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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23276665.2016.1217663>

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Citation

MUHLEISEN, Joselyn, & MUKHERJEE, Ishani. (2016). Policy analysis: A rich array of country and comparative insights. *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration*, 38(3), 204-210.

Available at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/soass_research/2520

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Policy analysis: a rich array of country and comparative insights

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(Received 21 July 2016; accepted 25 July 2016)

The International Library of Policy Analysis (ILPA) series, edited by Iris Geva-May and Michael Howlett, is a collection of books assessing the state of the discipline of policy analysis in eight countries. The books address the academic development of policy analysis, its practical applications, the diverse range of actors involved, and pertinent academic instruction. Although the state of policy analysis – and, importantly, the state of policy analysis scholarship – varies considerably in the countries studied, the series is able to synthesise existing knowledge through empirical research and institutional analyses of the governmental and non-governmental organisations that provide policy advice and analysis. This review considers the individual and collective contributions of the books to theory and practice.

Keywords: policy analysis; comparative policy; policy education; Japan; Taiwan; Australia; Brazil; Israel; the Czech Republic; the Netherlands; Germany

Introduction

Since its origins in the United States in the 1960s, the study and methods of policy analysis have expanded internationally. Over the last few decades, different adaptations and techniques of policy analysis have proliferated across the world and especially in countries of Europe and Asia. The International Library of Policy Analysis (ILPA) represents a novel series of in-depth empirical work that examines the experience with policy analysis as it has unfolded in various national contexts, each marked by its unique governance style and policy regime. The review here considers the eight books of the ILPA series that have been published to date, featuring policy analysis in Japan, Taiwan, Australia, Brazil, Israel, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, and Germany.

Japan

Policy Analysis in Japan (Adachi, Hosono & Iio, 2015) presents a novel and comprehensive undertaking in synthesising the state of knowledge of policy analysis. With limited formal and systematic discussion of policy analysis in Japan prior to this book, it represents an original collection of articles that are organised in four parts: the types of policy-level analyses that have existed in Japan both historically and at present; the various styles of policy analysis that are adopted in the Japanese government; the uses of policy-relevant analyses in the private and civic sectors; and the future avenues of

policy analysis development and reform. In general, the contributions indicate the state of policy analysis in Japan still to be in the initial stages, with currently limited levels of application being concentrated in the bureaucracy.

In engaging with the existing literature on policy analysis, the editors interestingly espouse policy analysis as involving the “analysis of the problems to be tackled, examination and selection of policy objectives, and conceptualization and selection of specific prescriptions” (Adachi, Hosono & Iio, 2015, p. 4). In the policy sciences, these features represent the initial stages of the policy process whereby policy problems are set to rise on the government agenda, following which alternatives are explored and shortlisted through policy formulation activities. The editors see the success of the features as shaping the quality of policy analysis, or the factors contributing towards “good” policy analysis.

Given the urgent need for the development and reform of policy analysis in Japan, this overarching depiction of policy analysis urges a comprehensive focus on the broader policy processes of Japan, beyond the methodological considerations of policy analysis that are formally viewed as a component of systematic, evidence-based policy-making, as discussed elsewhere (eg., Stokey & Zeckhauser, 1978; Weimer & Vining, 2015). As Hosono suggests, policy analysis in Japan needs to go beyond this “formal approach” to increase the use of policy analysis by policymakers as it is “meaningless without prescriptions relating to a policy agenda” (Adachi, Hosono & Iio, 2015, p. 30),

The various chapters expand on the diverse areas of public administration that have had their own unique experience or contribution to the topic of policy analysis in Japan. Given that policy analysis is still new and somewhat fragmented in the country, the chapters provide a wide ranging discussion on its origins and possible future. The chapters by Agata and Watanabe on policy education and job prospects for public policy graduates, respectively, are uniquely useful and will be of ready interest to students, scholars and professionals engaged with policy analysis and its development in Japan and elsewhere.

Taiwan

The chapters in *Policy Analysis in Taiwan* (Kuo, 2015) each present different perspectives on the state and characteristics of policy analysis in Taiwan, where it has been a formal topic of study since the 1970s. The chapters, which are not organised into distinct sections, examine the institutional design of the various sectors of the public and civic domain and comment on the needs in each of sector for policy analysis reform.

In the first chapter, Yu and Kuo strongly advocate centralised, formal policy analysis which was also the predominant form of analysis during the period of martial law after World War II. In a distinctly positivist vein, the authors argue that the democratisation of Taiwan since the 1980s, with an increased emphasis on more deliberative forms of policy analysis, has been accompanied by a period of political and social turbulence, with “low economic growth, high unemployment and high government expenditures, low taxes, generous entitlements and a lack of sound fiscal discipline” (Kuo 2015, p. 19). By contrast, Lee suggests that policy analysis in the legislative body needs to more deliberative, value-laden and inclusive of analysts from outside the civil service. Similarly, Fang stresses that the policy analytical capacity of local executives should be enhanced to “ensure sustainable development of local self-governance” (Kuo, 2015, p. 79). A unique contribution by Peng addresses gender equality in policy

analysis in Taiwan in terms of the nuances of increasingly participatory movements in state reform.

Other chapters explore the technical aspects of the practice of policy analysis in Taiwan that enhance the comparative contribution of this particular book. Focusing specifically on healthcare reform, Wang concentrates on the contribution made by network analysis methods and social network analysis in particular. Meta-analysis is used by Hsieh to gauge policy analysis in Taiwan from an international perspective. In a complementary way, Kuo's comparison of public policy and policy analysis graduate programmes and curricula illustrates policy analysis education in Taiwan in the context of other East Asian, North American and European universities.

Australia

In *Policy Analysis in Australia* (Head & Crowley, 2015), the editors weave a cohesive narrative to tie together the various contributions, which often comprise conflicting perspectives. The eighteen chapters are clustered in five sections: the policy advising context; analysis and advice within government; policy analysis beyond executive government; parties and interest groups in policy analysis; and policy analysis instruction and research. The volume is less focused on institutional analysis than it is on analysis of multi-level and stakeholder interactions. The editors emphasise the distinction between the applied-professional and academic-explanation orientations to policy analysis, appreciating that most work in public bureaucracies and think tanks is of the applied-professional focus, such that the “analysis of policy has lagged behind government practice” (Head & Crowley, 2015, p. 5).

Many of the contributions focus on the location, development, and variety of policy analysis capacity in Australia. While Weller finds that there has not been a decline in policy analysis capacity in the Australian government, and Wanna notes that policy analysis is now used to justify the decisions of the federal government, Head argues that policy analysis capacity has decreased since the 1980s. Phillimore and Arklay recognize that the policy analysis capacity of states in the Australian federation is challenged by budget cuts and competition for employees from the federal level. Dollery, Kortt, and de Souza find that the policy analysis capacity of local government depends on a process of forced amalgamation. These assessments are complemented by accounts of external capacity provided by expert advisory bodies (Stewart and Prasser), consultants and think tanks (Vromen and Hurley), business associations (Bell), and non-governmental community organisations (Goodwin and Phillips) – all in response to changes in the policymaking environment.

While Wanna considers the past century in his analysis, most authors focus on a shorter time period of the past 40 years. This choice highlights the influence of new public management on policy analysis methods (Fenna) and on the spectrum of actors involved in the policy process (Vromen and Hurley; Cooper, Ellem, and Wright). Its influence on public policy is far from an understudied topic but contributions examining the role of the media (Ward) and political parties (Gauja) in the modern policy process distinguish this volume. The selections exploring programmes and academic research in policy analysis also make empirical contributions. Di Francesco's analysis of policy analysis instruction in Australia determines that the field of public policy is “perceived very differently by its academic members . . . and its practitioner consumers” (Head & Crowley, 2015, p. 277).

Brazil

Policy Analysis in Brazil (Vaitsman, Lobato & Ribeiro, 2013) represents a pioneering effort towards understanding policy analysis in a national context where, similar to the situation in Japan, it has previously not been a subject of formal enquiry. The 20 chapters are organised into four sections exploring the styles and methods of policy analysis which are unique to Brazil; the policy analysis that is practiced in the government and the legislature; the forms of analysis that prevail in political parties, administrative councils, and interest groups for the purposes of advocacy; and the policy analysis emanating from academic and research organisations in Brazil.

In drawing a comparison with the established literature on policy analysis resulting largely from the experience in the United States, the editors point to the present lack of a conceptual and methodological distinction of policy analysis – or analysis for policy-making (Lasswell, 1951) – in Brazil. Accordingly, to explore the process and supply of knowledge and analysis that have been produced and directed to policymaking in Brazil, the editors and other authors address the period since 1930, which represents the founding of the bureaucracy of the modern Brazilian state.

Most of the chapters address the supply of policy relevant knowledge from various sectors both within and outside the government. The structure of the book helpfully charts the chronological development of policy analysis in Brazil through its different political regimes. From the 1930s to the 1980s, Brazil saw policy relevant analysis being convened by government administrators and oriented towards the evaluation of policies aimed at economic development. The 1990s, by contrast, were a period of “re-democratization” with greater participation in policy analytical activities from outside the government (Andrews), while a greater emphasis on addressing social problems also led to a strengthening of policy analytical capacities at the municipal level (Farah). The late 1990s and 2000s have ushered in a period of greater involvement of third party expertise from think tanks (Teixeira) and academic institutions (Batista).

Israel

Policy Analysis in Israel (Menahem & Zehavi, 2016) comprises 10 chapters divided into four parts: the styles and methods of public policy analysis in Israel; policy analysis by the executive and legislature; policy analysis in specific government units; and policy analysis from the outside. The editors present the status and trajectory of Israeli policy analysis as distinct from those not only of the United States but also of other developing countries. Several contributors, including Dror in the foreword, note that elements of the Israeli government ignore or sidestep policy analysis in their decision making processes. This makes findings about new attempts to increase in-house policy analysis capacity especially compelling (Alon), with the new attempts presenting a potential paradox since there has been an increase in the externalisation of policy analysis since the 1980s (Oser and Galnoor).

Despite significant external and internal constraints on policy analysis in Israel, there has been growth both in the attempts to incorporate internal policy analysis units in government, and in the utilization of external policy analysis. The privatisation of policy advice persists in spite of government suspicion of third-sector generated policy analysis (Katz). The increasing reliance on external policy analysis, and the reported poor quality of some government policy analysis (Dahan), are contrasted with the

top-down, hierarchical relationship between the central and local governments (Ben-Elia) and the immense influence of the Ministry of Finance.

Two practitioner accounts from high-level government policy workers add to the authority of the book. Flug, the Governor of the General Bank of Israel, explains that the policy analysis generated by the bank, often addressing more than just macro-economic issues, is widely cited abroad, thus increasing the legitimacy of the analysis. Another source of government policy advice is the Research and Information Center (RIC), a relatively new in-house independent research center in the Knesset (Israeli parliament). Avrami, the head of the RIC, details the work of the RIC and the relationship between it and members of the Knesset.

The editors and other authors adeptly situate Israel as a unique case in terms of the challenging policy environment, degree of policy transfer, absence of policy analysis instruction in many public policy programmes, and uneven use of policy analysis in decision making. The book successfully challenges existing scholarship about the trajectory of policy analysis in other developing and evolving contexts.

The Czech Republic

The 19 chapters in *Policy Analysis in the Czech Republic* (Veselý, Nekola & Hejzlarová, 2016) are grouped in five parts: the styles and methods of public policy analysis in the Czech Republic; policy analysis by governments; internal policy advisory councils, consultants and public opinion; parties and interest group-based policy analysis; and academic and advocacy-based analysis. In the introduction, Veselý identifies the lack of a direct translation of policy analysis into the Czech language as a fundamental obstacle to the development and centralisation of the discipline. The editors characterise Czech policy analysis as being influenced by several traditions, which stem from the different occupations and governance systems in the Republic. Overall, Veselý and Nekola assert that the “Marxist Leninist ideology of scientific communism” led to an inherited “traditional emphasis on methodology . . . and rather weak theoretical thinking relying on import of theories” (Veselý, Nekola & Hejzlarová, 2016, p. 324). The government often approaches public policy problems from a centralised and interventionist perspective, which the editors distinguish from the typically decentralised and incremental approach to public policy problems practiced by the United States government.

The contributions provide case studies drawing on diverse time periods, and several consider the recent dynamics between national and supra-national governance arrangements. Potůček, Hulík, Tesárková, and also Stejskal, recognise that in times of upheaval or system change supra-national organisations play an increased role in agenda-setting in Czech policy analysis. This is especially interesting when coupled with Šlosarčík’s assertion that the Czech government is successful at pursuing its agenda at the European Union level in similar circumstances concerning the Eurozone crisis. The implication is that there may be an enhanced degree of reciprocal influence between national and supra-national governance in times of crisis.

Some chapters provide evidence of a counter trend in policy analysis. Though there is a strong centralised tendency in the practice of solving policy problems, the discipline of policy analysis has lagged behind practice and the level of professionalisation of policy workers remains questionable.

Considering the lack of consolidation of policy analysis studies in the Czech Republic, the book is especially ambitious in terms of the breadth of phenomena addressed. This includes the roles of public opinion and the media in policymaking.

The Netherlands

Policy Analysis in the Netherlands (van Nispen & Scholten, 2015) stresses the relative centrality and strength of policy analysis and evaluation as an academic discipline in the country. It does this, while appreciating various other features of the local experience in terms of policy styles and modes of policy analysis; policy analysis in government; advisory boards, consultancy firms, research institutes and think tanks; and policy analysis in politics and by interest groups in society.

In the introduction, van Nispen and Scholten argue that Dutch policy analysis is advanced because of political conditions in the Netherlands, especially the practice of consociational democracy, as complemented by its established role in government. They identify three theoretical approaches to policy analysis – network, institutional and social constructivist – along with argumentative policy analysis as being particularly valuable for studying the contemporary interactions between policy actors and stakeholders. They emphasise that the consociational system has imparted a steering role to policy analysis in the Dutch policy process, with the fragmented political system relying on non-partisan expertise provided by independent policy institutes to build consensus.

Several contributions are institutional analyses, including van Nispen's account of the evolution of public budgeting agencies; van der Knapp's sketches of the role of national institutions; Scholten and van Nispen's review of advisory bodies and planning bureaus; Zaal's investigation of policy analysis mechanisms used by the Dutch Parliament; and Fenger and Koning's case studies of the institutional arenas that produce negotiated knowledge. This institutional focus makes the book a strong primer on the governmental bodies and independent governmental agencies in the Dutch system.

The deliberative and political turn emphasised by the editors is approached by contributions describing the increasing, optimising level of involvement of stakeholders and politicians in the production of knowledge (Van Twist, Rouw and van der Steen; van Buuren and Koppenjan). Hoppe, in conceptualising policy workers as engaged in boundary work, recognises that the nature of policy workers' involvement is determined largely by the type of problem being addressed. On the politicisation of policy analysis, Timmermans, van Rooyen and Voerman argue that political party think tanks cover less ideological topics in their in-house journals when their affiliated parties are serving in government. Both boundary work (Hoppe) and ideas about negotiated knowledge (Fenger and Koning) imply a flexible demarcation between the activities of researchers and political forces. Although Dutch research institutions are still independent, the politicisation of knowledge produced for policy is underway, with policy analyses being commissioned to debunk one another.

The editors and other authors convincingly situate the practice of policy analysis in the Netherlands as somewhat apart from the global and American practice. By distinguishing the practice and academic development of Dutch policy analysis, the book offers a wealth of material for comparative policy analysis scholars.

Germany

Most of the 19 chapters in *Policy Analysis in Germany* (Blum & Schubert, 2013) address, directly or indirectly, what the editors call the "typically German dualism between academic and applied policy analysis" (Blum & Schubert, 2013, p. 1). The editors make a convincing case for the necessity of a comprehensive state of the discipline review, even though policy analysis is well enshrined in German political science,

as chronicled by Jann and Jantz who argue that policy analysis in Germany has been influenced more by “practical political and administrative discourses” than by the international research agenda (Blum & Schubert, 2013, pp. 29, 38)

Rather than relying on analyses of individual institutions, most chapters focus on the dynamics between categories of institutions, stakeholders, the public and policy. Accounts are provided of how policy analysis is used by governmental and non-governmental actors. Schroeder and Greef argue that business associations and trade unions have important but distinct roles in the policy process and generate knowledge to increase the strategies they can use to influence the process. Also, as a corollary argument about the relationship of strategy to policy analysis capacity, Strünck notes that, since public interest groups use a strategy of framing to influence policy-making, the knowledge they produce must be easy for the public to understand.

While the editors and von Beyme emphasise the long tradition of policy analysis in Germany, the majority of authors address recent phenomena. Despite this temporal focus, no chapter is dedicated to the dynamics of Europeanisation or supra-nationalism. This may reflect the deep internalisation of the dynamics of multi-level governance in the discipline of public policy and, more broadly, political science in Germany. Such internalisation is likely because of the federal character of Germany’s governmental system, as addressed extensively in the book.

Concluding comments

The eight books of the ILPA series considered here are ambitious in the diversity of approaches adopted, the range of phenomena studied, and the scholarship reviewed. They provide comprehensive information on the structure, motivation and influence of institutions which produce and consume policy analysis that may be used very valuably as bases of cross-national studies by comparative policy scholars. In doing so, they comprise descriptions and explanations of policy dynamics in distinct political systems and, as such, serve the discipline of policy analysis itself by providing empirical data and insights on the state of scholarship and policy instruction in an array of contexts.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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