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The role of outside experts in local government

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Abstract

This paper addresses the role of experts in decision-making in local government. Departing from theories about professionals and technocrats in decision-making processes, the question arises as to how much influence these experts have in policy-making processes. The paper addresses this question and discusses the role of western experts in adapting the social security system to EU requirements in a Polish community under the PHARE program. This is a critical case, because comparative figures show that local policy-makers in East European countries have a relatively large trust in experts and because of the money involved, Polish policy-makers are heavily dependent on the experts. These facts result in the expectation that the experts' advice would be humbly accepted. The case study shows, however, that many recommendations do not get a follow-up. The degree to which that is the case seems to depend on the contents of the recommendations, the arrogance of the experts and the degree to which the recommendations are suited to the specific characteristics of the recipient's situation.

1. Introduction

In the process of enlargement of the EU, new members had to address a lot of demands placed on them by Brussels in order to become eligible for membership. In order to accomplish this, the countries were supported by advisory agencies from different EU countries, which could assist in transforming procedures and programs in such a way that these were suited to the practices of the European Union. Little is known until now about the way such processes evolved. The investigation can, however, have important practical and important theoretical ramifications.

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In theories on public policy processes, the role of professionals, rationalism and technocracy has been one of those areas that has been widely debated. The subject belongs to the classic themes in the study of public policy. On the one hand, scholars are seen who promote such professionalism: Lasswell, one of the founders of policy sciences, promoted policy studies by pointing to the need of making rational judgements on policy questions (Lasswell, 1948: 122). Already in 1945, Herbert Simon published his “administrative behaviour” and he became one of the main advocates of rationality, especially procedural, although he recognised the limitations in practice. From the 1960s onward, Yehezkel Dror advocated a “scientific” approach in policy analysis (Dror 1967, 1989), and Daniel Bell promoted the scientific and rational approach toward problem-solving. In the 1970s, Giddens called the trust in professionals a bargain with modernity which only seems to increase (Giddens, 1990). At some point in the growing complexity of social problems necessitating such development (Weiss, 1992) and others investigated the changing role of professionals (Brint, 1994).

On the other hand, more censorious arguments were also heard during the whole period. In the 60s, there was criticism about the rise of technocracy as expressed by Ellul, Dahrendorf, and Habermas who objected to the possibility of improving the policy-making processes by increasing the amount of information. Later on, they were accompanied by famous scholars like Illich, March, Cohen and Olsen, and Dunleavy who disputed the added value of expertise and pointed to the political and subjective nature of policy processes. Since then some critical case studies appeared on the role that professionals play in policy processes. In the 90s, books with catchy titles such as *The Tyranny of Experts* appeared, and criticism arose around the managerial view on policy-making.

The discussion about the actual, expected and desired role of experts in policy-making is far from concluded. Are they the powerful forces behind policy changes or are they just additional instruments in the hands of decision-makers? The next section of this paper goes into the main theoretical arguments in this discussion. It will be argued that this literature is too general in scope, neglecting that there might be variations in the impact of different experts. This is seen, for instance, in the absence of a distinction in the literature between outside and inside experts. Although we would have liked to base the research on theories specifically directed at outside experts, we have to rely on theories on experts in general. One of the most important differences between outside experts and inside experts is, of course, that among the former the knowledge of specific circumstances and culture is less than among the latter. As we will show, the way these outside experts deal with this is crucial to their effectiveness.

This paper presents a case study about the role of outside experts in Poland and argues the specific problems related to their advice and the variance in their approaches. This raises the question how to explain the varying impact of experts.

Is it the content of their work that is determinative, or is this a minor factor compared to the nature of the relation between the experts and local policy-makers; e.g., the a priori trust the latter have in the opinions of such experts and their dependency on experts' advice?

With regard to their reputation, the third section of this paper presents figures on the trust that local policy-makers in East and West European countries have in the recommendations made by experts. We use data from an international research project, indicative for the opinions of those people who actually develop and are responsible for local policies. They were interviewed and asked how they judge the desired role of professionals and expertise. This part of the study will reveal striking differences between local policy-makers in different countries. One finding will be that local elites in transitional countries have much more trust in experts than local elites in old democracies. With regard to the degree that local leaders are dependent on experts, our case study investigates a policy process in which the money involved and the impact of the outcomes are both indicative of a high degree of dependence. The question is, if even in such circumstances, in which one would expect local policy-makers to humbly accept the experts' advice, still variance in the acceptance of this advice is visible. If that can be shown, the content of the experts' advice is likely to play an important role.

Regarding the contents of expertise, there is increasing literature that explores the actual work that experts do. The preliminary conclusion to be derived from that scholarly work is that experts are not so much making recommendations based on an analysis of the problems in the policy at hand, but that they should rather be seen as so-called "standard-setters" (Brunsson & Jacobson, 2000). Experts from the EU, ILO, World Bank and other international organisations seem to be primarily occupied with transforming public policies in order to adapt them and make them compatible to their standards. The in-depth case study on the developments in the Polish city of Lodz shows that some experts can indeed be denominated as standard setters, but that there are also experts who listen, investigate the problem at hand and base their advice on the specific situation. They had to assist in order for Poland to qualify for the EU. It concerned a large project: over a period of nine years, the EU invested 1.7 billion ECU in it and a whole army of EU and ILO-experts flooded the country (Sobis, 2002). This made it possible to investigate the style of those experts and the degree to which the city of Lodz adapted its policies according to the experts' recommendations. Because of the high reputation experts have in the new democracies and the dependence on them as regards Poland's admission as a EU member, one would expect that every recommendation the experts made would be acted upon almost automatically. As the case study will show, the real picture is more complicated. We finish this paper with some reflections about the consequences of the empirical outcomes.

2. The theoretical debate about the role of expertise in policy-making processes

The debate around the role of experts and expertise in policy-making processes deals with persons and processes, empirical trends and normative judgements over the role of those people whose authority is knowledge-based instead of based on the representation of interests and the volume of the groups sharing this interest, as is the case with politicians. Experts are, in the words of Brint (1994: 131-132), a highly trained professional staff working in central institutional domains, either on a salaried or contractual basis. They also include professionals in the surrounding institutional arenas of scientific research, cultural and communication services, social service, medical, legal and educational organisations.

In the debate about these people, two subjects are central. First, the question is what experts actually do and second, what their impact is on the policy-making process.

2.1 Experts as standard-setters limiting policy-makers' choices

The debate about experts results in a prominent question, namely, "What is it that such experts do?" The most obvious answer is, of course, that they help to improve the situation at hand. You have a problem you don't know how to solve? Hire someone who does know and has the answers you do not yet have – an expert. From the experts' point of view, this is the only justified answer.

Nils Brunsson and Bengt Jacobsson provide an alternative answer to that question. In their eyes, it is primarily standardisation and legitimacy that is at stake. They pose that standardisation generates a strong element of global order in the modern capitalist countries because people and organisations following the same standards in the world see standardisation as a form of regulation and control that allows one to understand "similarity and homogeneity among people and organisations far apart from one another" (2000: 1). There are many organisations which refer to themselves as standard-setters. The European Union, International World Bank or International Labour Organisation can serve as examples. Jacobsson argues that "Standardisation is linked to expertise and is usually motivated by the view that there are some persons who know best. In this way, standardisation is given legitimacy" (2000: 40). Usually, expert knowledge is stored in the form of rules that are, e.g., voluntarily accepted by international multi-standards organisations.

Many decisions in the EU develop through trans-national networks involving several different levels and actors in both the public and the private sector. The EU Commission relies frequently on the expert knowledge found in companies, interest groups, the civil service of member countries, etc. There is an extensive interchange of information and views among companies, interest groups, civil

servants and politicians. The explanation for this is partly that efforts to promote integration in the EU have focused primarily on the economy and creation of an internal market (Jacobsson, 2000: 47).

With regard to the EU, Jacobsson argues that its legitimacy in decision-making is derived from the idea of a free market. Consequently, decisions are limited to the essential areas for guaranteeing such a market. The legitimacy of this free market is based on its utility. Experts who make good decisions in their respective fields emphasise that the free market is good for everyone. The legitimacy of EU decisions is based on the assumption that the sector networks in which these decisions emerge are best at solving the problems that may arise: "It is less important to know who is speaking on behalf of whom than who possesses the necessary knowledge" (2000: 47). Thus, decisions are legitimated by expert knowledge, although it is difficult to ascribe neutrality to them. The reason is that in Eastern Europe, we can observe an increasingly important role for such professionals who in fact have limited local politicians in their choices by the technical information provided by experts. This trend can be also explained in terms of "dis-embedding mechanisms" (Giddens, 1991: 17-20).

There is also an opposite view: that experts are becoming increasingly dependent on the market value of their skills, which in turn is increasingly dependent on the degree to which they can use their skills in order to support the politicians' interests in their service. In the modern nation-state, the state legislators possess hierarchical authority to regulate certain matters within national borders. In this sense, state legislators are not the standard-setters but rather the rule-setters. It is the group of international experts that are the standardisers. The standardisers differ from the nation-state in many respects:

Standardisers cannot claim hierarchical authority, nor can they impose sanctions. They offer standards – which could be described as pieces of general advice offered to large numbers of potential adopters. (...) Since standards are presented as voluntary, standardisers often have to expend considerable effort convincing other people that it is in their interest, either now or in the long term, to accept the standards (Brunsson and Jacobsson, 2000: 2).

"Standards" are understood as "rules about what those who adopt them should do, even if this only involves saying something or designating something in a particular way" (Brunsson & Jacobsson, 2000: 4-8). Many rules and types of advice can be described as standards. Brunsson and Jacobsson distinguish three types of standards: (a) Standards about being something, which classify things or actors in a standardised way; e.g., what a telephone is. (b) Standards about doing something; e.g., how organisations should behave, what should be included in different types of educational programmes, what states should do about their financial problems, etc. (c) Standards about having something, which refer to

things we should have; e.g., a modern state should have democracy, a constitution and an educational system.

Some standards become institutionalised if actors take it for granted that they should be followed. Kjell Arne Røvik (1996) defines “institutionalised standards” as follows:

Institutionalised standards are prescriptions, but the extent to which they give detailed practical specifications for organising varies considerably. Some are vague ideas that allow a lot of room for each individual organisation to give them its own interpretation. Other institutionalised standards, however, provide more detailed prescriptions for how organisational activities should be carried out (...) Institutionalised standards are not prescriptions for building a whole complex organisation. On the contrary, they apply to small parts of the organisation and may therefore be regarded as institutionalised “building blocks.” Thus, an organisation is often also a multi-standard organisation because it has usually adapted many institutionalised standards over a period of time from various institutionalised environments (Røvik, 1996: 142).

Assuming that institutionalised standards are ideas that travel in time and space and “have their day”, then “an institutionalised standard is an organisational fashion that has its day” (Røvik, 1996: 166). In other words, a fashion that receives a social authorisation as the most advanced, effective, rational and modern method and strategy to organise work, and that is well-known in the organisations of highly developed Western countries Røvik calls “organisational fashion”. Hence, the Western experts who spread such popular and institutionalised standards might be called “fashion-setters” (Sobis, 2002: 36).

2.2 The influence of experts

The second question is how successful experts are in such standard – or fashion-settings. What is their influence in policy-making processes? Scholars seeing an increased influence often talk about technocracy being the dominant form of decision-making nowadays. Because of the increasing complexity of present-day problems, one cannot solve these problems by just deliberating and deciding about a program. Research has to be done, information gathered and relations between variables have to be taken into account. The interdependence and dynamics of problems has led to an increasing need for expert-analysis and consequently of an increasing influence of people knowledgeable about and able to conduct such analysis, that is, experts (see a/o Bell, Giddens and Weiss). Because such professionals possess a quality not found among policy-makers themselves, and the latter often hardly comprehend the technical details nor the impact of the choices they have to make, they increasingly rely on and therefore become dependent on people they assume do know, who have had the scientific educa-

tion to know and/or work in an organisation specialising in the problems at hand. This has in the eyes of these scholars resulted in the rise of what is called “technocratic decision-making” or the meritocracy in which the most highly educated form the elite (cf. Michael Young).

Some judge this development to be positive because it disposes of the irrational, ineffective and inefficient decision-making processes characterising many policy-making processes in the past, and the possibility of relegating the ideological conflicts by using the tools available to do better (Bell, 1960: 1). Others point to the negative side effects of this development in terms of decreasing possibilities for democracy and the fading primacy of politics in which conflicting interests and power are central (Ellul, 1964).

Irrespective of the moral judgement, scholars seem to agree that the trend towards technocracy is real and irreversible. The arguments are based on the increasing number of people educated at universities and polytechnics, the growing number of experts working in and around government, the influence of think tanks and advisory committees composed of professionals, the increasing dominance of problems related to so-called “organised complexity” (Bell, 1960: 29), and the visibility of this influence in the many, chunky and for non-experts often incomprehensible technical reports accompanying policy processes. Such reports are not only becoming more important because of the complexity of issues, but also because of the emergent need for impact assessments, performance measurement, and in general the need for transparency. The technological advancements in the last couple of decades made possible, what, in the early days of scientific management, could only be done in a very limited way; that is, to rationalise policy processes and in the end to rationalise society.

Regardless of the persuasiveness of this argument, not everyone seems to be convinced. Recently, a growing body of literature appeared that points to a diminishing role of experts and expertise. Lakof, for instance, tells us that “Professionals lack political resources to exercise determining influence. In no actual society, scientific or technological knowledge is considered to be a sufficient source of moral or legal authority” (in Brint, 1994: 137). Nelkin (1992) concludes that technical analysis is not likely to change anyone’s mind, and that major events are more likely to effect opinions than technical scientific reports. Wilding (1982) sees the power of professionals only to the degree they are granted this power by politicians which is strictly in the interest of the latter. Brint put it as follows: “The idea that the technically able increasingly make important political decisions is fallacious” (1994: 18) ... “Experts for the most part have limited mandates and limited influence” (1994: 135) ... “except on narrowly technical matters.... On matters of larger public interest, politicians are in a position to claim higher priorities and more binding responsibilities, priorities and responsibilities that override the mere conviction of expert knowledge” (1994: 135-136).

He notices a shift from trustee professionalism to expert professionalism. The former is dominated, in Max Weber's terminology, by substantial rationality based on a public outlook influenced by noblesse oblige, an emphasis on character and trust, and an insistence on cultivated judgement (Brint, 1994: 8). In the last century, this kind of professionalism is said to be replaced by a kind of professionalism in which the surplus value is measured by its market value. He talks about the marketisation of professionalism in which the distinctive contribution to society at large is no longer crucial, but rather the skills involved in their work. One of Brint's conclusions is that professional development must not be seen in occupational terms, but in relation to the development of markets for professional services and in relation to the interests of organisations that employ large numbers of professionals.

The consequence is that idealism and humanistic culture have been replaced by materialism and market-consciousness (1994: 14). The recent age of expertise has been an age of relatively unrestrained consumer markets and corporate power. (1994: 17). This development resulted in a decline of independent knowledge and increased dependency on those who can afford to pay for their skills; that is, the corporations and in the public sector the politicians with their often one-sided interests. It is not as Ellul says, that the politician is at the mercy of the professional, (Ellul, 1964: 258), but that the professional is increasingly at the mercy of the politicians. The influence of experts is encapsulated within the institutional context that forestalls the outcomes of their analyses and recommendations which run counter to the interests of their "clients" (cf. Massey, 1988). As Brint (1994: 145) tells us, experts are also increasingly naive, mistaking political applause for their ideas as a sign of rationality of their ideas rather than of the political utility of their ideas.

Underneath this discussion about the influence of experts, there is a more fundamental one which often remains implicit in the debate: whether the contents of professional expertise is in any way important for the development of effective, efficient and legitimate policies. Another question is whether the policy process can be seen as a rational process in which goal-achievement and the usage of policy instruments can be technically optimised by the simple standardisation referred to in the previous section in order to eradicate the societal problems confronting policy-makers. It seems that those scholars seeing a tendency toward technocracy indeed think this to be the case. If one sees such processes as political and subjective – involving conflicting interests about the problem definition, the weighing of different effects or in case the costs and benefits are unequally divided – or if one sees such processes as irrational and unpredictable, thus being more dependent on the specific contingencies, the idea that regardless of the contents of the advice, experts have a decisive role, surpassing the provision of legitimising information to be used at the policy-makers' advantage in case of

conflict, makes little sense. In that case the role of experts will be judged to be modest. Therefore, the ideas about the increasing influence of technocrats and the desirability thereof, is likely to tell something about one's view on the aspects deemed important in policy-making. To a certain extent, the same goes for the view of the marginal influence of expertise and the desirability thereof. This seems to be associated with a view on policy-making in which the political and subjective aspects are deemed crucial.

In conclusion, there are two theoretical opposite opinions on the role of experts in policy-making processes. The first sees an increasingly important role for such professionals with politicians being limited in their choices by the standardized information provided by experts. The second sees the opposite trend and professionals increasingly being dependent on the market value of their skills, which in turn is increasingly dependent on the degree to which they are use these skills to support the interests of the politicians. The first view seems to be based on a managerial perspective where the rationalisation of policy processes is central. The second view seems to be associated with a more political approach to policy processes and a conception that technical information has to fit the dominant political views in order to have an impact.

3. The case of Western advisers in a Polish municipality

The interesting thing about the debate outlined above is that it does not necessarily lie in finding the ultimate answer to what in theory is the real nature of policy processes and the role of experts therein. When such an answer in theory is not (yet) available, one way out is to analyse the practice in actual policy-making processes, to assess the opinions of those people involved and to conduct in-depth assessments of policy processes in which outside experts are involved. This is the course of action taken below. We will do an in-depth analysis of the impact of experts coming from Western European countries on policies in a municipality called Lodz in a Middle European country, Poland, with regard to the adaptation of Polish social security policies to EU-norms in order to assess how such expertise works out in practice and whether the recommendations based on such expertise are always acted upon. The research, conducted as part of the PhD project by the first author of this paper, was based on EU official documents, international reports about the transition in the Central and Eastern Europe, the Polish legislation of labour market relations, statistics of unemployment, and 48 interviews with local politicians and representatives of the agencies involved. We will first argue that the circumstances are favourable for a decisive impact of outside experts on the policies underway in this city. The amount of money involved as well as the serious consequences in case Poland could not adapt and the trust in experts among local elites in transition countries in general, results in

the expectation that the experts' advice would be followed almost automatically, irrespective of its content.

3.1. Indicators for a large dependence

Shortly after 1989, about 86,000 unemployed people were looking for work and assistance within the Employment Agency of Lodz, the textile-industry city in Poland. Unemployment, unknown under socialism, presented a new and major problem to the local authorities. The means to counter unemployment was lacking; this along with bad room-conditions and a staff unprepared to deal with unemployment provided the starting point. It further illustrates that adapting to the new labour market and labour protection rules characteristic of free market economies was tough.

About the same time, the Council of Ministers of the European Union decided to assist Poland and Hungary with sweeping changes in the framework of the PHARE programme. PHARE is an acronym for *Poland and Hungary: Action for the Restructuring of the Economy* (Council Regulation (EEC) N° 3909/89 of December 18, 1989). The programme was the world's largest grant assistance effort to Central and Eastern Europe, and the first programme to support reforms of those sectors of the economy of beneficiary countries perceived to be of key importance in the proper functioning of a market economy (See references to the PHARE Programme). In Poland, the EU assistance concerned: (1) Agriculture, (2) Restructuring of Economy and Privatisation, (3) Regional Development, (4) Environment Protection, (5) Infrastructure, (6) Education, Training and Research, (7) Labour Market and Labour Protection, (8) Administration and Local government, (9) Health Care, and (10) Multi-sectional Programme. All the sectional programmes were implemented during 1990–1994. The EU documents indicate that the national PHARE programme for Poland during 1989–97 supported the process of economic transition and institutional reform according to the new circumstances. After 1997, the aim was to prepare Poland for joining the European Union. The PHARE program can be seen as an EU institution that displayed a “constraint/freedom duality” towards Poland. The Polish authority voluntarily accepted participation in the programme because Western assistance was wanted and expected to be in conformity with the Roundtable negotiations. Nevertheless, Poland as a beneficiary country, had to respect the plan of procedure for EU assistance to show that it shared respect for the Community's common norms. After signing the Europe Agreement, the Community reinforced Polish economic reform, industrial restructuring, and stimulation of trade and commerce to prepare the country to join the EU. This implies that there was heavy pressure on Poland to adapt and accept the proposed changes (Sobis, 2002: 73 and 171).

It appears as though Polish authorities took the EU standards for granted, probably because they were based on “expert's knowledge” and voluntarily ac-

cepted by member states. At the national level, the Labour Code was amended, EU labour market norms were introduced, and legislation altered with regard to (1) the definition of unemployed persons and the protection of unemployed persons; (2) the organisational structure of the Public Employment Service; and (3) the regulations for employment, unemployment and unemployment benefits. The legislators implemented the new rules, laid down the amendments to the bills, and approached the EU/ILO's highly institutionalised standards gradually, somewhat by experimental learning due to EU assistance within the framework of PHARE programme, the actual situation on the labour market and the signals from employment agencies. In 1993, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy established the National Labour Office (NLO) – the highest administrative body coordinating adaptive process. In the framework of the PHARE sectional programme dealing with the labour market and labour protection policy, the EU standard-setters, in close cooperation with the ILO fashion-setters, provided assistance to secure political goals.

The cooperation between the Polish government and the EU resulted in the preparation of an assistance programme by the ILO. The aim was to spread ILO basic organisational fashions of Western employment agencies and to adapt them to the organisational structure of the Polish public employment service. Consequently, the ILO consultants in collaboration with the authority of NLO prepared a series of training programmes.

First, the chief administrators were trained through discussions with supervisors and Western consultants. This happened at the Ministry for Labour. The first staff training courses started later on. About twenty courses were addressed to the staff of the employment service in Poland in order to raise its competency in market economy conditions. Danish, English, French, German and Swedish consultants conducted the training programmes. In March 1995, the ILO started the second stage of the two-year training programme. Its aim was to improve the level of staff competence and the public employment service's organisation. Many courses were about promotion and starting one's own business under catchy titles like "Promotion of Small Enterprise in the Lodz Region", "Vocational Counselling and Promotion of Small Enterprise", and "Individual Enterprise in the Practice of DLOs". Lecturers from the University of Lodz, the authority of the state and municipal governments, and representatives of various financial institutions conducted lectures in collaboration with a consultant from London. Afterwards, the ILO programme started another series of seminars dealing with "Educational aspects of women's adaptation in a situation of unemployment on a labour market". The specific problems of women's unemployment were discussed in topical blocks under the heading of "The general problems of women's unemployment when creating a market economy", "The educational activities for women on the

regional labour markets”; and “The chances, threats, and support concerning women’s educational activities”.

The amount of money involved and the need to be successful in adapting to EU regulations in order to become a member of the EU, are indicative of the dependence of Polish authorities on the experts brought in from the EU to accommodate the transition process.

3.2. The inclination to listen to experts

A second factor important for understanding the Polish position toward outside experts is that Poland is a new democracy and, as will be argued in this section, local elites in such countries place a relatively large trust in experts’ opinions.

Since 1989, the opinions and background of local elites in East and West European countries are measured by a large scale survey conducted within the so-called “Democracy and Local Governance Research” project. This project is coordinated by Krzysztof Ostrowski (University of Pultusk), Henry Teune (University of Pennsylvania) and Lars Strömberg (University of Göteborg); the second author of this paper participated in this project. In all countries involved, more than 20 communities comprising between 25,000 and 250,000 inhabitants were selected at random. Within each of these communities, about 15 political leaders and 15 leading officials were interviewed, resulting in a database of over 16,000 respondents in 665 communities. The interviews were carried out in 1989–1991, repeated in 1995–1996 and again in 1999–2001. For Western European countries, often the only data available is from the period 1995–1996. In this paper, we use data from former East European countries, such as Poland, Lithuania Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan and West and European countries, such as the USA, Germany, the UK, Spain, Netherlands, Japan and Taiwan. From these countries, we have survey data from 1994–1996 which encompassed 9,468 local officials.

Among the respondents, senior politicians include the mayor, aldermen and leading representatives, often local party leaders, in the local council. The top administrators comprise the town clerk, members of the management team and the heads of departments. They are people who prepare, develop, decide about and take care of the implementation of policies and programs that directly affect the life of the people in the community. They make decisions about subsidies and grants, local taxes, public and social improvements, safety, culture and recreation, housing, education and health policies. It is these educated people, often having a university or polytechnic education who are what some call the local elite (Jacob, 1993). Although their autonomy varies over countries, depending among other things on the degree of decentralisation, all are in some way influential for the daily life of many people.

The interviews/questionnaires were standardised in order to make valid comparisons possible. In the research for the Democracy and Local Governance Project, the most influential local politicians and public administrators in the selected municipalities were asked their opinion about 40 statements. These questions regarded central-local relations, economic equality, values and norms, economic growth and the central variable in this paper, trust in experts. The respondents were presented a number of statements with which they could answer in a simple objective way: completely disagree, disagree, agree or completely agree.

One of those statements refers to the trust the respondent has in experts. It reads as follows: “Most decisions should be left to the judgement of experts”. It is about trust, because trust is, as Hardin interprets it, a three-part relation involving encapsulated interests: A trusts B to do X. This specific trust relates to the knowledge of A that B will take A’s interest into account when doing X. Hardin talks about a high degree of trust, when he says, “I trust you because I think it is in your interest to attend my interest in the relevant matter” (2002: 4) and “What matters for trust is not merely my expectation that you will act in certain ways, but also my belief that you have the relevant motivations to act in those ways, that you deliberately take my interests into account because they are mine” (2002: 11). In this case, A is composed of local policy-makers, B consists of experts and X relates to their judgement in decision-making. Because decision-making is of such crucial importance, in this context we can speak of high-level trust when local elites agree with the statement.

Figure 1
Local elites’ opinions about the influence of experts in 1995

| Most decisions should be made by experts | | | | |
|---|------------------|------------------|---------------------|-------|
| | old democracies* | new democracies* | newest democracies* | Total |
| (strongly) disagree | 67,19 | 33,24 | 41,63 | 50,00 |
| (strongly) agree | 32,56 | 66,75 | 58,37 | 50,00 |

* *The old democracies involved are the USA, Germany, the UK, Spain, Netherlands, Japan and Taiwan. The new democracies involved are Poland, Lithuania Hungary, Czech republic, Slovakia, The newest democracies involved are Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan*

Whether or not and by which percentage of local elites experts are trusted in this way is shown in figure 1. This figure shows the percentage of all respondents in the different countries in agreement with the statement. Overall, there are as many members of the local elite trusting experts as there are that distrust those people (last column). It shows also, for instance, that in old democracies, such as the Netherlands this kind of trust is rare. About 32 percent of the local elite in

western countries agree with the statement that decision-making should be left to the judgement of experts.

However, in the new and newest democracies this high-level trust in experts is much more common. Especially in the Central European transition countries (among them, Poland) on average two-thirds of all respondents would prefer it if decision-making would be left to the judgement of experts. In the newest democracies, still nearly 60 percent has this opinion. It seems that especially in these countries where the social and economic problems are huge compared to those in Western democracies, experts are seen as the ultimate resource in improving the situation. The reputation of experts is good, and if possible they are hired and put into service. In Poland, a transition country, this trust in experts in general is also high. All this is indicative that the Lodz case is a critical case for the theory. The financial dependence of the local community was high considering the amount of money involved within the Phare program, the dependency on the outcome (eligibility for EU membership) was high and the a priori trust in experts was relatively high. All this resulted in the expectation that local officials will follow up on every advice given by those experts.

3.3. The actual role of the outside experts

But how did the officials in Lodz actually perceive the impact of the outside experts who were flooding them? There were reactions that were congruent to our expectations given the dependence and a priori trust in experts. The interviewed officials perceived the Swedish, German and Danish expertise as extremely useful in creating a modern employment service. The staff could almost immediately adapt to most of the recommendation, and it felt direct improvements in its working methods. The way the Swedish proceeded seems to be important. The Swedish consultants trained the employment service's staff in Lodz and Gothenburg. The Lodzian delegation had visited the employment agency of Gothenburg to observe how they worked with unemployed persons, what equipment they had, and other important details that could provide them with some inspiration for the organisational changes within the employment service of Lodz. The respondents recalled:

When we had most serious problems how to serve the unemployed and how to pay out unemployment benefits in the simplest way, we received assistance from the Swedish consultants. [...] No one could help us so much than they did. They came four times to Lodz from September 1993 to June 1995. Their visits were important for us. We had no patterns, ideas, and theory how to organise work with unemployed persons within the office. [...] My visit in the Employment Agency of Gothenburg had confirmed my suppositions that a part of the Swedish solu-

tions would be possible to adapt in Lodz certainly, in the framework of our employment and unemployment rules (Interview 21/3, 7, 8).

Our Swedish colleagues helped us paying attention to our needs. They did not impose their will upon us. They neither evaluated our work nor the office's organisational structure in comparison how they did it in Sweden. They gave us advice and pointed at other solutions. They admitted that our office was in a very specific situation. It was impossible to compare our situation with other labour offices in the world. We could not follow any patterns or models that worked correct in other offices (Interview 22/8).

The consultants from Sweden prompted us to improve our work. They schooled us within the office and on the conferences or courses. The meetings with them were to our advantage (Interview 24/12).

The Swedish consultants had some information about our unemployment and it was easier for them to understand our problems. On the other hand, we were very open to their suggestions (Interview 17/80).

The personnel appreciated the Swedish consultants' friendly manner of assisting, of their understanding for the specific situation within the office and their respect for their Polish colleagues' efforts to improve service to the unemployed. The personnel had to learn new working methods from step one. The minimal modifications showed that most Swedish organisational fashions worked correctly within the office, and were adapted into the office's organisational structure. In general, respondents shared the opinion that the Swedish organisational fashions improved their working methods with clients, and they positively affected organisational changes within the District Labour Offices of Lodz (DLO) and essentially contributed to elaborating the model office in harmony with Polish rules. It was not surprising that the state authority spread these organisational fashions further in the framework of cooperation with other DLOs in Poland. Thus, the Swedish organisational fashions of the employment agency helped to standardise activity within the employment service of Lodz, and proved to be of central importance for creating a network of Public Employment Service (PES) in Poland. In this way, the Swedish "organisational fashions" travelled in time and space and brought about the organisational similarities of Polish employment service.

The Germans provided the Centre of Vocational Information (CVI) with office-equipment; furniture, computers, printers, copying machines and video while the Voivodship Labour Office (VLO) financed the reconditioning works and installation of equipment on the area of 130-150 m.² The German organisational fashions of the CVI had a complementary value to the Swedish ones. They came to Lodz when the Swedes had prepared the groundwork for implementing the CVI. According to Røvik, the German prototype of CVI was "an institution-

alised building block” consisting of many “institutionalised standards” (Røvik, 1996: 142). They enlarged the staff’s knowledge about the service of vocational counselling and contributed to its modern pattern in the Western meaning. The staff had reproduced the vocational counselling over time, its “social form” after 1989 clustered around the same goals as in socialism. However, the organisational fashion has been altered and adapted to a market economy. The German institutionalised standards of the CVI travelled from city to city, and contributed to create the similar organisational fashion of the CVI in Poland.

Danish consultants joined the ILO programme in the autumn of 1994. They conducted staff training until 1997 in close cooperation with the National Labour Office of Warsaw. The first course focused on the marketing of the employment agency based on Danish, English and Swedish literature. The courses were addressed to future trainers in marketing of the employment agency and labour matching. The NLO bestowed on one person from Lodz the right to conduct internal training within the employment service in order to prepare placement officers to negotiate with employers about earnings to the unemployed, create workplaces for former prisoners, the disabled, young, etc (VLO 1997: 13). The general understanding for marketing implicated the office’s further improvement in the adaptive strategies. (Interviews 22/15; 24/103) In the opinion of the respondents, the Swedish, German and Danish assistance had an especially positive effect on the adaptive process.

The English consultant started the second stage of the ILO training programmes, aimed at promoting free enterprise, granting loans to employers and training for those starting their own business and other important issues connected to private enterprise. Following the respondents’ narrative about England, they have non-governmental firms that sign agreements with employment agencies to start a “simulating business”. Those firms have a right to monitor the newly established firms/cooperatives and oversee what they did with money they received from the employment agency to start their business. One of the Polish respondents made the following comment on that model, proposed by the English consultant:

They are very professional [in promoting enterprise], but we cannot work in this way. It is too early for us. They look at unemployment in a different way. Look, they have some regions in which they establish the “simulating firms” to counteract unemployment. The firms produce nothing but work for people. Certainly, it could be useful in Poland, especially in those regions, where the unemployment rate is 40 per cent, to let those people do something, but giving them just money is destructive (Interview 15/89,90).

In the opinion of the respondents, the English prototype was highly useful to counteract unemployment but inappropriate to actual Polish conditions. In

their opinion, systemic transition was not sufficiently advanced. Materialisation of the idea required further reforms; e.g., the reform of the banking system and the establishment of new institutions to promote such enterprises. Secondly, the “simulating business” was impossible to implement into the employment service because the rules recommended ways to promote enterprises, start one’s own business and grant loans other than the English ones. Thus, the English organisational fashion had to be rejected. However, the respondents thought that they could be used in the future if the legislative body had changed the rules. (Interviews 18/39 and 24/24) In Røvik’s terms, the Polish personnel had stored the cognitive representations of English simulating business, but did not act upon the advice.

The respondents emphasised that the staff training conducted by the English consultant was meaningful for them because the legislative body had changed the rules dealing with promoting enterprises, granting loans for starting businesses, training for unemployed, etc., though a few times the staff were feeling confused on, e.g., how to promote enterprise. They had no experience with that. The English consultant, by talking about English experiences promoting enterprise, opened up new ways of thinking about the issue. The English institutionalised standards of promoting enterprise served as a source of inspiration to organise work within the Department of the Active Labour Market Programmes, especially those concerning training for unemployed, loans for the unemployed to start a business, and loans for employers to help create jobs. The example shows that experts’ advice has to conform to the local situation in order to result in policy changes. Just promoting a standard, however useful in one’s own country, does not automatically result in adoption, even if respect for the expert and the dependence thereon is large.

When experts’ advice is not even thought useful, the chance of adoption is even slimmer. For instance, the French consultants promoted the French organisational fashion of the employment agency, but this was rejected by the employment service because it proved inadequate to Polish culture and customs in the opinion of those interviewed. French consultants visited the Voivodship Labour Office of Lodz in 1993 as the first ILO consultants. One of the managers admitted:

When they were telling about labour matching and vocational counselling, I had no clue what they were talking about (Interview 21/6).

French consultants tried making the staff more sensitive to the active labour market programmes even while the Employment Agency did not have sufficient means to pay out unemployment benefits to about 86,000 registered unemployed persons. In the French employment agency, they keep a record of all the unemployed, take notes from their discussions with unemployed persons, etc. Everything has to be accurately documented. Those working methods were impossible

to conduct in Lodz because of workload; one placement officer had to provide such services to about 840 unemployed persons in 1993.

The French experts tried to promote their own bureaucratic model, while the labour officers needed concrete, pragmatic ideas to make the payment of benefits easier (Interviews 21/7; 17/24). Probably the French organisational fashions were ultimately rejected because the communication between the consultants and the staff was obscure and arrogant. One of managers explained:

I had participated three weeks in the French programme within the Voivodship Labour Office of Lodz. I had declined with thanks the French model of Employment Agency because it was overly bureaucratic. We had too many unemployed persons coming to the office daily. It was not for us. We needed the most simply roll to pay out unemployment benefits at that time /.../ At the beginning, we were not prepared to discuss with the Western consultants. Later on, when we had been re-trained and had the preliminary vision of the office, we could take advantage of their assistance. Without re-training, we did not have a clue what our guests were talking about. I have said it because of my own experiences. When I had the problems, how to register so many unemployed persons, how to pay out unemployment benefits and when the Western consultants suggested to start with labour matching and vocational counselling, I did not understand them. (Interview 21/5 and 26)

The French experts were interested in establishing a so-called “Club of Active Looking for Work” at the Voivodship Labour Office. To this purpose, they started to train the vocational counsellors to prepare the local leaders who could conduct training for unemployed persons. The French “organisational fashion” of vocational counselling was controversial in the opinion of the interviewees:

Let us imagine, you invite the unemployed persons and ask them to write their life story in the pictures. The unemployed person is told to draw a flower in which s/he is a central point of the bloom, while all the petals suggest that person’s social network or lack of it. I am afraid that such a vocational counsellor would be made fun of and people probably would leave the meeting. The unemployed persons expect a very concrete piece of advice what to do in their situation. The Swedish consultants proposed much more sensible solutions. (Interview 17/26)

The respondent underlined that the office’s clients interpreted that form of vocational counselling as a silly game rather than essential assistance in looking

for work. The Polish respondents added: “Those humans did not deserve to be treated as children” (Interview 17/27).

In general, most Polish officials expressed the same view: “It is impossible to use any organisational pattern in Poland, although it worked correctly in other countries, without changing it” (Interview 22/40). This grasps the essence of the adaptive process; namely, that if outside experts propose measures that do not fit the financial resources, culture and structure of the recipient organisation, these will not be adopted no matter the reputation, the dependence relation or the external pressure to adapt.

4. Reflections and conclusions

This paper started with the question of whether in this complex world the influence of experts in policy-making processes is increasing or decreasing. First, the paper addressed the core business of expertise theoretically and stressed the standardising effect of expertise. Subsequently, we discussed the literature on the relation between experts and policy-makers. Here, we distinguished between the thesis that experts are dominant and politicians are subservient and the opposite thesis that policy-makers are still in charge, while the position of experts is one of subservience. Empirical data shows that in the new democracies there is considerable trust in outside experts, at least more trust than in old democracies. However, a case study involving Western assistance to a Polish employment service, under conditions favouring adoption of all proposals, because of the dependence on the Polish part and the consequences for not adapting to EU rules, still showed that having a reputation as an expert is not enough to induce organisational change.

The case of Western assistance to the Polish employment service, with a focus on the Employment Agency of Lodz, shows how consultants spread the organisational fashions dominant in their own home countries with different success. Not all the organisational fashions suited the Polish realities during the transition from socialism to a market economy. Some of them were contrary to the domestic regulation of the labour market policy, the financial possibilities or even the cultural customs. This seems to be determinative for the degree to which such fashions are adopted. The Swedish, German and Danish experts provided the most meaningful organisational fashions and these were adopted. Conversely the French and English experts' advice was not adopted, simply because there was no fit with the recipient organisation. In terms of Røvik's fashion perspective, the former could make a contribution in solving the problems of the Employment Agency, the problems associated to its adaptation to a market economy, and those related to the creation of a modern public employment service. This implies that the adopters from Lodz followed their own principles of rationality and made de-

cisions that Røvik would describe as “a compromise between norms of rationality and norms of fashionables” (Røvik, 1996: 167).

Although a single case study is presented and generalizations based thereon are by definition hazardous, it is possible to derive two hypotheses about the role of experts in the local policy-making processes. The first hypothesis reads that even under the most unfavourable circumstances, in terms of dependency and reputation of experts, policy-makers still decide for themselves which advice to follow and they base this solely on experts’ advice if that advice is sound. Second, if experts do not take the contingencies of the local situation, culture and structure into account, their advice is likely to be ignored. If, however, they listen and help to solve real problems, their recommendations are likely to be adopted by the recipient organisation.

In conclusion, this case study proposes a way to investigate as well as a preliminary answer to the question of whether experts or policy-makers are dominant in the policy-making process. It suggests selecting cases based on specific features in the relation between policy-makers and experts; e.g., the inclination by policy-makers to listen to experts and their dependency on those experts. It hypothesises that even when the inclination to listen to experts is high and the dependence thereon is large, the policy-makers’ view still seems to be determinative for the actions taken and that even in this case, experts only are influential if they have ideas that are sound in the conception of the policy-makers. These have to be ideas that fit the circumstances in which the recommendations require a follow-up. Furthermore, it implies that theories on technocracy, technocratic behaviour and the power of experts in relation to policy-makers are in need of more empirical research. Research that investigates the relative impact of substantial and strategic factors is needed for understanding the influence of expertise in policy-making processes.

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