest groups' influence on regulating the economy, etc.), is similar to rational choice theory. The source of this similarity can be found in the economic concept of human activities oriented towards their well-calculated interests; the behavioural pattern followed in public policies is borrowed from a pattern of market behaviours. Political choices are guided by a particular interest, and ideas are merely an expression or sublimation of that interest. This also applies to politicians and bureaucrats whose aim is to gain power, maintain their position, or retain influence.

Some elements of the economic approach to the analysis of public policies (but with a broader, more flexible formula) can be found in the concept of New Public Management. This concept was crucial in the process of economising decisions and, more broadly, economising ways of thinking in the area of public policies in the 1980s. The basic context for making decisions was the cost-effectiveness of a given policy, an effectiveness that is measured by the ratio of results (measurable effects) to costs. However, discussion on this issue rarely concerned the decision-making mechanisms or the policy-making process but was more concerned with its content and the evaluation of results.

The issue of power as the main context for decision-making takes on a different meaning in the analyses of institutionalists, for whom the vital element is the existence of rules that indicate or even limit the field of choice for decision-makers and in extreme cases can even suggest an optimal solution. The classical institutionalism of Montesquieu or Tocqueville treated politics as actions whose framework was defined by the system and its institutional forms, and its greatest asset was based on the ability to take into account various possible solutions and to compare their outcomes. New institutionalism, often called 'neo-institutionalism', appears "as a reaction to the victorious march of behaviourism, which definitely marginalized the importance of the institution" (Beyme, 2005, pp. 194–195). New institutionalism emphasises the relative autonomy of institutions, which was denied by pluralists, who focused on interest groups, and their opponents, who adhered to Marxist state theories (March and Olsen, 2005).

Neo-institutionalists treat institutions as either a generally accepted framework for the activities of individuals and groups or as constraints on these activities, which may be formal or informal and can include

those that are not recognised by law but imposed by adherence to custom (North, 1990).

In the first decade of the transformations, Poland and other Central European countries were attracted to institutionalism. However, this attraction was based on the unrealistic assumption that formal rules significantly determine the quality of politics and thus will lead to the identification of cultural and social barriers that hinder the creation of a new order. Over time, it became evident that neither the belief in the possibility of a rational analysis of policies, nor the more sophisticated belief in the possibility of their being rationally formatted by systemic solutions, is a good starting point for analysing and designing public policies.

Artur Wołek (2004) discussed the dual nature of political institutions in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, a region that is crucial for capturing the specificity of democracy in this part of the world. This specificity is derived from the patterns of political rivalry (Antoszewski, 2004), understood as the shape of the party system, the electoral system, and elements of political culture. The second aspect is the model of administration and the public sector, i.e. the extent to which officials and experts participate in decision-making and the extent to which their voice is taken into account or, in extreme cases, is decisive.

Interesting examples of analyses related to renewed institutionalism in the field of policy making can be found in Agnieszka Dudzińska's (2015) work, which is devoted to the practice of Polish parliamentarism, and Kaja Gadowska's (2015) work on the civil service, as well as in certain classic papers whose authors analyse the functioning of the government (Rydlewski, 2002).

Personality, cognition, and information

Reflection on public policies and the functioning of modern administration has always taken into account the role of emotions, personality, and group behaviour in decision-making processes. This is referred to in Herbert Simon's key articles, in which he indicated the limitations of rationality in the actions taken by administrations (Simon, 1976). This was also referenced by Harold Lasswell, who emphasised, among other

things, the role played by political decision makers' personalities in the process (Lasswell, 1966).

In the process of decision analysis, we must account for decision-makers' beliefs and values, their emotional and cognitive determinants (especially what they consider to be 'real' and 'relevant' to the image of the world), and for the mistakes that result from group thinking. The latter concept stems from the observation that decision-makers form coherent groups that are prone to making similar mistakes, taking the same perspective, and eliminating alternative approaches (Parsons, 1995, p. 246, 345).

Studies that question the rationality of individuals' behaviour and their ability to understand the structures in which they function may turn out to be a breakthrough in research on the psychological and cognitive aspects of political action. The works of Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman that point to problems related to cognitive barriers (Kahneman, 2012) create an important context for undertaking contemporary research on decision-making mechanisms in the area of public policymaking.

Similar conclusions are drawn from analyses of voters' behaviours and, more broadly, the framework of political debate and how it is viewed by citizens (Dalton and Klingemann, 2010; Lakoff, 2017). There is also much to suggest that, in time, broader approaches that indicate the psychological determinants of decisions, and even political attitudes (Haidt, 2014; Westen, 2014) will become an important context for understanding and interpreting the behaviour of both citizens and the politicians that represent them. This means, above all, an opportunity to develop political research that is based on the findings of studies conducted within psychology, linguistics, and cognitive science.

The latter perspective assumes that not only will theoretical approaches and research methods change but that politics itself will change too. On the one hand, rival agents and candidates will increasingly resort to methods of modelling their electorates that are based on profiling their identities and, more broadly, their online behaviour on social media. On the other hand, public policies must pay attention to this new perspective of knowledge regarding attitudes and needs. Changes in the research perspective will also be driven by the emergence of new political phenomena, such as changes in the political divisions of the Western world, as well as the new styles of politics that will arise because of this change.

Can populism be instructive?

In this context, the emergence and spread of politics based on authoritarian and populist rhetoric should be looked at from a certain distance. This rhetoric employs figures and metaphors from the 1920s and 1930s but arranges them into different patterns and uses them for different political purposes.

Two positions prevail in the debate on the contemporary wave of populism flowing through Western democracies: the first puts the blame on politicians who have no inhibitions and use rhetoric that has been avoided for years, while the second blames their predecessors, complacent elites, advocates of neoliberalism, specialists in political correctness, etc. Laying the blame with one or the other is tempting but to some extent cognitively sterile (for someone to be able to seize the opportunity, someone else must have created it). However, we miss a more systemic question here: can a wave of populism repair the political model, including public policy making, or is it meaningless destruction, necessarily followed by a return to the *status quo ante*?

Many who attempt to grasp the phenomenon of populism assume that the shape of the political system is relatively unchanged, subject to changes in terms of political shifts or changes in the electoral system at most. The unshakeable stability of the party system is considered so obvious that the majority of texts dealing with Central and Eastern European countries analysed the evolution of the party system in terms of its consolidation, aimed at establishing stable competing models and creating party identification (Antoszewski, 2004).

Reducing the role of populism to merely changing the party system invalidates its significant influence on the decision-making process. Meanwhile, ruling politicians who represent this new trend claim that they do not intend to respect the existing model of decision-making and constantly infringe unwritten rules of decision-making and even, in some countries, the constitutional framework of governance. In countries such as Poland and Hungary, this politics is characterized by a focus on immediate, socially perceptible effects or by building the politics of fear as the foundation for legitimizing the ruling political camp (Magyar, 2018).

Populism, understood as both a distinct political trend and as a trend affecting numerous political rivals, primarily affects policies that are

important for public and social security (migration, employment, and social policies) and those policies that shape the sense of national identity (historical and cultural policies). Above all, however, populism is an attempt to construct a different model of legitimization that is based not on traditionally understood democratic representation and accountability but on treating those in power as the only advocates of national interest and excluding opponents from the political community (Müller, 2017).

The following conclusions can be drawn from the above considerations: (1) the practice of exercising power by populist governments contradicts practices that are shaped within the framework of governance as populism employs a hierarchical model in order to legitimise decision-making; (2) the decision-making processes do not take into account the reservations of social partners or the opposition but focus on ensuring that the decisions made by those at the centre of the decision-making process are implemented quickly and to the letter; (3) public policies are (more than in a liberal democracy) useful tools in a continuous election campaign and for the mobilisation of support.

It seems likely that a strong wave of populism would change political practice not only in countries where such parties came to power (e.g. Poland, Italy, and Hungary) but also in those where mainstream parties will make effective attempts to counteract this wave and anticipate the moves of populist parties. This may result in a retreat from the model of public policy-making that has become widespread in Europe in recent decades. After all, its present form is equated with neither democracy nor the liberal order; it has developed at a certain stage of the functioning of liberal democracies and seems to be very closely linked to the process of weakening class and ideological tensions and the search for objective reference points for individual policies. As Peter Sloterdijk (2011) states, ideologists were replaced by consultants after 1968. After the first period of expert self-confidence, a “newer wave of advice” appeared, which “starts with the correct premise that actors who can’t do much are best supported by consultants who know that they don’t know much. From now on, Socrates is back with us again”. This conclusion, however, is not optimistic, as it indicates that “outstanding carriers of incompetence would pay almost any sum [for experts’ incomplete knowledge], and it is not only the executives of great industry who pay a lot for the absolution

provided by consultants. In recent years, German federal ministries have bought large-scale advisory bluff under the guise of ‘special committees’ (*Enquete-Kommission*) for billions” (Sloterdijk, 2011, pp. 83-84).

A natural corrective measure that has been identified is the departure from the type of prescriptions that were inscribed in the New Public Management and governance, and even a partial shift towards the traditional model of shaping public policies, often referred to as neo-Weberism (Mazur, 2016). Of course, this could be seen to be the result of failing to create a theory that organizes our understanding of public policy making and its principles. However, it is also an outcome of the natural circulation of ideas between related academic and expert worlds, in which the latter has a natural tendency to exaggerate. In this sense, progress in academic reflection on the mechanisms of shaping public policies should be based on the skilful accumulation of experience and on avoiding falling into the extremes that are present in this period of scientific maturation. The choice of a paradigm should never mean that it becomes dominant and holds a privileged position in shaping our opinions on political practice.

Conclusion

When politics changes rapidly, the greatest role in creating a new understanding of public policymaking processes will be played by those sciences and approaches that focus on the ways in which we discover and understand social reality. However, their conclusions will be insufficient in building new critical models and formulating expert advice on how to optimise public policy decision-making processes. Although they will make us more careful, better informed about our own entanglements, and more sensitive to even minor semantic changes in politics, they will not increase our chances for a better understanding of the increasingly complex model of shaping public policies by various state agendas. It would be naive to suppose that someone is still in control of this process or that governments are aware of how the public sector defines and achieves its goals. Moreover, events such as the 2008 crisis, the attack on the WTC, Brexit, and the immigration crisis in Europe after 2015 all demonstrate that governments have problems analysing the data

available to them, recognising grave threats to the normal functioning of states, and activating crisis management tools.

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